

'The witch hunt has now also reached Rijswijk'



Demonstrators from the Patent Office pass the German embassy

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An unusual demonstration in The Hague today, attended by around 400 employees of the International Patent Office (EPO) in Rijswijk. Whilst at most protests the aim is to speak to as many journalists as possible, on this occasion most people don't dare to. At least: not by name.

A representative of their own trade union Suepo explains why, from a stepladder. "The witch hunt has now also reached Rijswijk," he tells the audience at the square opposite the Peace Palace. "That's why two colleagues couldn't be here today."

“Unthinkable”

The details remain unclear, because even telling someone else that you are the subject of an internal investigation is a reason for dismissal at the EPO. But one thing is clear, that President Battistelli is threatening to take action against two employee representatives, after already [firing two others](#) and demoting a third earlier this month.

"It is unthinkable that these kinds of things could happen in democratic countries like Germany, France or the Netherlands," says the Suepo representative. "But within the buildings of our organisation, it is apparently possible."

Message

The march took the protesters from the French to the German embassy, the two most powerful countries among the 38 Member States who must monitor the European Patent Office. Inside, a Suepo delegation made a statement, in which protest was lodged against the "violation of fundamental rights" by the EPO leadership and in which a reversal of the sanctions against all trade union representatives was demanded.



'People feel intimidated.'

Staff members have the support of French member of parliament Cordery as well as members of the Dutch Second Chamber Gesthuizen (SP) and Kerstens (PvdA), all three of whom are walking alongside them. "We have delivered a clear message to the President of the EPO here today," says experienced campaigner Gesthuizen. "And that is: you are not above the law!" "Legal immunity does not mean impunity!" Cordery agrees.

Study

During the demonstration, State Secretary Van Dam sent a letter to the Second Chamber, in which he stated that an [independent study](#) into the working conditions at the European Patent Office will be conducted. The EPO leadership themselves were not present.

A spokesman for the Patent Office said afterwards that there is certainly no question of a witch hunt under Battistelli's leadership. "We can't go into any more detail on internal investigations, these are confidential. But I do want to underline the fact that we have reached out a hand to the trade union in various ways over the past six months. They have just not wanted to accept it so far."