

European Patent Office staff plan to strike; distrust between management and employees mounts

RIJSWIJK - European Patent Office (EPO) staff will be holding a strike on Thursday. The reason for this is the mounting lack of trust between the employees and the management of the European organisation.

The employees at four branches of the EPO, including Rijswijk, will therefore not be working on 7 April. A proposal to strike was supported by a huge majority of the employees. At least 90 percent of those who took part in a vote on the walkout voted 'yes'.

There has been [unrest at the EPO for years now](#). Hundreds of employees [took part in a demonstration march through The Hague](#) at the end of January. The immediate [cause for this was the dismissal](#) of two colleagues and downgrading of a third.

Criticism of the management

According to the employees, they are paying for the fact that they dared to express criticism of the 'tyrannical' EPO boss, Frenchman Benoît Battistelli.

The staff members demanded, among other things, that the measures should be suspended, but that did not happen. They are also against a change in the working conditions.

Biggest international organisation in the Netherlands

At the European Patent Office, a patent can be requested for various countries in Europe with just one application. The Rijswijk branch is the largest international organisation in the Netherlands with 2,700 employees.

After the demonstration in January, the cabinet also made it clear that there were concerns about the working conditions. According to State Secretary Martijn van Dam (PvdA - Dutch Labour Party, Economic Affairs) 'a dialogue was opened' between the management of the EPO and union members, at the insistence of the European Patent Organisation (EPOrg) member states. 'The objective of this was to create better mutual understanding, as a prerequisite for an improvement supported by the management and staff,' he wrote in his answer to the parliamentary questions.

No results

But Van Dam also had to recognise that: 'This dialogue has been difficult and has not yet led to concrete results. Media reports about the poor relations also give cause for concern. So there is every reason to keep a close eye on the situation.'

NRC later reported that EPO boss Battistelli even left in anger during an initial meeting with the state secretary because Van Dam started talking about working conditions for the staff.