

European Patent Office: Immunity doesn't mean impunity. It's more than enough is enough; too much is too much. Battistelli must go

Article put on line on 11 October 2016 in [Blog](#), [En circonscription](#), [Revue de presse](#).



On 13 October I once again stood together with some 600 employees of the European Patent Office (EPO) who were marching peacefully through the streets of The Hague to express their discontent with the authoritarian and arbitrary way in which the organization is being managed.

Insane pressure for production, drastic limitation of the right to strike, a whole range of threats of sanctions, suspensions and sackings of staff representatives and union members That's everyday life at this international organization, which for three years has been hiding behind its functional immunity so as to violate with complete impunity the most elementary and basic principles of labour law and workers' rights.

The EPO, like a considerable number of other international organizations, enjoys a form of immunity from jurisdiction and intervention under which no laws or decisions can be imposed on it. The aim of this is to protect it against possible interference by national authorities in the context of the performance of its functions. And it is an immunity which the main person involved, the President, Benoît Battistelli, a Frenchman, is brandishing as an argument in his defence. But, as I have said over and over again, "Immunity doesn't mean impunity".

I would prefer to talk about the EPO with regard to what is in fact at the heart of its mission; that is, as a hugely impressive organization, of which all the employees, for close on 40 years, have been devoted to the service of industry and innovation in Europe, the seriousness of the work being undertaken being proof and guarantee of skill and competence in the highly demanding world of industrial and intellectual property. Sadly, the social pressure, combined with the brutal imposition of incessantly higher demands for results over the past few years, is now resulting in a deterioration in the quality of the work provided, and so, in the long term, risks seriously affecting the confidence of its users.

It is in this context of so much anxiety and potential damage that I have several times gone to The Hague to show my support for the personnel. I have met many of the staff members, and all of them have told me about what really goes on behind the attractive-looking façade of the organization. For three years I have been ceaselessly agitating with the French authorities in an attempt to draw their attention to what is at stake here, and the risks to industry and social and moral justice.

The latest developments are both disturbing and unacceptable. In January, three staff representatives were dismissed or downgraded in Munich. Now it's the turn of those at The Hague to come under threat. This cannot be a coincidence. This harassment of the staff

representatives, all of them members of the majority staff union, is unworthy of an organization in a democratic country.

The way the management team is acting is not only a grievous burden on the personnel and a brake on the efficiency of the EPO, it has also in the course of time begun to tarnish the image and reputation of France in Europe, and indeed in the world as a whole. It's more than enough is enough; too much is too much. Mr. Battistelli must go.

NB. I have been obliged to blur the photo so as to protect the staff members who had the courage to come on the demonstration.

The article from Le Monde of Wednesday 12 October is reproduced below