

European Patent Office fires another union leader



More demonstrations by staff members outside the EPO in Munich.

After firing the leaders of the in-house staff union Suepo in Munich, the boss of the European Patent Office is now also going after the staff representatives at The Hague. Around 800 staff members were on the streets in protest.

Despite a series of internal [conferences](#) aimed at improving the [poor working atmosphere](#), the European Patent Office (EPO) still won't settle down. On Monday the in-house staff union [Suepo](#) staged another demonstration at short notice at the headquarters of the Office in Munich, which according to insiders involved around 800 staff members. This was sparked off by EPO President Benoît Battistelli firing the Suepo leader at The Hague, Laurent Prunier, at the end of last week.

Battistelli versus the Union

According to the *heise online* call about the protest, the EPO leadership accused the union leader of having harassed a member of a staff committee in the Dutch capital, and of having put the person under pressure. The Union maintains that there has been no official complaint whatsoever. And the international labour court concerned has already clearly ruled that staff representatives must resolve internal disputes among themselves, without the Office management getting involved.

It was as far back as January that Battistelli, in a [disciplinary procedure](#) against three Union leaders, who had evidently been secretly spied on by a [special investigation unit](#), demanded [tough sanctions](#): Elizabeth Hardon, up to now the Chair of Suepo, and her predecessor, Ion Brumme had to go, and the Union treasurer was downgraded. Suepo is now fearful that the new attack has been launched so as “to destroy” the staff representation. As an institution outside the State, the EPO is not subject to German labour law.

Unrest among the staff

The unrest among the staff caused the Administrative Council of the European Patent Organization (EPO), which is the main body of the Patent Office, to demand in March that Battistelli ease off. The President was required to ensure “that disciplinary measures and procedures are not only fair” but that they should be seen to be so, according to the [communiqué](#). The possibility should be provided of having the cases looked into externally, or engaging mediation.

By the end of the proceedings, and before further relevant disciplinary decisions are taken, the Frenchman was also required by the supervisory body “to report in adequate detail” on these matters, according to the release. The Council members demanded proposals be put forward which would restore and improve confidence in reasonable measures. An agreement should be reached with the unions “without any preconditions, and without any topics being excluded from future discussions”. ([vbr](#))