

Van Dam: the social situation at the European Patent Office must improve

Yesterday, 16:49



The European Patent Office in Rijswijk Marc Hamer / NOS

State Secretary Van Dam wants the European Patent Office (EPO) to take concrete steps to improve the social situation. In a letter to the House of Representatives, he wrote that a study by the agency PWC includes concrete starting points for this.

The office has branches in various European cities, including Rijswijk. There has been unrest about the working conditions and social situation at the institution for a long time. Staff at the office in Rijswijk have taken to the streets on a couple of occasions, including just last week. The House of Representatives and cabinet also expressed their concerns.

Lack of trust

The EPO allowed the study, in part at the insistence of the cabinet. In this study, PWC states that important reforms have already been introduced, which have been successful to an extent. A significant decrease in sick leave and the introduction of part-time and home working are referred to, for example.

But the researchers are also critical on various points. The question marks with regard to the reforms are in the areas of employee participation and implementation of the right to strike. They also identify an “us and them culture and a lack of mutual trust between the management and staff.”

Report puts finger on it

According to Van Dam, the report puts its finger on it. The State Secretary is concerned, among other things, about the internal lack of trust and will continue to address the president of the office on this point.

Trade union members have already been dismissed a couple of times at the EPO, including only recently. Van Dam writes that he cannot talk about that last specific case, but that he “does not consider it a good basis for repairing the social relationships.”

The results of the PWC study were recently presented to 350 people involved with the EPO. Van Dam states that it is telling that the largest trade union was not invited to this meeting.