

"We've got our eye on it"

EUROPEAN PATENT OFFICE

Behind the façade of the European Patent Office (38 countries belong to it, Luxemburg among them) a massive social conflict has broken out.



The battle between the President and the staff union Suepo, which represents the majority of the 7,000 strong workforce, has been raging for more than five years. Minister Etienne Schneider is now providing a reply to the question raised in Parliament on this issue by LSAP deputy Claudia Dall'Agnol.

The management style adopted by President Benoît Battistelli, who took this office in 2010, appears to have led from escalation to escalation. Only recently, staff members took to the streets in their thousands in Munich to march to the consulates. If we are to believe what the union members are saying, Battistelli has been tightening the screws for a long time, to such an extent that the environment at work can sink no lower. In the course of the year, three senior Suepo members have been summarily kicked out. Our information is that the President has produced very flimsy excuses for doing this – some would say totally far-fetched.

Another senior Suepo figure was dismissed without notice at the beginning of November at the branch of the Office at The Hague, and a further member is said to have been subjected to extreme pressure. How, why, when, and who is concerned is not clear from the accusations. Two weeks ago, EPO officials at The Hague were called upon to carry out a protest demonstration at the Dutch branch office. A majority of the 2,800 or so personnel working there took part, and really made their voices heard (► [Link](#)).

"Focus of attention"

The Minister responsible, Etienne Schneider, in his reply to the question raised in Parliament by Deputy Claudia Dall'Agnol simply repeated the official version put about by the EPO President. There have allegedly been cases of bullying, but those responsible have been identified and punished. The staff member who was ejected in November at The Hague is said to have been the main person responsible.

But we have received entirely different information, too, which points to the President unleashing a systematic campaign of harassment against many of his staff, but in particular against the personnel representatives who are members of Suepo.. Schneider appears to be equally at ease in his reply,

since he goes on to write: "I can give assurance that the Luxemburg delegation continues to pay close attention to the development of the social dialogue at the EPO, and to provide its support to any initiative in that context."

According to Etienne Schneider, the agenda at the next meeting of the Advisory Board is scheduled to include the results of an internal survey on the issue of social dialogue and working conditions at the branches of the European Patent Office.