

Minister Koenders: improvements required soon at Patent Office to avoid action ‘at high level’

THE HAGUE – “Visible improvements in the labour relations” are required at the European Patent Office (EPO) in Rijswijk in the short term. If this does not happen, Bert Koenders of Foreign Affairs will discuss the situation at a ‘high political level’ with the other countries that are members of the European Patent Organisation.

“I will continue to monitor this dossier closely in accordance with the host-country responsibility,” writes Koenders in a letter to the House of Representatives. He also continues to urge the top management “to improve the situation within the EPO.”

At the insistence of the House of Representatives, the minister recently spoke with Vice President of the EPO, Willy Minnoye, about [the ongoing unrest among staff](#). He notes in the letter to the house that the Supreme Court has confirmed the immunity of the EPO. This means that the organisation does not fall under Dutch law. This does not mean, according to Koenders, that the Netherlands, as host country, cannot start a discussion under this situation. “Particularly now that this unrest has become part of public and political debate.”

Internal unrest continuing too long

In the conversation, Minister Minnoye is thought to have said that “the internal unrest is continuing for too long and that the situation now demands rapid improvement.” As far as he is concerned, the “social dialogue needs to be recommenced” and a number of trust-building measures need to be introduced in the very short term.

The Vice President of the EPO is believed to have indicated that “attempts are currently being made to commence a positive dialogue with the staff in various ways.” And also that the organisation will be entering calmer waters soon.

Reign of terror

The situation at the EPO has been unsettled for a long time. Employees have recently held [various protests and strikes](#). Under [the leadership of Director Benoît Battistelli, the top management is accused of conducting a reign of terror](#).

“Battistelli rules with an iron fist and does not tolerate input or contradiction. He dismisses people as he pleases, demotes them, makes unilateral changes to the working conditions and is therefore demotivating the whole organisation,” the FNV trade union previously stated.