

FNV: 'Rutte must intervene at the European Patent Office to prevent infringement of employees' rights'

The Netherlands Trade Union Confederation (FNV) has called on Prime Minister Mark Rutte and Minister of Social Affairs and Employment Wouter Koolmees in a letter to intervene at the European Patent Office (EPO). The EPO is once again breaking Dutch law.

The Netherlands partly responsible

Marieke Manschot, Director of FNV Government: "As a host country for foreign businesses, the Netherlands is (partly) responsible for the rights of the employees on its territory and must therefore intervene to protect employees' rights. In order to continue attracting and retaining foreign investors, good working conditions are necessary."

Management conducting a reign of terror

The EPO is proposing to abolish the majority of permanent employment contracts, even if the nature of the work does not require this. The contracts for future employees will be replaced by temporary contracts with a maximum duration of five years, which is extendible. This is in breach of the Dutch Work and Security Act. Staff representatives, such as the works council or union representatives, will also no longer be involved in the hiring policy for new employees.

'The abuses at the EPO are stacking up,' says Tuur Elzinga, Vice Chair of the FNV. 'We have already taken action along with the staff as the management were intimidating staff and critical individuals had been dismissed with immediate effect. Now the employees are also being denied the security of a permanent contract. The Dutch government must intervene to stop this reign of terror by the management.'

Infringement of European legislation

Like all other Member States of the European Union, the Netherlands has a responsibility towards employees working on its territory. This means, among other things, that employees in temporary employment are not treated worse than employees in permanent employment. Abuse by switching to only successive temporary employment contracts, for example, must therefore be prevented. In this context, the FNV also refers to infringements of European legislation (Directive 1999/70/EC).

On 30 January 2018, the proposal to abolish permanent employment contracts will be discussed by the EPO in Munich. In March, the proposal will be presented to the Administrative Council of the EPO. Elzinga: 'Dutch representatives at the EPO will be present at both meetings. This will be an excellent opportunity to raise the issue of the breach of the employees' rights.'