

FNV: 'European Patent Office infringing on employees' rights'

The Financieel Dagblad newspaper has reported that the Netherlands Trade Union Confederation (FNV) has called on Prime Minister Rutte and Minister of Social Affairs and Employment Koolmees in a letter to intervene at the European Patent Office (EPO) in Rijswijk.

The FNV has sent the letter because the EPO, which is located in Rijswijk, is planning to abolish the majority of permanent contracts. For future employees, only contracts for a maximum of five years will be available. These contracts would be extendible. This is not currently legal in the Netherlands.

'The abuses at the EPO are stacking up,' Tuur Elzinga, Vice Chair of the FNV, tells Financieel Dagblad. '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.'

According to Marieke Manschot, Director of FNV Government, immunity is the major problem. 'Thanks to the Vienna Convention, the EPO enjoys immunity as an international organisation. So it is very difficult to tackle things, as you cannot make any demands. The EPO must observe Dutch employment law, but it is not doing so.'

The plan to abolish permanent employment contracts will be discussed by the EPO on 30 January.