

Patent Office employees protesting against culture of fear again: ‘President not entering into dialogue’



Some of the employees who demonstrated. | Photo: Omroep West/Mark Kool

RIJSWIJK - Hundreds of employees at the European Patent Office demonstrated outside the Portuguese embassy on Thursday afternoon. The staff at the office, based in Rijswijk, want the new president, António Campinos from Portugal, to enter into dialogue with the staff. According to the demonstrators, a culture of fear has prevailed within the organisation for years now and too little is being done to put an end to this.

Employees at the Patent Office have been drawing attention to the abuses within the organisation for years. One of the demonstrators explained why they were standing outside the Portuguese embassy. “Dialogue with the staff stopped under the previous president of the office. In Campinos, we have a new president with a mandate to talk to the staff but, in the past year and a half, nothing has changed. This is because the team around the president has remained the same, which means that even with a new president nothing has changed.”

The demonstrator did not want to be named. “There is a huge culture of fear. I feel uncomfortable just giving this interview,” he told the reporter from Omroep West who was in attendance. “If I am recognised on the screen then that could and would definitely have consequences for me at work. That’s why we also don’t want any photographs to be shown in which people can be recognised.”

Under pressure

The demonstrator hopes that the protest will not have any consequences at work. “The organisation arranged different events all day long, to ensure that people would not be able to go.” The employee is not afraid that the office will discipline everyone who left during working hours. “You can have lunch between 11.30 and 14.00 and it doesn’t matter where you do that.”

In the end, hundreds of employees took part in the protest. “We travelled from the patent office to the Portuguese embassy on buses, since the president is Portuguese. Although the staff were pressured not to attend the demonstration, we succeeded in filling five hundred places on the buses. With the people who travelled by bike too, there were around 600 demonstrators. It’s absolutely brilliant to see how many people are here today.”