

Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

To the Chair of the
House of Representatives
Binnenhof 4
The Hague

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Date 23 February 2017
Re. Conversation with Vice President of European Patent Office

Our Reference
4ZKWPA3M5U6C-3-15307
Your reference
14-12-2016 DPG1
Appendix/Appendices
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Dear Chair,

I hereby inform your House, in accordance with my commitment in the general meeting of the standing committee on Foreign Affairs regarding diplomatic immunity on 14 December 2016, of my conversation with Mr Minnoye, Vice President of the European Patent Office (EPO), which took place on 30 January 2017.

Part of this conversation was about the ruling of the Supreme Court on 20 January 2017, in which the immunity of the organisation was confirmed. The Netherlands respects the immunity of the EPO, along with the other intergovernmental organisations that are based here. This immunity does not prevent the host country from entering into conversation with the management of the EPO regarding the continuing unrest between the management and staff at the EPO. Particularly now that this unrest has become part of public and political debate.

In this context, I informed Mr Minnoye that the internal unrest has been going on for too long and that the situation now needs to improve quickly. In order to make a rapid start to restoring trust between the management and staff, the proposal is to resume constructive social dialogue and to introduce a number of trust-building measures in the very short term, based among other things on the Social Study:

- Including external parties in the internal complaint procedure, so that this procedure is experienced as impartial and independent by the staff;
- Reconsideration of the disciplinary measures implemented with respect to certain trade-union members.

Finally, on the basis of my host-country responsibility, I indicated that the EPO can call on the host country when it comes to support for initiatives that contribute to ending the current situation of unrest.

Mr Minnoye indicated that attempts are currently being made to commence a positive dialogue with the staff in various ways. As an example, he cited the townhall meetings that recently took place. Vice President Minnoye expressed the hope and expectation that the organisation will be entering calmer waters soon.

Our Reference

STPS5HHCFWEY-7-88383

I stated that I share this hope, but added an important note: If there is no clear improvement in the industrial relations within the EPO in the short term, I see no other option but the discussion of the situation at a high political level with the member states of the European Patent Organisation.

I will continue to monitor this dossier closely in accordance with the host-country responsibility and will continue to urge Vice President Minnoye to improve the situation within the EPO.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs,

Bert Koenders