

Politics**IPO: a 'hostage' to disputes over millions**

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The Intellectual Property Office will be without a director from tomorrow. Luka Novak has been sacked without explanation and the government has not (yet) managed to find a new one. Andrej Šifrer, the singer-songwriter, has dropped out, and no one else wants the post of Director because of tensions with copyright organisations.



Luka Novak is returning (involuntarily) to publishing from the Intellectual Property Office.

Luka Novak will spend his last day in the director's office of the Intellectual Property Office today. He was dismissed abruptly and without explanation by the government one month ago, and yesterday's cabinet meeting has yet to find a new director.

Until the day before yesterday, musician Andrej Šifrer was a candidate for the post of Director, but because he did not meet the formal conditions, his candidacy was dropped. Šifrer declined to comment on the developments.

"To this day, I still don't know why I was removed", says Luka Novak. "They mentioned a reorganisation of the office, but I was not officially informed of anything."

Government spokesman Boštjan Lajovic assured us yesterday that an acting director would be appointed at the end of Novak's mandate, which will be on Saturday. The "right" person would be found among the current staff of the Office. The Ministry responsible for economic affairs explained that the search for an acting director is still ongoing.

However, our discussions with insiders yesterday showed that the relationship between politics, the profession and the collective copyright management organisations that the Intellectual Property Office (IPO) is supposed to oversee is too heated for the post of Director to be tempting at all, even on a temporary basis.

Amongst others, we spoke to two IP experts who have already been asked to take over the running of the Office but have turned it down. Novak also explained to us that the appointment of an acting Director would not be urgent. In fact, it is possible to appoint an "interim commissioner" - just enough to keep the office running. This "has happened several times in the history of the Office".

The fact that Andrej Šifrer, the music composer, aspires to become Director is symptomatic of the issues at stake in Novak's view: copyright and the collecting societies (such as SAZAS and ZAMP) that administer authors' rights are given too much weight, according to Novak.

Most of our interlocutors yesterday, who did not wish to be named because of the sensitivity of the subject, pointed out that the work of the Office is only to a minor extent devoted to authors' rights, and to a major extent to rights deriving from economic activities, such as industrial property and patents.

"Copyright is handled by one and a half people at the Office, while forty people deal with other areas", one of our interlocutors noted, for example. Experts advised us that a solution that might be appropriate, as is also known from other countries, would be to move the regulation of copyright law under the Ministry of Culture.

The problem is that the Office, which deals with a wide range of rights protection - from patents and protection certificates to trademarks and geographical indications - has for years been "hostage" to disputes between collecting societies such as SAZAS, IPF and AIPA, which have been unable to agree on how to collect and distribute money, and the disputes have spilled over into politics.

These are organisations that are overseen by the URSIL, but at the same time are difficult to control because of the large amounts of money that flow through them from users to authors. Our interlocutors pointed out that past directors, such as Jurij Žurej, have tried to regulate relations between the Office and the organisations and between the organisations themselves, but that resentment and antagonism have only deepened.

SAZAS collects and distributes more than ten million Euros each year to authors, IPF just over one million Euros and AIPA a similar amount. All organisations retain part of the money for their own operations.

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