
EPO President Battistelli's Term Extended Amid Staff Concerns

30/06/2014 BY [DUGIE STANDEFORD](#) FOR INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY WATCH — [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)

The term of European Patent Office (EPO) President Benoît Battistelli has been extended for three years to 30 June 2018. The vote by the European Patent Organisation Administrative Council strongly backed Battistelli's quality and efficiency reforms, but sparked unhappiness from staff who see the president as a "dictator".

The Administrative Council (AC) vote came during its 25-26 June meeting. Council members are delegates of the 38 member states of the European Patent Organisation. The AC voiced continued support for Battistelli's strategy of using five "roadmaps" in the areas of information technology, cooperation, human resources, buildings, and quality, the EPO said.

"The Council fully endorsed the steps taken and progress achieved so far, and unanimously approved proposals for further action in all five of the updated roadmaps," it said in a 27 June press release.

The AC decision leaves EPO staff facing four more years of Battistelli, said an office employee who wishes to remain anonymous for fear of reprisal. "Staff despairs and fears the worst for the coming years," the employee told *Intellectual Property Watch*.

AC Asked to "Safeguard" its Authority

Employee concerns were detailed in a 20 June letter to the AC from attorneys for the Staff Union of the EPO (SUEPO), <http://www.suepo.org/public/ex14151cl.pdf> which noted the "rift" between a "great majority of the personnel of the EPO" and its president. The "serious deterioration in the social climate" inside the EPO is the result of restrictions of trade union rights to strike and join a union, the lawyers wrote.

"We wish to draw your attention to the fact that the deterioration in the social climate, the growing feeling of defiance and exasperation, can and must be seen as directly linked to the various policies which have been validated by the Administrative Council," the letter said. "A number of you have, by your vote, conferred on the President of the EPO some quite exceptional and uncontrolled powers, which are in contradiction to the most elementary standards of good governance."

This has allowed Battistelli to make unilateral decisions and to be no longer answerable to the AC, the attorneys wrote. They urged AC members to "take steps to safeguard and restore your prerogatives." Battistelli is seen as a "dictator" who doesn't listen to anyone, the office employee source said.

Choosing Union Reps Contentious

One unpopular change the president made was to dissolve the system of statutorily elected staff representation and replace it with a single, non-transferable vote regime controlled by him, the EPO employee said. Despite that, staff mostly re-elected the same SUEPO representatives, the union said in a 20 June announcement to its members.

SUEPO is "stronger than before" and the election sent a "clear message" that staff wants "a strong union to represent them; they do not want their working conditions to be deteriorated without reason; they reject damaging management techniques," the announcement said.

The new scheme for electing staff representatives "is a big success," the EPO told *Intellectual Property Watch*. Nearly 70 percent of the staff participated, it said. SUEPO, which used to fill 100 percent of the positions, now holds 75 percent, allowing new voices to be heard, it said.

"The objectives of this reform (notably direct election of the staff representation by the staff, clarification of the rules to be elected, equality between candidates during the campaign) have been fulfilled. It delivers the basis for a refreshed, constructive and professional social dialogue," the office said.

Asked whether the ongoing unrest affects patent quality, the EPO employee said, "Everybody is working." Output has slowed over the past six months because of the labour issues, but that has not affected patent quality, the employee said.

There is tension between EPO management and the AC, which are pushing for more patents to be issued, and the staff, which wants those patents to be of higher quality, the employee said.

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