

EPO president Campinos still has to show he is serious about restoring social peace

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While the EPO published a report late September about the importance of intellectual property rights for the European economy, internally meetings were held by EPO president António Campinos both with the Central Staff Committee and representatives of trade union SUEPO to normalize relations between staff and management. Campinos announced several encouraging measures. Still, there is little confidence of real change. Ahead of the meeting of the EPO's Administrative Council, next week in Munich, SUEPO called for the implementation of 'seventeen measures to restore staff's trust and engagement and ensure long-term financial health'.

According to the [joint EPO-EUIPO study](#) which was published last month, 'industries that make intensive use of intellectual property rights (IPRs) such as patents, trademarks, industrial designs and copyright generate 45% of GDP (EUR 6.6 trillion) in the EU annually and account for 63 million jobs (29% of all jobs). A further 21 million people are employed in sectors that supply these industries with goods and services.'

The findings are based on data about the EU economy between 2014 and 2016. 'Industries making intensive use of patents employ some 24 million people and generate 16% of the EU's total GDP', according to the report.

Meetings with CSC and SUEPO

Also last month, president Campinos held meetings with the Central Staff Committee (CSC) and the SUEPO about the dire social climate at the EPO, a legacy of former president Benoit Battistelli. Fourteen months after Campinos took office, many feel let down by him. In their eyes, he has done nothing to improve things, for instance for staff and union representatives who were harshly sanctioned by Battistelli for very questionable reasons. Last year, a [staff survey](#) showed many employees don't trust the senior management.



However, in a message circulated internally about the September meetings, Campinos sounds confident and writes 'steady, ongoing progress' is being made regarding social issues. Some other quotes from his message, regarding issues which have long been a source of conflict:

(meeting with CSC): *'Discussions have continued to try and reach agreement on the resources available to staff representatives. (...) Within four weeks of the meeting, it was agreed proposals will be sent to the CSC to adjust the current framework with a view to (...) putting a revised framework in place at the beginning of next year.'*

'Staff Representatives are free to publish communiques on the intranet site without prior checks.'

'...we have an opportunity to improve the performance management system. Staff Representatives have helped us to identify some potential areas for improvement and, as a result, a proposal for adjustments to the merit-based career system will now be put forward within four weeks.'

'Given the importance of the Performance management system to our colleagues, we also want to try and make sure that it is transparent. This is why I decided when I arrived to start publishing the statistics on the outcome of the rewards cycle.'

In the meeting with SUEPO representatives, Campinos promised steps to finally settle the cases of representatives who were fired, downgraded or otherwise sanctioned by the Battistelli administration:

'I informed SUEPO representatives that concrete proposals had been sent to settle amicably the cases involving SUEPO and Staff Representatives, without discussing the merits or details of the cases. These offers have been made in an effort to truly move on and to reinvigorate social dialogue. In a further effort to break with the past, I have also committed to removing the reference to disciplinary measures from the personnel files of the individuals concerned.'

'Dialogue with SUEPO representatives has highlighted areas of the strike regulations that they would like to improve. The right to strike is an important freedom of expression for EPO staff and I have therefore agreed to look at our strike regulations. A proposal will therefore be sent to unions and Staff Representatives in the next four week for discussion.'

'I will send a proposal for a possible MoU between SUEPO and the Office in the next four weeks. We will consider basing it on the principles of the MoU that exists between unions and the European Commission.'

These are encouraging statements which, if lived up to, could help Campinos get rid of growing criticism that he is a man of words not actions. The lack of confidence in the EPO president is obvious from a SUEPO statement which was sent to staff this week, ahead of the meeting of the EPO's Administrative Council, 9 and 10 October in Munich.

Its summary reads: *'The President is about to communicate 17 measures emanating from the (in our opinion heavily distorted) financial study. After 8 years of Battistelli's presidency and 14 months of Campinos' presidency, both with the same administration, we feel it is now time to implement a basket of the following seventeen measures to restore staff's trust and engagement and ensure long-term financial health.'*

The 17 points from SUEPO concern issues varying from production pressure and quality, temporal contracts, sickness and pension regulations, to the functioning of staff committees and unions, and - again - the unsolved cases of disciplinary actions against representatives who were downgraded or fired.