

Transparency:

The CEO's salary, a well-protected secret



What has happened to the promise of “*transparency*” made by Fabrice Fries when he was appointed AFP’s CEO in April 2018? It is clear that *the salary of the current CEO, as well as that of his predecessor Emmanuel Hoog, remain well-protected secrets*. And they will undoubtedly remain so following a ruling by the Paris Administrative Court handed down on July 1 in a case bought by a SUD staff representative.¹

The balanced and highly interesting ruling is the latest step in what started as a joint initiative by the *CFE-CGC, FO and SUD* trade unions at AFP with an open letter to Mr. Hoog² requesting that he release information on:

- his base salary;
- the variable elements of his salary;
- any possible remuneration linked to the performance of his duties;
- changes to his base and variable elements of salary;
- the financial conditions of his departure from the Agency.

After Hoog ignored the request, our staff representative seized the CADA (Commission for Access to Administrative Documents), which *supported* granting access to the requested documents “*on the condition that all information whose disclosure would violate the privacy rights of the person concerned is redacted ... as well as all information that could be considered an appreciation or judgement on the value of the person concerned.*”³ Our new CEO Fabrice Fries refused to provide even these redacted documents, so our staff representative turned to the Administrative Court.

In its ruling, the Administrative Court emphasized that AFP is “*a private legal entity charged with a public service mission*” and that *documents linked with that mission should be accessible by the public*. But the court rejected the request for documents on the CEO’s salary, saying:

“It is clear from the case documents that the remuneration of the chief executive officer of Agence France-Presse is not governed by any legislative or reglementary rules and is freely negotiated between the Agency and its chief executive officer. When remuneration is agreed upon by the parties without reference to rules governing the post, it is consequently an appreciation or judgement of the worth of that person.... Thus the chief executive officer of Agence France-Presse may legally refuse the documents sought by the claimant.”

Even if staff now have a representative on the remuneration committee on AFP’s Board of Governors, this representative is bound to respect the *confidentiality* of the information about the CEO’s wages. AFP employees, whose wages were blocked from November 2012 until a modest increase in January thanks to a long legal fight⁴, will thus never learn whether Emmanuel Hoog got a pay boost during this period and the financial conditions of his departure in 2018 when his mandate was not renewed.

We won’t learn Mr. Fries’ salary either. We won’t learn if the CEO and the other directors are pitching in to help the agency weather the coronavirus crisis while it is making savings at the expense of its most precarious employees — stringers — who are suffering what are sometimes severe drops in revenue.⁵

The struggle for transparency and labor rights continues. **Never give up!**

¹ <http://u.afp.com/3emR> (French)

² <http://u.afp.com/4VdT> (French)

³ <http://u.afp.com/oQ2b> (French)

⁴ <https://www.sud-afp.org/spip.php?article601> (English)

⁵ <http://u.afp.com/3PUN> (English)

