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To:

Subject: Agnes Jongerius on the conflict at the EPO

Conflict about social rights at the European Patent Office Is Europe applying double standards?

Why do employees of the European Patent Office in Rijswijk not have the same social rights as other workers in the Netherlands?

That is the question put by Dutch Labour Party MEP Agnes Jongerius to the European Commission as a reaction to the long-running conflict between management and staff at the European Patent Office.

The employees of the patent office have no say, never mind co-determination, in relation to their working conditions at the Office. Their right to strike is severely curtailed. According to the management, the EPO is an international organization, which may determine its own staff regulations completely independently.

"That is of course crazy," says Agnes Jongerius, "In Europe we recognise the European Charter and the European Convention on Human Rights. In those instruments matters such as the right to strike are well-defined. And that is not supposed to apply to employees of what is - *nota bene* - a European agency. Is this a case where Europe is applying double standards?"

The workers received some support in their fight this week from the Court in the Hague. The court agreed with the staff that the Office was violating fundamental principles of the rule of law. But VVD Minister Ivo Opstelten decided to consign this verdict to the wastepaper-basket. He is of the opinion that the EPO as an international organization is immune to the judgments of a national court.

Agnes Jongerius now wants the European Commission to intervene in the matter. And, also in the interests of all other European offices and agencies, to establish that European workers cannot and should not be deprived of their social rights.

2700 employees work at [*the Hague sub-office of*] the European Patent Office which processes patent applications for the entire European Union.

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