

English translation of:

«Να πάρουν θέση τα κράτη μέλη του Ευρωπαϊκού Οργανισμού Ευρεσιτεχνίας»

<http://www.syriza.gr/article/id/63958/K.-Koyneba:-Na-paroyn-thesh-ta-krath-melh-toy-Eyrowpaikoy-Organismoy-Eyresitechnias-.html#.Vq3ymFLLdx8>

30 January 2016

K. Kuneva MEP

"The Member States' of the European Patent Organisation must take a stand"

Staff of the EPO trade union react to persecution with large demonstrations in The Hague and Munich.

Yesterday (28 January) over 900 employees of the European Patent Organisation Employees (EPO) participated in a demonstration organized by their union (SUEPO) in the Dutch city center. The demonstration was the response of the union to an unprecedented attack which had been unleashed by the administration of EPO on trade union rights and staff representatives which culminated in the dismissal of two elected union officials and the downgrading of a third from the EPO's main office in Munich.

A similar demonstration in Munich on 20 January was a huge success and well-attended by EPO staff.

It noted that the European Patent Organisation (European Patent Office) employs approximately 7,500 employees in offices in five European cities with the largest number of employed in The Hague (approximately 2,500) and Munich. It examines and grants thousands of patents from industries responsible for 40% of the EU GDP and 35% of employment. In 2014 it received 274 174 applications for patents amounting to an increase of around 3.1% from the previous year.

Led by the current President, Batistelli, as part of its strategy to promote institutional reform of the organisation with the stated aim of improving quality and reducing costs, in 2010 the EPO commenced a concerted campaign of violating trade union rights, terrorising, intimidating and persecuting its staff. The most tragic consequences of the climate of oppression which prevails are the five suicides of employees which occurred over the last three years.

Despite the appeals of the employees to justice (both Dutch and German courts), the administration of the EPO hides behind the mantle of the judicial immunity of international organizations, so as not to be held accountable to anyone for the violation of fundamental rights at the heart of Europe.

Konstantina Kuneva submitted a question on this subject to the European Parliament which was signed by 14 MEPs from many countries and many political groups.

The attempted changes in the institutional framework and operation of the EPO, along with the promotion of the Unitary Patent and Unitary Patent Court, bear obvious similarities to the secretive consultations surrounding TTIP and ISDS [the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and associated Investor-State Dispute Settlement for resolving disputes between investors and states] and reveal the strategy of the EU leadership and business lobby for the empowerment of fully autonomous organizations which operate beyond the pale of any democratic institutional framework and are characterised by intransparency, secrecy and immunity.

To this end it is considered necessary on the one hand to restrict the applicability of national regulations and on the other hand to eliminate democratic workers' rights (fundamental labour standards, trade union rights, etc.) which are regarded as a "bureaucratic hindrance" to opening up new markets for transnational conglomerates.

In response to the demonstrations in The Hague and Munich, SYRIZA MEP Konstantina Kuneva said: " The workers EPO in Munich and The Hague deserve for their impressive mobilisation and vigorous defence of their rights. The situation has now gone out of control. The intransparent governance, authoritarianism and immunity of "autonomous" international organizations, must end. The governments of the Member States which are represented on the Administrative Council of the EPO must finally take a stand against the violation of trade union rights and the employment rights of staff."