

**Question for written answer E-002338/2017  
to the Commission**  
Rule 130  
**Marc Tarabella (S&D)**

Subject: European Patent Office (EPO) and social abuses

In 2016, the President of the European Patent Office (EPO) dismissed three elected staff representatives, all of them union representatives. Three other staff representatives were ruthlessly downgraded in 2015 and 2016. In the past four years, five EPO officers have committed suicide. The EPO has refused to allow any independent investigation to be carried out by the local authorities into the circumstances of these deaths, preferring instead to hide behind its immunity. Although the Supreme Court of the Netherlands recently upheld the immunity of the EPO, the Court of Appeal's conclusions that certain fundamental rights had been violated remain entirely valid. Had these acts occurred within a European institution, there is no doubt that rapid action would have been taken to determine liability and apply the necessary sanctions; no such action was taken at the EPO, however.

The European Commission has given the EPO a mandate to grant unitary patents. All 28 Member States sit on the Administrative Council of the EPO. The Commission is an observer on the council and is therefore entitled to express its opinion. For more than three years, numerous MEPs have attempted to draw attention to the social situation at the EPO, which they describe as highly problematic. Does the Commission intend to present its view and/or communicate Parliament's position to the EPO?

What is the Commission's official position on these social abuses?

Is it in favour of an independent investigation?