



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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to: Working Party on Intellectual Property (Patents)

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Subject: Draft Council Conclusions on an enhanced patent system in Europe

Delegations will find in Annex revised draft Council conclusions drawn up by the Presidency for discussion at the Working Party meeting on 22 October 2009.

Draft

COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS

on

AN ENHANCED PATENT SYSTEM IN EUROPE

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

- 1a. RECALLING that enhancing the patent system in Europe is a necessary prerequisite for boosting growth through innovation and for helping European business, in particular SMEs, face the economic crisis and international competition;
- 1b. CONSIDERING that such an enhanced patent system is a vital element of the Internal Market and that it should be based on two pillars, i.e. the creation of a Community patent and the setting up of an integrated specialised and unified jurisdiction for patent related disputes;
- 1c. ACKNOWLEDGING the considerable amount of work accomplished so far by the Council's preparatory bodies on the legal instruments needed to establish the above mentioned two pillars;
- 1d. AGREES that the following conclusions should form part of the overall final agreement on a package of measures for an Enhanced Patent System in Europe comprising the creation of a European and Community Patents Court, a Community patent, an enhanced partnership between the European Patent Office and central industrial property offices of Member States and relevant amendments to the European Patent Convention;
2. TAKES NOTE of the Draft Agreement on the European and Community Patents Court in document 7928/09 of 23 March 2009 (below the Draft Agreement), acknowledges that some elements of the envisaged agreement have been under particular discussion and draws the following conclusions from this discussion;

3. STRESSES that the following conclusions are without prejudice to the request for an opinion of the European Court of Justice¹ and are conditional on the opinion of the Court concerning the compatibility of the envisaged European and Community Patents Court (below the ECPC) with the EC Treaty.

I MAIN FEATURES OF THE EUROPEAN AND COMMUNITY PATENTS COURT

THE EUROPEAN AND COMMUNITY PATENTS COURT

4. The ECPC should have exclusive jurisdiction in respect of civil litigation related to the infringement and validity of Community patents and European patents.
5. As outlined in the Draft Agreement, the ECPC should comprise a Court of First Instance, a Court of Appeal and a Registry. The Court of First Instance should comprise a central division as well as local and regional divisions.
6. The Court of Justice of the European Communities should ensure the principle of primacy of Community law and its uniform interpretation.

THE COMPOSITION OF THE PANELS

7. In order to build up trust and confidence with users of the patent system and to guarantee high quality and efficiency of the ECPC's work, it is vital that the composition of the panels is organised in a way which makes best use of [available] experience of patent litigation among judges and practitioners at national level through pooling of resources. Such experience could also be acquired through training which should be provided in order to improve and increase available patent litigation expertise and to ensure a broad geographic distribution of such specific knowledge and experience.
8. All panels of the local and regional divisions and the central division of the Court of First Instance should guarantee the same quality of work and the same level of legal and technical expertise.

¹ OPINION 1/09, European Court of Justice.

9. Divisions in a Contracting State where, during a period of three successive years, less than fifty cases per year have been commenced, should either join a regional division with a critical mass of at least fifty cases per year or sit in a composition whereby one of the legally qualified judges is a national of the Contracting State(s) concerned and two of the legally qualified judges come from the pool of judges to be allocated to the division on a case by case basis.
10. Divisions in a Contracting State where, during a period of three successive years, more than fifty cases per calendar year have been commenced should sit in a composition whereby two of the legally qualified judges are nationals of the Contracting State. The third legally qualified judge, who would be of a different nationality, would be allocated from the pool of judges [...]. The judges from the pool should be allocated on a long term basis where this is necessary for the efficient functioning of divisions with a high work load.
11. All panels of the local and regional divisions should comprise an additional technical judge in the case of a counterclaim for revocation or, in the case of an action for infringement, when requested by one of the parties. All panels of the central division should sit in a composition of two legally qualified judges and one technically qualified judge. The technically qualified judge should be qualified in the field of technology concerned and be allocated to the panel from the pool of judges on a case by case basis. Under certain conditions and with the agreement of the parties, cases in the First Instance may be heard by a single judge.
12. The allocation of judges should be based on their legal or technical expertise, linguistic skills and proven experience.

JURISDICTION IN RESPECT OF ACTIONS AND COUNTERCLAIMS FOR REVOCATION

13. In order to ensure that local and regional divisions work in an expeditious and most efficient way, it is vital that the divisions have some flexibility on how to proceed with counterclaims for revocation.
- (a) Direct actions for revocation of patents should be brought before the central division.

 - (b) A counterclaim for revocation can be brought in the case of an action for infringement before a local or regional division. The local or regional division concerned may:
 - (i) proceed with the counterclaim for revocation;
or
 - (ii) refer the counterclaim to the central division and either proceed with the infringement action or stay those proceedings;
or
 - (iii) [...] with the agreement of the parties, refer the whole case for decision to the central division.

LANGUAGES OF PROCEEDINGS

14. The Draft Agreement, the Statute and the Rules of procedure should provide for arrangements which would guarantee fairness and predictability of the language regime for the parties. Furthermore, any division of the ECPC should provide translation and interpretation facilities in oral proceedings to assist the parties concerned to the extent deemed appropriate, in particular when one of the parties is an SME or a private party.

15. The language of proceedings of the local and regional divisions should in general be the language(s) of the Contracting State(s) where they would be established. Contracting States may however designate one or more of the official languages of the European Patent Office as language of proceedings of the local or regional division they host. The language of proceedings of the central division should be the language of the patent. The language of proceedings of the Court of Appeal should be the language of the proceedings at the First Instance. It should however be possible, for reasons of convenience and fairness to the parties, for the panels in local and regional divisions to, under particular circumstances, decide on the language of the patent as the language of proceedings at the request of one party, after having heard the other parties. Such circumstances could for instance be when one of the parties is a small or medium sized enterprise or a private party that has no establishment or domicile in the Contracting State where the relevant division is situated. Such an order may always be appealed separately.

THE TRANSITIONAL PERIOD

16. The transitional period should not last longer than five years after the entry into force of the Agreement on the ECPC.
17. During the transitional period, proceedings for infringement or for revocation of a European patent may still be initiated before the national courts or other competent authorities of a Contracting State having jurisdiction under national law. Any proceedings pending before a national court at the end of the transitional period should continue to be subject to the transitional regime.
18. Unless proceedings have already been initiated before the ECPC, holders of European patents or patent applications granted or applied for prior to the entry into force of the Agreement on the ECPC should have the possibility to opt out of the exclusive jurisdiction of the ECPC, if the opt out is notified to the Registry no later than one month before the end of the transitional period.

REVISION CLAUSE CONCERNING THE COMPOSITION OF PANELS AND COUNTERCLAIMS
FOR REVOCATION

19. The Commission of the European Communities should closely monitor the functioning, the efficiency and the implications of the provisions regarding the composition of the panels of the First Instance and the jurisdiction in respect of actions and counterclaims for revocation, see points 9, 10 and 13 above. Seven years after the entry into force of the agreement on the ECPC and after a sufficient number of infringement cases, approximately 2000, have been decided by the ECPC, whichever is the later point in time, and if necessary at regular intervals thereafter, the Commission should, on the basis of a broad consultation with users and an opinion of the ECPC, draw up a report with recommendations concerning the continuation or termination of the relevant provisions which should be decided by the Mixed Committee.
20. If the Mixed Committee on the basis of the Commission's report decides to terminate one or more of the relevant provisions, the following provisions should instead apply;
- (a) All panels of the local and regional divisions should sit in a multinational composition of three legally qualified judges, of which two of the judges should be permanent (instead of points 9 and 10).
- (b) A counterclaim for revocation can be brought in the case of an action for infringement before a local or regional division. The local or regional division concerned may;
- (i) proceed with the counterclaim for revocation;
- or
- (ii) with the agreement of the parties refer the counterclaim to the central division [...] and either proceed with the infringement action or stay those proceedings;
- or
- (iii) [...] with the agreement of the parties, refer the whole case for decision to the central division. (Instead of point 13).

PRINCIPLES ON THE FINANCING OF THE ECPC

21. The ECPC should be financed by the ECPC's own financial revenues consisting of the court fees, and at least in the initial stages as necessary by contributions from the European Community and from the Contracting States which are not Member States.
22. A Contracting State setting up a local division should provide the facilities necessary for that purpose.
23. The court fees should be fixed by the Mixed Committee on a proposal by the Commission of the European Communities. The court fees should be fixed at such a level as to ensure a right balance between the principle of fair access to justice and an adequate contribution of the parties for the costs incurred by the ECPC, recognising the economic benefits to the parties involved.
24. The ECPC should be organised in the most efficient and cost effective manner and should ensure equitable access to justice.
25. The level of the court fees should be reviewed periodically, in accordance with point 23, and in order to maintain the balance of the ECPC's finances.

II THE COMMUNITY PATENT

THE RENEWAL FEES

26. The renewal fees for Community patents should be progressive throughout the life of the patent and, together with the fees due to be paid during the application phase, cover all costs associated with the granting and administration of the Community patent. The renewal fees would be payable to the European Patent Office, which would retain 50 percent of the renewal fees and distribute the remaining amount among the Member States in accordance with a distribution key.
27. A Select Committee of the Administrative Council of the European Patent Organisation should, once the Community Patent Regulation enters into force, fix both the exact level of the renewal fees and the distribution key for their allocation. The Select Committee should be composed only of representatives of the Community and the Member States. The level of the renewal fees should in addition to the above mentioned principles be fixed with the aim of facilitating innovation and fostering the competitiveness of European business. It should also reflect the size of the market covered by the Community patent and be similar to the level of the renewal fees for what is deemed to be an average European Patent at the time of the [first] decision of the Select Committee.
28. The distribution key should be fixed taking into account a basket of fair, equitable and relevant criteria such as for instance the level of patent activity and the size of the market. The distribution key should provide compensation for, among other things, having an official language other than one of the official languages of the European Patent Office, and for having disproportionately low levels of patent activity, taking into account duration of EPC-membership.
29. The Select Committee should periodically review its decisions.

THE ENHANCED PARTNERSHIP

30. Enhanced Partnership should pave the way for the European Patent Office to make regular use, where appropriate, of the result of any search carried out by central industrial property offices of Member States of the European Patent Organisation on a national patent application the priority of which is claimed in a subsequent filing of a European patent application.
31. The aim of such enhanced partnership is to promote innovation by enhancing the efficiency of the patent granting process through less duplication of work, with the goal of more rapid delivery of patents which will increase speed of access to market for innovative products and services.
32. Enhanced partnership [...] should fully respect the central role of the European Patent Office in examining and granting [...] European patents. Under the enhanced partnership the European Patent Office would be expected to consider but not be obliged to use the work provided by participating offices. The European Patent Office should remain free to carry out further searches. The enhanced partnership should not restrict the possibility for applicants to file their application directly at the European Patent Office.
33. Enhanced partnership [...] should be based on a European Standard for Searches (ESS), containing criteria for ensuring quality. The ESS should in addition to searches include standards on inter alia training, tools, feedback and assessment.
34. The ESS should be implemented within the context of the European Patent Network (EPN)², in particular, the Utilization Project³ and the European Quality System,⁴ within the policy of the European Patent Organisation.

² EPO documents CA/120/06 and CA/PL 8/09.

³ EPO document CA/147/08 Rev. 1.

⁴ EPO document CA/122/06 and CA/PL 8/09.

35. Enhanced partnership [...] would be subject to [...] periodic reviews [...]. In addition, regular feed back from the European Patent Office to the participating offices on how search reports are utilised at the European Patent Office would be essential for the enabling of the fine-tuning of the search process to the benefit of the optimal utilisation of resources.
36. The participation of central industrial property offices in an *enhanced partnership* should be voluntary but open to all. In the spirit of facilitating the utilization and pooling of all available resources, regional cooperation should be encouraged. In addition the possibility of limiting the participation of a central industrial property office in an enhanced partnership to a specific technical field should be further analysed, tested and evaluated.
- 36a. All central industrial property offices, including those which do not perform searches in the course of a national patent granting procedure, can have an essential role under the enhanced partnership, advising potential applicants including SMEs, disseminating patent information and receiving applications. Also, central industrial property offices can play a vital role fostering innovation.
37. The steps now taken should be without prejudice to any future development of the enhanced partnership. Against this background, the European Patent Office and Member States should give comprehensive evaluation of the functioning and the further development of the Enhanced Partnership, [...] based on experience gained through the implementation and the performance achieved by central industrial property offices in meeting the ESS.

AMENDMENTS TO THE EUROPEAN PATENT CONVENTION AND ACCESSION OF THE COMMUNITY TO THE EUROPEAN PATENT CONVENTION

38. In order for the Community patent to become operational, amendments would have to be made to the European Patent Convention (EPC). The Community and its Member States should take the necessary measures [...] and put them into force, including those for the accession of the Community to the EPC [...].