PATENT OFFICES OF THE IP5 GROUP MAKE PROGRESS TOWARDS HARMONIZATION

Earlier this summer the Patent Offices of the IP5 group, i.e. The European Patent Office (EPO), the Japan Patent Office (JPO), the State Intellectual Property Office of the People's Republic of China (SIPO), the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) and the Korean Intellectual Property Office (KIPO), met in Busan, Korea to discuss how to increase both the efficiency and the quality of the patenting process and how to enhance the various work-sharing initiatives in place among the five Offices.

The Offices belonging to the IP5 group are the five largest Intellectual Property Offices in the world. The group was set up to improve the efficiency of the examination process for patents worldwide. According to official records, The IP5 Offices together handle about 80% of the world's patent applications, and 95% of all work carried out under the Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT).

At the recent meeting, the heads of the IP5 Offices made a number of undertakings to continue promoting their mission. In particular, they agreed to increase the quality of the patent documentation held by the Offices. This should be achieved by publishing the complete collection of each Office. The Offices will also promote public access to “file wrapper” information (via a service known as the Global Dossier) at the IP5 level. Indeed, the EPO Global Dossier service has already been launched, while public access to file wrapper information through the systems of each of the five IP Offices is expected to be completed over the next two years. The Offices will start working on patent harmonization by focusing on the citation of prior art, written description/sufficiency of disclosure, and unity of invention. Furthermore, the Offices will launch the update of the group's website in order to more efficiently provide public information on the IP5 Offices' cooperation and related activities, together with IP5 statistics and materials. Finally, the Offices will cooperate on the further development of the Patent Cooperation Treaty system.

It is also worth noting that prior to the recent meeting, the heads of the IP5 Offices met with representatives from six industry groups of the IP5 regions. These industry groups are the American Intellectual Property Law Association (AIPLA), BusinessEurope (BE), the Intellectual Property Owners Association (IPO), the Japan Intellectual Property Association (JIPA), the Korea Intellectual Property Association (KINPA), and the Patent Protection Association of China (PPAC). The meeting was aimed at allowing the heads of the IP5 Offices to hear views and opinions on IP5 agenda topics, with particular emphasis on the Global Dossier, patent information exchange, work-sharing, quality, development of the PCT, the PPH system, patent harmonization, and the future of IP5 cooperation. At this separate meeting, the IP5 Offices confirmed the importance of directly involving users in their efforts to improve the global patent system.

These meetings presented a significant opportunity for the group's Offices to make progress in making their services and policies more user-friendly and efficient. The group's Offices also agreed to continue their endeavours in providing sustainable and reliable IP services to users.

All steps taken by the IP5 group Offices to promote efficiency and work-sharing will clearly benefit users, who will be able to operate in a more integrated and harmonized international IP environment. In fact, this will make it easier for applicants throughout the world to avail of increasingly similar and transparent patenting procedures when acting before the EPO and the other IP5 offices, which will in turn simplify the process for protecting their intellectual property assets in Europe and in the other most important markets in the world.