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Dear Mr. Lagemaat

Please find attached the minutes of the last PATCOM meeting with the EPO which took place the 17.03.2006 in Vienna.

As usual the document comes in form of a CA document, as it will be presented to the members of the WPTI in the meeting which will take place in Munich from 4-6 April 2006.

Yours sincerely

Wolfgang Pilch
Principal Director
Patent Information

CA/T 3/06

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SUBJECT: Report of the meeting of 17.03.2006 between the PatCom Group and the EPO

DRAWN UP BY: President of the European Patent Office

ADDRESSEES: Working Party on Technical Information (for information)

SUMMARY

The PatCom Group was established towards the end of 1999 and is an association of commercial companies that provide patent information products and services that include EPO data. It has been agreed to hold regular meetings with PatCom on a six-monthly basis. The meeting on 17 March 2006 was the 12th such meeting.

This document has been issued in English only.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The PatCom Group was established towards the end of 1999 and is an association of commercial companies that provide patent information products and services that include EPO data. The EPO has agreed to hold regular meetings with PatCom on a six-monthly basis.

The 12th meeting between the PatCom Group and the EPO took place in Vienna on 17 March 2006. The present document is a report of that meeting.

The agenda for the meeting was based on a list of points submitted in advance by PatCom.

PatCom was represented by:

LexisNexis (formerly Univentio, PatCom Presidency), Incom, Questel-Orbit, Thomson Scientific, FIZ Karlsruhe and Chemical Abstracts Service (CAS). The Patent Documentation Group (PDG) sent a representative as observer.

PatCom thanked the EPO for the opportunity to meet, remarking that the regular six-monthly meetings with the EPO were always useful.

II. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING IN THE HAGUE

PatCom reported that it had no comments to make on the report of the previous meeting (CA/T 39/05), except to remark that at the time of the meeting the Trilateral Alliance was in the process of preparing its **second** annual statement, not as incorrectly stated, its first (see CA/T 39/05, Chapter II, second paragraph).

III. GENERAL ISSUES AND IPC8 IMPLEMENTATION

PatCom complimented the EPO and other patent offices on the effort they gone to in order to prepare the implementation of IPC8. PatCom had had some problems when IPC8 was launched in January 2006 (eg the feed from WIPO of IPC7 classifications in IPC8 fields), but considering the size of the challenge, the problems were limited. Nevertheless the problems that occur did cause disruption and had a financial impact on PatCom members.

In a letter to the EPO and as a gesture of co-operation to minimise problems in future, PatCom offered to contribute actively to future development in such

projects, and provide feedback. As a first step, PatCom said it would pass on any comments received from end users on IPC8 to the EPO and WIPO.

PatCom informed the EPO that it had had a meeting with WIPO on IPC8 in February, which had been very successful. It asked the EPO to continue its practice of holding technical seminars for the commercial sector and specifically requested an event in 2006 on issues relating to WIPO Standard ST 36. The EPO agreed.

Moving to the question of technical support from the EPO, PatCom said it had been experiencing problems with response times on specific technical issues it had submitted to EPO in The Hague. The EPO explained that the implementation of IPC8 has led to a very intense working period in the technical units, and consequently to some delays in response times. This should improve now that the workload situation is stabilising.

IV. AUTOMATION PLAN

The EPO distributed an excerpt of the Automation Plan, containing the elements that are important for the outside world. The EPO stressed, however, that the document distributed should be treated confidentially and not passed on to third parties.

It went on to explain that the tenor of the document included the creation of "Business Process Areas" (BPA), two of which are of specific interest to PatCom: Patent Information Service and BPA dealing with electronic filing and related issues. The EPO that the introduction of BPAs will help guarantee clear planning, monitoring and reporting on developments in future.

V. QUALITY OF DATA SUPPLIED BY THE EPO

One PatCom member drew the EPO's attention to a change in the data supplied on ESPACE discs which had led to significant problems for him and his customers at the beginning of the year. The production chain had been changed with repercussions for the final products which were not announced in advance. The EPO expressed regret that the problems had occurred, which were due in part to a very late arrival of the corresponding data at the EPO, and assured PatCom that the EPO had not intentionally withheld information.

It added that the EPO is always very grateful to receive error reports, so that it can work on resolving problems. The most efficient way for this to happen is for a single error report to be submitted direct to the responsible helpdesk, rather than approaching different EPO departments on one issue. PatCom agreed that streamlining contacts is in everyone's interest.

With regard to the forthcoming change of DOC-DB to XML, the EPO said it would start regular weekly production of DOC-DB in XML in August 2006. This will include some data elements previously only available in the INPADOC files (abstracts, non-standardised applicant names, etc). Parallel production of the new and old formats will be maintained until February 2007. At the time of the meeting, a pre-pilot phase involving a very limited number of external users had almost finished that the EPO announced that a broad-based test phase would be starting at the end of March 2006. PatCom members were invited to participate in the test phase and give early feedback to the EPO.

To ease the data conversion that recipients of DOC-DB will have to initiate, the EPO agreed to provide documentation (a sort of concordance table of old and new tags) on the changes planned.

VI. EPO PLATFORMS AND FORMATS

PatCom asked for a status report on ongoing efforts to standardise its data formats.

The EPO stated that it currently offered most of its bulk data services via a download area on the internet. It also provides genuine FTP delivery on EPOQUE database dumps - these are, however, pure database dumps and in a format that is difficult to use. These EPOQUE dumps are, however, the sole source of WO full text data.

PatCom asked about a new item in the EPO price-list, namely a complete copy of the BNS archive. The EPO confirmed that the BNS backlog is available, but only on cartridges, which are impracticable for such data quantities (the complete dataset on this medium would run to thousands of cartridges). The EPO said that work was, however, underway to prepare the same data in TIFF or PDF format for delivery on high capacity discs. There was no fixed target date for completion of this work, but it may be possible to report progress by the end of 2006.

PatCom expressed surprise that the BNS backlog is already in the price-list, but in effect not deliverable. The EPO confirmed that the price-list should include only things that are deliverable and will bear this in mind in future.

VII. *esp@cenet* DEVELOPMENTS

The EPO listed recent developments to *esp@cenet*, such as the launch of **full document downloading**. It reported performance problems experience in December 2005 and January 2006 had been resolved.

It went on to announce that all changes in *esp@cenet* are now subject to a harmonised "**change management system**". Input provided by external customers or national patent offices is compiled by the responsible departments (PD 4.5 for customers of patent information products) and then fed into the change management system, which is then discussed twice a year and prioritised for final approval (or otherwise) of the national patent offices at the Working Party on Technical Information.

One imminent development for *esp@cenet* is a **Japanese language interface**, developed at the request of the JPO as a project within the trilateral co-operation.

The EPO informed PatCom that the creation of a new possibility for "**forward citations searching**" is under consideration, the target date for which is the end of 2006. The new feature will simply allow users to search for occurrences of where a given document is present in the cited documents field. PatCom explained that a number of commercial products exist based on citation analysis and stressed that the area is particularly sensitive in terms of potential business impact. Early and clear information from the EPO is therefore essential.

Further developments under consideration are **multiple document delivery** via the "My patents" feature and **full text search for level 1 national servers**. The full text search feature will be done through the national interfaces, one country at a time.

The EPO confirmed that has no concrete planning in 2006 for providing **machine-translation** in *esp@cenet* in 2006, but in the longer term it will be developed since there is a clear wish for this from national patent offices and *esp@cenet* users in general.

Some European languages are high up the list, but in each case any decision will depend on the line taken by the Administrative Council and the countries concerned. The EPO has, however, already issued a tender for both the dictionary and software elements generically necessary for performing machine translation. The high level of interest shown in the tender was very encouraging. For the EPO, machine translation is an area where quality is of the highest importance; but even understanding how to assess quality is a challenge.

Noting that it had put the same question to WIPO, PatCom asked if the EPO was looking at **Chinese to English translation**. It noted that Chinese patents were becoming the number one question from the user basis of PatCom and adding that currently available machine translations did not achieve acceptable quality levels.

The EPO responded that for Japanese to English, it was Japan that had taken the initiative. The EPO was therefore hopeful that China will recognise the advantages in making its documentation more readable to international industry.

Finally, EPO agreed to publish its **planning** for *esp@cenet* for the rest of 2006 as soon as it was approved (mid-April 2006). The *esp@cenet* forum would seem to be the appropriate place for this.

VIII. OPS

The EPO reported that its Open Patent Services (OPS) had been modified at the beginning of 2006 to handle IPC8 data. French and German title data was currently missing due to a modification in the underlying database, but would soon be re-introduced. An important new development was the introduction of facsimile image pages (sourced from the BNS), already available in a test environment. Other new features under test include additional bibliographic data (multiple levels of publication, non-standardised items, nanotechnology classes and full text of descriptions and claims).

PatCom said that the current test site for evaluating new features in OPS is very appreciated.

PatCom explained that OPS and *esp@cenet* are a success and some commercial services and end users have come to rely on them completely. It stressed that outages in the service cause significant disruption. The EPO said that it was

considering drawing up a charter, explaining what its goals were in terms of reliability of service. PatCom said that this would be very useful.

IX. MIMOSA & ESPACE

On MIMOSA, the EPO explained that the three main sources of workload in recent months have been the IPC reform, the conversion of MIMOSA to work with XML data and the termination of the contract with the Bundesdruckerei for the production of some ESPACE products.

PatCom asked how many of the ESPACE national series would convert to GTI version 5 and what would happen to the TIFF tags in these cases. The EPO stressed that the national office concerned always decides what it wishes to produce and how (eg character-coded PDF rather than BACON or TIFF formats). The EPO agreed, however, to put a question to the national offices on this point at the next opportunity, presumably the WPTI meeting in late April.

The EPO confirmed that the latest version of the MIMOSA Authoring Software allows the creation of databases that are searchable via the internet.

PatCom asked if there was any news on the availability of Italian data. The EPO stated that it was aware of a project in Rome to digitise trade mark and patent data, but did not know when actual scanning of patent data would begin.

X. EXPERIENCES WITH THE EUROPEAN PUBLICATION SERVER

The EPO reminded participants that since April 2005, the Publication Server had been the sole authoritative source for European patent documents. In addition, searching in all IPC classes has been possible since the launch of IPC8.

In the days just prior to the meeting, the full backfile to 1978 had been loaded, and links to WIPO's PatentScope resource had been activated. Furthermore, a web access to the data would be available soon.

The Austrian Patent Office already uses this technology to distribute its publications, other national offices are in a test phase.

XI. CO-OPERATION WITH THE EUROPEAN PATENT ACADEMY AND FOR SME TRAINING

The EPO announced that it had been agreed internally that whatever is done in

terms of training on patent information would be done by the EPO in Vienna. PatCom stated that they had received invitations to participate in EPO events with a speaker very late and were unable to accept because of calendar-related reasons. PatCom would appreciate receiving such invitations as early as possible.

PatCom said it had offered WIPO the option of linking to a list of training material available via the PatCom website and made the same offer to the EPO. The EPO accepted with thanks.

XII. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The provisional date for the next meeting was set as 8 September 2006, in Vienna.