

WIPO



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WORLD INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ORGANIZATION
GENEVA

ADVANCED SEMINAR ON THE INTERNATIONAL PATENT CLASSIFICATION (IPC)

Newport, United Kingdom, December 7 to 11, 1998

SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

adopted by the Seminar

INTRODUCTION

1. The fifth Advanced IPC Seminar (hereinafter referred to as “the Seminar”), organized by WIPO, was held at the United Kingdom Patent Office, Newport, from December 7 to 11, 1998.
2. The Seminar was open to officials of industrial property offices of countries party to the Strasbourg Agreement (hereinafter referred to as “the Agreement”) concerning the International Patent Classification (IPC), some other interested offices, and selected organizations active in the field of patent information. The list of participants appears as Annex I to this document.
3. The Seminar was opened by Mr. M. Makarov, Head, International Patent Classification Section, WIPO, on behalf of the Director General of WIPO, who expressed satisfaction with the widespread interest shown in the subject of the Seminar, reflected in the number of industrial property office representatives and other participants attending.

4. Mr. R. Marchant, Assistant Comptroller (Patents), United Kingdom Patent Office, welcomed the participants, expressing the wish that the Seminar would achieve its objectives and be able to formulate recommendations to the Committee of Experts to that end.

5. Mr. J. Calvert, Senior Examiner, International Classifications, United Kingdom Patent Office, acted as Moderator for the Seminar. Mr. M. Makarov acted as Secretary to the Seminar.

PURPOSE AND PROGRAM OF THE SEMINAR

6. At its twenty-sixth session, held in March 1998, the IPC Committee of Experts (hereinafter referred to as "the Committee") had indicated that the end of the sixth IPC revision period would be an appropriate time to review the existing revision policy and revision procedure, in order to make the revision work even more efficient and effective, especially in the light of the advent of new computerized search tools and decided to convene an IPC seminar to discuss this matter. This task was further confirmed by the twenty-seventh session of the Committee (see documents IPC/CE/ 26/8, paragraphs 24 to 28, and IPC/CE/ 27/12, paragraphs 33 to 37). The purpose of the Seminar was to consider the use and structure of the IPC, its revision policy and procedure.

7. The program of the Seminar appears as Annex II to this document.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8. The discussions were held in the light of lectures presented by the Netherlands Industrial Property Office; the National Institute of Industrial Property (INPI), Paris; the Swedish Patent and Registration Office; Derwent Information; the United States Patent and Trademark Office; the European Patent Office; the United Kingdom Patent Office; and the International Bureau (IB), WIPO. The INPI lecture included a presentation of CIB-LN, natural language system for accessing the IPC. Papers in support of the lectures are reproduced in the document series IPC/SEM/98.

9. The Seminar also listened to short presentations given by the German Patent and Trademark Office and the Japanese Patent Office based on papers submitted to the Seminar by those offices and noted the paper entitled "USPTO Plan of Action" submitted by the United States Patent and Trademark Office. The International Bureau informed the Seminar that the papers submitted would be included in the above-mentioned document series and that the whole document series would be sent, together with the present summary of proceedings, to all member countries of the IPC Union and to the organizations that were represented at the Seminar.

10. The Seminar noted, with appreciation, status reports made available by industrial property offices of Australia, Croatia, Egypt, Germany, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovenia, ARIPO and OAPI, containing material on the use of the IPC by these offices.

11. The Seminar, in the discussions following each of the lectures and presentations, arrived at several conclusions and recommendations to the Committee.

The Role of the IPC in the Electronic Age

12. The Seminar noted that word searching computerized systems were nowadays broadly available and that they were rapidly developing, especially because more and more full text patent databases would be available, for example on the Internet. Those systems, however attractive they may be, had serious restrictions in information retrieval concerned with language dependence, for example, problem of synonyms, inconsistent and frequently changing terminology. It was also inherently problematic for word searches to accurately retrieve information regarding matter that can be described in many equivalent ways, such as spatial relationships or movements. These problems can be overcome by a language – independent classification system

13. The Seminar agreed that the IPC, in view of being the only patent classification used worldwide and being applied in almost 100 countries and several international organizations, remained an important search tool representing in many technical fields the principal search tool. The IPC thus retains its universal value indicated more than 20 years ago in the Strasbourg Agreement.

14. The Seminar recognized that, whereas for some major industrial property offices the IPC had become inadequate to satisfy their search needs and they had introduced internal classification systems based on the IPC, other offices, including all medium sized and small offices, and the general public relied in patent searching significantly on the IPC. The IPC therefore should continue to accommodate changes necessitated by developments in technology. In this regard, the Seminar indicated that one of the objectives of the revision of the IPC should be to maintain the international patent classification system as a high quality platform for additional search tools developed by different offices or sources. It was considered especially important that the IPC enable efficient access to the non-PCT Minimum Documentation for which no other classification system was readily available.

15. The Seminar further recognized that, in view of the increasing reliance by searchers upon electronic access and retrieval of information, the IPC henceforth should be used in concert with electronic searching means and that the revision of the IPC in different technical fields should take into account the potential of such means in those fields.

16. The Seminar agreed that efficient and effective use of the IPC in the electronic environment required changes to the IPC itself and methods of its revision and application so as to fully accommodate the Classification to information in the electronic age.

Main problems facing the IPC and objectives of its further development

17. There was a common understanding that the structure of the IPC was not particularly suitable for electronic searching by combining IPC symbols, since the IPC had been designed for paper-based searching which inevitably required limiting the number of classification symbols assigned to a patent document by providing special rules. As to the hybrid systems relatively recently introduced in the IPC which combined classification and indexing terms, their complex presentation and non-obligatory use also limited search possibilities using the IPC. The Seminar considered therefore that one of the principal objectives of the IPC development should be to increase its effectiveness as a search tool.

18. In this context, the Seminar noted a vital role of new information technologies for the accommodation of the IPC to the electronic era and agreed that a close co-operation should be pursued between the IPC Committee of Experts and the WIPO Standing Committee on Information Technologies (SCIT) so as to provide a common working platform for the elaboration of new searching tools using the IPC.

19. The Seminar also noted that, in the course of many years of its existence, the IPC had evolved into a complex system, which was often difficult to understand and utilize for the non-professional users of patent information. It was considered as an important objective to intensify training in the use of the IPC, particularly in respect of developing countries, with WIPO assistance applying modern technology to simplify its use and make it more understandable.

20. The Seminar welcomed a new system for accessing the IPC in natural language, elaborated by INPI Paris for inexperienced users and which was demonstrated to the participants, and expressed the hope that expansion of that system to languages other than French would be achieved, as mentioned to be in preparation in collaboration with the EPO, especially in view of esp@cenet. Furthermore, it was recommended that the Committee work with the SCIT, coordinated by the International Bureau, to collaborate on this project to avoid a duplication of effort.

21. The Seminar noted that the currently established five year revision period and the currently applied revision procedure were not sufficient for timely incorporation of necessary amendments into new editions of the IPC and agreed that acceleration of processing of IPC revision proposals should be achieved, without, however, deterioration of the quality of the revision work.

22. The seminar indicated that the revision work would lose a considerable part of its importance if the back file – which formed the most convincing reason to undertake the revision in the first place – were not reclassified as soon as possible to enable efficient retrieval of the relevant state of the art for incoming new patent applications. The Seminar considered therefore that a study should start immediately about feasible methods for reclassifying published documents, or at least adding the relevant symbols from the revised version of the IPC to the symbols already allotted to those documents.

Recommendations of the Seminar

23. On the basis of the above-mentioned strategic considerations and of proposals put forward in the lectures and presentations, the Seminar outlined recommendations to the Committee in the following broad categories.

24. Recommendations relating to the IPC general structure and principles:

- a) Introduce a transitional revision period (1999 – 2002) during which modifications to the IPC revision policy and revision procedure and to the implementation of results of the revision should be elaborated.
- b) Modify IPC revision policy statements as proposed in the lecture by The Netherlands Industrial Property Office.
- c) Introduce electronic data illustrating the contents of IPC entries: examples of patent documents, detailed notes and classification definitions.
- d) Establish an ad hoc working group to consider modifications to the IPC revision policy and revision procedure and develop a general question and answer pamphlet on the application of the IPC.
- e) Consider the elaboration of rules for multiple classification in the IPC, for example, in areas covered by the last place rule, in function-orientated versus application areas, and investigate possible bearing of such rules on general principles of classifying disclosed in the Guide to the IPC.
- f) Review the hybrid systems in the IPC.
- g) Elaborate measures for increasing the consistency in the application of the IPC.

25. Recommendations relating to the revision period and implementation of the results of the revision:

- a) Determine the most appropriate duration of revision cycles.
- b) Establish a close cooperation between the Committee and the SCIT.
- c) Study automated classification tools and conduct pilot projects on their use, in particular for the reclassification of backlog patent files.
- d) Study the possibility of cooperation between offices in the reclassification of backlog patent files, including its outsourcing to external contractors.

26. Recommendations relating to the revision procedure:
- a) During the transitional period continue the revision of the IPC on the basis of the revision projects deferred from the previous revision period and new revision proposals that may be submitted for the creation of classification places covering new technologies.
 - b) Augment the role of rapporteurs for revision projects by giving them a mandate to initiate further discussion of the projects.
 - c) Streamline the revision procedure by allowing the revision requests to be submitted directly to revision groups via the International Bureau.
 - d) Introduce in IPC entries, where appropriate, more technical terms illustrating their contents.
 - e) Elaborate a system of priorities for revision proposals.
27. Recommendations relating to training in the use of the IPC:
- a) Enhance WIPO role and support in the application of the IPC.
 - b) Improve IPC training by providing modern training techniques, for example, computer based and Internet training tools. This should involve, in particular, enhanced support for developing countries in use of IPC.

Short term and medium term recommendations

28. The Seminar agreed that a part of the above recommendations which did not require detailed elaboration could be implemented by the Committee in short term, already for the new revision period, whereas the other part required detailed elaboration through the proposed ad hoc working group and could be implemented in medium term, after the completion of the transitional period.
29. The Seminar qualified as being short term the recommendations referred to in the following paragraphs, above: 24 (a) to (c), 26 (a) to (d), 27 (a) and (b).
30. The Seminar qualified as being medium term the recommendations referred to in the following paragraphs, above: 24 (d) to (g), 25 (a) to (d), 26 (e).
31. The Seminar proposed that prior to the end of the transitional period the Committee should elaborate a long-term strategy for creating a new international patent classification system for the new millennium.

Establishment of a Task Force

32. Recalling that its mandate included a possibility of creating a Task Force for further work, the Seminar decided to establish the Task Force in order to present detailed recommendations, including a plan of action, to the Committee.

33. The Seminar noted that industrial property offices of Finland, France, Germany, Japan, Portugal, Russian Federation, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States of America, ARIPO and OAPI volunteered to participate in the Task Force, which work would be conducted via e-mail exchanges.

34. The volunteering offices were requested to indicate their representatives and their e-mail addresses to the International Bureau and to submit proposals, by January 15, 1999, concerning actions to be taken with respect to each recommendation by the Seminar.

35. On the basis of the proposals to be submitted, the International Bureau was requested to propose final recommendations with the action plan attached and to circulate them, by February 1, 1999, to the members of the Committee.

36. This Summary of Proceedings was unanimously adopted by the Seminar at its closing meeting on December 11, 1998.

[Annexes follow]