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**SPECIAL UNION FOR THE INTERNATIONAL PATENT CLASSIFICATION
(IPC UNION)**

COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS

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**REPORT ON THE SECOND MEETING OF THE TRILATERAL WORKING GROUP ON
CLASSIFICATION HELD IN THE HAGUE FROM FEBRUARY 1 TO 4, 2000**

Document prepared by the European Patent Office (EPO)

1. At the second session of the ad hoc IPC Reform Working Group held in Geneva from November 15 to 22, 1999 it has been announced that it was planned to elaborate the trilateral policy with regard to the IPC reform by April 2000. In view of the twenty-ninth session of the Committee of Experts from March 13 to 17, 2000 the trilateral offices agreed to meet already early February 2000.
2. The trilateral working group on Classification held its second meeting in The Hague from 1 to 4 February 2000 and agreed to concentrate on the trilateral policy with regard to the IPC reform.

PRESENTATIONS

3. The USPTO made a presentation of the US Patent Classification and stressed the importance of a set of uniform simple rules for consistent classification like, for example, the general precedence used in the USPC.

4. The JPO made a presentation on the Japanese FI system and explained that 90% of the IPC version 7 is part of the FI system. By the end of April 2000 all FI groups will be translated in English. Also the Fterms have been explained as having a viewpoint different from the IPC.
5. The EPO made a presentation on ECLA, which has his roots in the German DPK and the Dutch IdT. Also the differences between the IPC rules and the use of it in ECLA has been outlined. The current revision of ECLA has been explained to apply strict rules for all fields as the general public has also access to it via esp@cenet.
6. The EPO made a second presentation on a potential new classification technique, which is in development for classifying difficult concepts. It is based on linking existing classification symbols and avoids the development of complex schemes not fulfilling the search needs. It is intended to be tested in the field of electric circuits.

STRUCTURE OF THE NEW IPC

7. Following the principle expressed by the Ad Hoc IPC Reform Working Group, that the future IPC should have two levels (core and advanced), the trilateral offices underline that the core level should lead to a more simple revision process, an easier use of it by small patent offices and a reduced amount of reclassification work for national collections.
8. The trilateral offices recommend that:
 - The core level should be kept as small as possible. The criteria for defining the size of the core level still have to be found e.g. on the depth of the subdivisions or on the file size of the groups.
 - The advanced level shall provide a comprehensive search system for the PCT minimum documentation to other patent offices.
9. In the beginning the advanced level will consist of the remainder of the current IPC beyond the core level and will be extended by proposals of the Trilateral Offices, most probably stemming mainly from harmonised ECLA-FI groups.
10. A simplified set of rules should on long term be established for the future IPC. Since a change of general classification rules in the current IPC does not seem feasible, it seems more appropriate to introduce changes in rules for new or significantly revised areas in the IPC.
11. Concerning precedence rules it is recommended that:
 - as a long-term target a general precedence, which should be applied on different levels of the IPC, is to be introduced.
 - the general precedence should be compatible with a broader introduction of the principle of multiple classification.

12. The Trilateral Offices are in agreement with the proposal to introduce classification definitions in the IPC. However these classification definitions have to be developed taking into account that:

- the titles of the classification entries in the IPC itself should be self-explaining and clear and as far as possible without additional information.
- the definitions should provide additional guidance, but must not alter the scope of the group title.

INFORMATION TO BE CLASSIFIED

13. The information to be classified is indicated in paragraph 83 of the guide and is based on the practice to classify granted documents or documents for which the invention is confirmed. However even in the case of granted documents, due to the language used, it can not be stated that new elements can only be found in the claims.

14. In view of the fact that nowadays mostly patent applications are classified, and granted patent documents only to a lower extent, the rules defining which part of the content of a document is to be classified, must be revised.

15. It is proposed to adapt the IPC rules according to the following principles:

- all invention information present in a document, is to be classified, using the claims as a guidance. When classifying granted patents, classification may be limited to the content of the claims.
- it is recommended to classify also other information which could be useful for search purposes.

CLASSIFYING AS A WHOLE / MULTIPLE CLASSIFICATION

16. With the growing complexity of the published patent applications and the use of combinations of different technologies, more and more questions are coming up regarding multi-aspect classification, multiple classification, function versus application etc.. The rules are to be modified to give more guidance.

17. The paragraph 52 of the guide strongly underlines the principle of classifying as a whole. Classification methods as multi-aspect classification, multiple classification and classification of constituent parts have to be seen in the light of information retrieval.

18. It is proposed to bring the rules more in conformity with the current practices of classifying and searching. Therefore the trilateral offices recommend that:

- although on the long term a general precedence rule is to be established, multiple classification must be allowed where appropriate. Main emphasis in determining classification rules should be put on search efficiency.

- in order to ensure the applicability of multiple classification, the rule established in par. 52 of the guide to the IPC should be adapted by adding: unless there is information useful for search in the constituent parts.

19. There is a doubt about the value of indexing systems as well as on a consistent use of these systems. Therefore the trilateral offices recommend that:

- indexing systems must be reduced in number and size as far as possible. The strategy to be followed will depend on the result of the Task Force put into place by the IPC Reform Working Group.

20. In case of mixtures and compositions additional constituents can be classified and schemes as indexing codes are used for it. However classification entries for the compounds used as additional constituents are already available in the IPC e.g. in chemistry. Therefore the trilateral offices recommend to stop the development of these schemes.

- replace the use of indexing codes for additional constituents in a mixture by multiple classification. The complete scheme of section C can be used for that purpose.

21. The present IPC rules (Guide par. 58, 59) seem to leave some uncertainty in the selection of function or application when classifying. To remove this uncertainty as far as possible it is recommended that the rules in the IPC Guide should be extended by a statement according to the following principle

- When in doubt if a document is to be classified in a function-oriented or an application-oriented place, it should be classified in both places.

STORAGE OF SYMBOLS AND MASTER CLASSIFICATION FILE

22. The current practice of marking the different types of information (invention information, additional information) is not always followed on the moment of publication and disappears almost completely when stored in databases. This can have a negative impact during search and therefore

- it is desirable that the marking of classification symbols should be continued and at least the difference between invention information and additional information classification should be more readily distinguishable.

23. The creation of a core and advanced level brings up the question of classifying on both levels. This question is in first instance only important for the offices classifying in the advanced level.

- The trilateral offices will classify their own newly published documents only according to the advanced level of the IPC under the condition that the core level classification is generated automatically in the Master Classification File

24. The classification data to be stored can belong to different levels and can be original, reclassified or other classification data. Further measures for differentiating classification data can be needed. It is also desirable to indicate the source, i.e. the originating office of a classification allotted.

- For retrieval purposes it is needed to store a version control indicator on the status of the classification symbols.
- It is expected that additional classification data may need to be stored, so that additional fields may be needed.

25. The need for creating a master classification database has already been questioned in view of existing databases which fulfil the currently known requirements.

- In view of the functionalities already present in EPO's DOC d.b. database, as well as the fact that almost all IPC classification data is already stored in DOC d.b., it is recommended to use DOC d.b. as the Master Classification File.

REVISION PROCEDURE

26. Due to the creation of a core and advanced level the current revision procedure has to be reviewed taking into account the need of the trilateral offices to make changes in a quick way e.g. similar to the ECLA, USPC updating.

27. The revision procedure for the advanced level should be set up according the following principles

- The advanced level must not undergo a lengthy revision cycle like the current IPC but as long-term goal a monthly publication is to be reached.
- The trilateral offices are in charge of the revision process. All offices which are a member of the IPC Union have the possibility to send proposals as well as to make comments on trilateral proposals before final decision.
- The proposals of the trilateral offices are only in English language and are sent to the International Bureau for publication.
- Proposals could be announced, e.g. on an Internet site, in order to give the possibility to comment on these proposals, which could be automatically considered accepted if no adverse comments are received.

28. The revision procedure for the core level should serve the needs of its users but also continue to be the basis of the advanced level. The following principles are mentioned:

- The revision of the core level must be carried out in harmony with the revision of the advanced level.

- The revision cycle of the core level should be made flexible and dependent on classification and search requirements, e.g. the revision of the advanced level or the number of substantial changes adopted. It means that a revision of the core level should enter into force when necessary and not according to a cycle of fixed length.

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