



## European Patent Office Single Patent Process (SPP) Programme

The EPO launched the Single Patent Process (SPP) Programme in April 2009 to redesign and improve the patent and business processes of the EPO. The SPP Programme team have carried out a detailed analysis of all the current EPO processes and have used this analysis as the basis for proposals to simplify and automate the work. A major feature of SPP will be an electronic dossier for every application and the eventual phasing out of the labour-intensive maintained paper files.

The SPP Programme will necessarily change the way that the applicant interacts with the EPO. In order to obtain maximum benefit from the SPP programme the majority of communications between the examiner and the applicant should be in electronic form. The EPO is working on the basis that all filings at the office will be in electronic form from 2013 onwards.

One aim of the SPP programme is to make elements of the interaction of applicants with the EPO self-service; items such as requests for extensions of time, changes of representative and the like could be handled by an automated procedure without the need to involve EPO Formalities Officers. In 2011 the EPO wishes to have the first external users of the "Patent Workbench" with a view to having the whole process handled via the Patent Workbench by 2013, at which time there will be no new paper files created by the EPO and on-line filing by applicants will be the "only" route.

The Patent Workbench is best described as the human interface to the Single Patent Process and will be an application running on the applicant/attorneys screen with a task list and the different tools integrated and configured to enable the user to interact for each patent application with an electronic dossier and the examiner handling the dossier. Solutions to the problems of security of access, authentication, non-repudiation of communications are required although technically not difficult problems, such problems may cause business issues.

The EPO has realised that the SPP will only be successful if the applicants and their representatives fully co-operate and work with the new processes. The EPO clearly takes the position of the representatives very seriously and has set up an External Focus Group with a membership made up of professional representatives and formalities experts. The EPO has also appointed an external advisor, Mr Ruud Peters, CEO Philips Intellectual Property & Standards, to the SPP governance committee to act as a further oversight of the work.

The EPO has held two meetings with the External Focus Group (EFG). The first meeting in November 2009 was primarily to establish the EFG and to give an introduction to SPP. The outcome of the meeting from the EFG members perspective was that the SPP should lead to a reduction in administrative work for applicants and simpler procedures.

RJB, 20 September 2010