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With the aim of further developing the international patent system to better support innovation in economies around the globe, the European Patent Office (EPO) and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) have agreed on a comprehensive three-year technical co-operation scheme.

Thus, EPO President Benoît Battistelli and WIPO Director General Francis Gurry signed on May 3, 2012, in Munich, a Cooperation Agreement specifically aimed at improving the procedural framework of the Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) with a view to increasing its use by patent applicants. Moreover, co-operation also focuses on enhancing the quality and efficiency of the patent granting process, including patent classification and searching, and improving access to patent information.

As leading international authorities in patents and intellectual property, both EPO and WIPO have a particular responsibility to promote the development of efficient structures and procedures in the international patent system in order to facilitate the grant of high-quality patents. Creating a barrier-free patent information system and improving the dissemination of technological information to the public are a further essential step to foster innovation with the help of the patent system.

Also, WIPO and the EPO are strategic partners in the delivery of first-class services to support the innovation programmes of industry, universities, public research institutions and small- and medium-sized enterprises. Thus, this agreement will enhance the successful technical cooperation that exists between WIPO and the EPO and is based first and foremost on a shared vision of the PCT as the core work-sharing platform of the international patent system. WIPO looks forward to the continued support of the EPO based on the long-standing European tradition of multilateralism.

Also, the agreement foresees establishing annual work plans of co-operation activities in areas of mutual interest surrounding the PCT, and among the deliverables are the fully electronic exchange of PCT documents and an enhanced digital exchange of patent information products.

As an international treaty that enables the filing of a patent application in some 140 countries simultaneously, the PCT route administered by WIPO is the only one that allows innovators to file for patent protection at global level. Carrying out some 70,000 patent searches related to patent applications filed under the PCT – about 40% of the total – originating both from Europe and from other regions, the EPO is by far the largest International Searching Authority (ISA) under that scheme.

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