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PCT AUTOMATION

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PROGRESS REPORT ON THE PCT AUTOMATION ("IMPACT") PROJECT

1. In March 1998, the Assemblies of Member States of WIPO approved the PCT automation project IMPACT (Information Management for the Patent Cooperation Treaty) and also agreed that the Assembly of the PCT Union should be kept informed of the development of the automated system (see documents A/32/5 – WO/BC/18/5 and A/32/7). This document¹ contains a progress report on the development of the project and other relevant information; see document PCT/A/27/2 for the previous progress report to the Assembly.

2. It is recalled that the main objectives of the IMPACT Project include:

- to offer further improved services to PCT applicants;
- to prepare the ground for future fee reductions by lowering PCT operating costs;

¹ WIPO's Internet site is at <http://www.wipo.int>. For this and other working documents for the Assembly's session, see http://www.wipo.int/eng/document/govbody/wo_pct/index_28.htm.

- to streamline work procedures and establish a more efficient and cost effective operation for the administration of the PCT through the implementation of an automated information and document management system;
- to create and make available to PCT applicants and national Offices electronic filing software (see below);
- to improve services for national and regional Offices and to establish generalized solutions for electronic data exchange between the Office of the PCT and the national and regional Offices as well as the PCT International Searching and Preliminary Examining Authorities, including electronic publishing and the dissemination of PCT information;

and that:

- the overall project is now expected to be completed in three to four years from May 1999, with the first components of the new system being delivered towards the end of this year.

3. The tender process as described in the previous progress report (see document PCT/A/27/2) was completed in December 1999 with the awarding of a contract to a consortium of three companies under the leadership of Xerox Professional Services (XPS) U.K. The other members of the consortium are Cap Gemini (France) and Hewlett Packard (Switzerland).

4. Experts from the consortium and a core WIPO team of information technology specialists (the IMPACT core team), responsible for the management and delivery of the system, began work on the analysis and design phases of the project in the new year. The award of the second part of the contract – implementation phase – will hinge on the successful completion of system benchmarking tests to determine the viability of the design. These tests, which will be jointly undertaken by WIPO and the consortium during the first half of this year, will ensure that the proposed technical solution meets the functionality and performance requirements stipulated by WIPO.

5. Management of the project will remain in the hands of WIPO. It is recalled that the initial approach had been to outsource the entire project to a systems integrator. However, following further analysis and advice from certain member States which had undertaken similar large scale projects, especially in the area of document imaging, it was decided to move the responsibility and management of the project in-house and to maintain a healthy balance between internal and external resources.

6. Heavy involvement of PCT operational staff is critical to the success of the project. Key PCT staff have already been moved permanently into the project team and priority has been placed on activities such as training, change management and maintaining good internal communications throughout the project by such means as the establishment of user focus groups and weekly status review meetings, the minutes of which are distributed to all interested staff throughout the International Bureau. The project team has put in place other initiatives to keep staff well informed such as a project intranet site and an e-mail address to which users and other staff can send suggestions and comments.

7. Other milestones achieved to date include:

- The selection of the Project Management Institute's project management methodology – PMI;
- The selection of a systems modeling methodology called Unified Modeling Language (UML), which is part of a systems development methodology package called the Rational Suite. Other components of that package are under evaluation for possible use within the project;
- A draft implementation plan for the entire project;
- A "to-be" model for the International Bureau's PCT operations which indicates that substantial gains will be made in the time it takes to process a PCT application;
- The establishment of a model office, including a document database for the project based on similar technology (Documentum 4I) that will be deployed for the overall project. The model office will be used for prototyping and training;
- A finalized Communications On Request (COR) scope document for phase 1 of the project;
- The establishment of a process to analyze the existing computer systems;
- The full integration of existing IT staff into the project team and the back-filling of those positions.

PCT ELECTRONIC FILING

8. At the fourth Plenary session of the Standing Committee on Information Technologies (SCIT) in December 1999, an Action Plan² for PCT on-line filing was adopted. At the same session it was agreed that this Action Plan would be subject to review in the first quarter 2000.

9. It is further recalled that PCT electronic filing, which will be expanded to go beyond only on-line filing, to include other electronic media, for example, CD-ROM, DVD, diskette, etc., was from the outset foreseen to be part of the IMPACT project. As such, the IMPACT Project team will be responsible for fully developing the PCT electronic filing project plan, taking into account the Action Plan for PCT on-line filing. Once the PCT electronic filing project plan has been finalized, including any additional information resulting from the current session of the PCT Assembly, it will be made available to PCT Contracting States for them to express their views. Among the first deliverables from the electronic filing project team will be a system requirements document and a system scope document, which is consistent with a normal Project Development Lifecycle. Consultations with PCT Offices, applicants and other interested parties will be held to gain acceptance prior to investing resources in the subsequent stages of the PCT electronic filing component of IMPACT. The

² The SCIT Action Plan is reproduced as an attachment in document PCT/A/28/3 Add.1 and may be accessed on WIPO's Internet site at http://www.wipo.int/eng/general/scit/project/p8/an_6.pdf.

aim of the International Bureau is to develop a PCT electronic filing system that can be used by the majority of PCT applicants, including applicants from developing countries, and that is acceptable for the purposes of the national phase to all designated States, without imposing further requirements related to the use of the electronic filing system.

10. Recognizing that applicants and Offices from PCT member States have different requirements, it is very likely that more than one technical solution for electronic filing may be required. If this is indeed the case, it will be important to ensure that the same technical standards are applied to these different systems to ensure maximum interoperability and ease of use. In order not to delay the current initiative for a PCT on-line filing system as referred to in the Action Plan, the International Bureau intends to put in place the technical infrastructure and to complete the technical standards needed to support that system, ensuring its future interoperability, whilst commencing work on a more comprehensive electronic filing system.

11. As indicated in paragraph 13 of document PCT/A/28/3, Part 7 and the technical standard set out in Annex F of the Administrative Instructions will need to be promulgated simultaneously in order to implement electronic filing and processing of international applications. However, draft Annex F in its current form appears to require further elaboration in order to completely address all of the needs of the PCT system and the PCT member States in regard to electronic filing. That further work, including the taking into account of the comments which have so far been submitted by the SCIT Task Force members, will be taking place as soon as possible. As a result of that work, it is anticipated that modifications may be needed to the provisions of Part 7 and Annex F, in addition to modifications resulting from the consultations taking place during and subsequent to this session of the Assembly.

12. It is also likely that, as a result of the comments received, it will be necessary to submit a revised version of the Administrative Instructions for further consultations, thus making it unlikely that the April deadline in the Action Plan for the promulgation of the Administrative Instructions will be able to be met. However, the International Bureau will make every effort to enable the electronic filing of international applications by the March 2001 target date referred to in the Action Plan.

13. During the process of finalizing the PCT electronic filing standards, the IMPACT project team will continue to utilize the expertise of the SCIT Task Force established for that purpose. Recognizing that the SCIT membership also has a strong interest in PCT automation, the International Bureau will continue to keep the SCIT informed of progress made in the IMPACT project.

14. The Assembly of the PCT Union is invited to take note of the progress report on the IMPACT Project contained in this document.

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