

INTERVIEWS

Interview with the President of the German Patent and Trade Mark Office (DPMA), Cornelia Rudloff-Schäffer



Ms. Rudloff-Schäffer, what was the biggest challenge for you in 2011?

By far the biggest challenge was the introduction of our electronic case file – called ELSA – for patents and utility models on 1 June 2011. This date marks a historic turning point for our Office. Of course we have worked with IT supported systems for a long time. However, in spite of IT support, we had kept our case files on paper for over 130 years. Since 1 June 2011, everything has changed. We said goodbye to paper case files for patents and utility models, and changed over to full electronic processing.

A project of such dimensions always requires large-scale adjustment of existing structures and also a loss of duties and tasks. This normally also produces anxiety and resistance. Have you been successful in taking your staff along with you in this process of change?

It has been beyond question for me that, in addition to the technical introduction, we need to also keep

an eye on the impact of this project on the working environment of staff. Such a large-scale IT project cannot succeed without acceptance by and guidance to staff. For it is true that IT provides assistance to us, but it does not work in isolation. In addition to the technical project group we also established a project group dealing with changes in the staff structure and with restructuring of existing jobs. We have also developed an extensive training programme. Nevertheless, the

move to end-to-end IT-based processing meant a huge change for staff. In the outcome, despite some obstacles, the staff actively joined us on this road and see ELSA also as a chance for professional development. I am very grateful for that.

Why have you introduced the electronic case file at all?

As the German Patent and Trade Mark Office we do not have a monopoly position. Just think of the European Patent Office or the Office for Harmonization in the Internal Market in Alicante. Our electronic case file is a very important strategic instrument to strengthen our future competitiveness as a national office. We now have an IP processing system that ranks among the most modern and efficient IT systems of the world's large patent offices.

Ms. Rudloff-Schäffer, let us now turn to another issue. The creation of the EU patent has recently developed dynamically. As President of a national office, do you not view this development with scepticism?

Not at all. However, I am aware that such European developments give rise to questions and also concerns. Important IP rights have already been Europeanised under the European Patent Convention, the Community Trade Mark Regulation and the Community Design Regulation. So far, these developments have hardly had any impact on the volume of work at the DPMA. I see it as proof of the attractiveness of the DPMA. We have built a good reputation and are well prepared. What are the issues that are most important to applicants? Again and again I hear: quality, speedy processing and cost. With regard to these criteria, I am confident that we will be able to continue to hold our own internationally.

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What are your priorities in the next few years?

My aim is to strengthen the competitiveness and future of our organisation in the interest of our customers.



We have invested much time and resources in introducing our electronic case file. In the past few years, a very large number of staff were tied up with this project. Regrettably this also led to longer processing times. In this respect, we intend to again clearly shorten the duration of procedures in the future.

Furthermore, we plan to introduce full electronic processing also for trade marks and designs. Work is already underway in the trade mark area.

As the fifth largest national patent and trade mark office in the world we will continue to be involved in international activities. With regard to the increasing patent activity in Asia, for example in Japan, South Korea and China, we particularly think of an improved exchange of data. Work sharing and effective cooperation between patent and trade mark offices for the benefit of our customers are also among the issues high on the agenda.