

## **PREFACE**

This joint annual Trilateral Statistical Report contains a compilation of statistics from the European Patent Office (EPO), the Japanese Patent Office (JPO) and the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO). It is also partially based on statistics from the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) in Geneva.

Besides promoting a better understanding of the importance of patent rights in the world, its purpose is to facilitate an understanding of the operations of each Office and to increase general awareness about the patent grant procedures of the three Offices. The report is a supplement to the separate annual reports of each of the three Offices, and is one of the fruits of trilateral cooperation.

It is appropriate first to look briefly at general macroeconomic developments as a background to the patent statistics contained in this report. However, interpreting worldwide patenting activity behaviour in terms of economic developments is difficult, because the economic factors which have major influences on the numbers of patent applications are not completely clear.

In the past, significant net growth has indeed been seen in numbers of patents applications both in times of economic growth and of recession. After a pause in economic growth at the beginning of the 90's, at the time of the Gulf War, there has since been worldwide expansion. This has continued strongly in the USA but has led to recession in Asia and Japan, while Europe has steered a middle course. There have been some regional drawbacks in the numbers of patent filings, but these did not affect the overall increasing trend in the number of patent applications filed in the world.

Patent applications are a reflection of efforts undertaken in the areas of Research and Development, and worldwide expenditures on R&D are trending upwards together with the general economic growth. The value of intellectual property protection seems to be increasingly appreciated, and also the areas of research in which patents can be applied for are increasing. This leads to the conclusion that first patent filings should continue to grow in the inventors' countries.

A major feature of the 1990s has been the transition towards multinational diversification of enterprises and globalisation of markets and production. More states have been joining the Patent Cooperation Treaty and tuning their patent laws towards common international standards. This has stimulated the flow of patent applications to other countries away from the country of invention and original domestic first filing. Together with the above mentioned increases in first filings, this has led to a large continuing increasing trend in the numbers of worldwide patent applications.