



Europäisches
Patentamt
European
Patent Office
Office européen
des brevets

Abstracts of decisions

Selected case law of the Boards of Appeal
edited by the Legal Research Service
of the Boards of Appeal

Issue 9 | 2024



Boards
of Appeal

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Case Law of the Boards of Appeal, 10th edition (update 2024) – references in issue 7/2024 and following

In the table summarising the decision data for an abstract, the links to the CLB, 10th edition, lead to the [HTML version](#), which was updated in June 2024. In the body of any given abstract, references to the CLB mirror those provided by the board in the underlying decision.

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Abstracts of decisions

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1. Article 052 EPC | T 1465/22 | Board 3.2.07

Article 052 EPC

Case Number	T 1465/22
Board	3.2.07
Date of decision	2024.05.23
Language of the proceedings	EN
Internal distribution code	D
Inter partes/ex parte	Inter partes
EPC Articles	Article 052 EPC
EPC Rules	
RPBA	
Other legal provisions	
Keywords	patentable invention – method for performing mental acts
Cited decisions	
Case Law Book	I.A.6.6.2 , 10th edition

In [T 1465/22](#) the appellant (opponent) had contested the opposition division's findings that although the method steps of claim 1 could be carried out manually, this did not render them non-technical, as the performance of a manual activity was not a purely mental act. According to the appellant, the method steps in features 1.2 to 1.8 of claim 1 were merely instructions to a user that could be carried out manually. In particular features 1.5.1 and 1.7 did not require that the steps were actually carried out, so that they remained instructions which were purely mental acts and therefore non-technical (Art. 52(2)(c) EPC). The appellant had argued that only feature 1.1 could be considered to be a technical feature and that this feature was well-known from the skilled person's common general knowledge (as shown in D1), so that the subject-matter of claim 1 of the main request was not inventive.

The board agreed with the opposition division that at least some of the method steps of claim 1 might be carried out manually, but that this did not lead to these method steps being "schemes, rules and methods for performing mental acts" as set out in Art. 52(2)(c) EPC. A method for performing mental acts requires that the method be performed entirely within the human brain. According to the established case law, subject-matter is excluded from patentability if the claim is not restricted to physical, technical implementations, i.e. if it is not excluded that the claimed invention may be carried out mentally. As the respondent (patent proprietor) argued, the features of claim 1 inter alia of "inserting, extracting, transferring, juxtaposing and capping" could not be considered to be purely mental acts. They required concrete handling of

containers, nests, a transport tub, a substance, a stopper and a cap. It could not be seen how any of these steps could possibly be achieved purely through mental activity.

The appellant's further argument that a user might not actually carry out the steps of the method, as the method steps were merely instructions, was not convincing either. The board noted that claims to methods were clearly allowed under the EPC (G 2/88). Any method claim requires that the steps are indeed carried out (whether manually, automatically or in a combination of both) and not just given to a user as instructions, otherwise the user would not be working within the scope of the claim. The board held that this applied also to method steps 1.2 to 1.8 of claim 1. Therefore, the appellant had not convincingly demonstrated that the subject-matter of claim 1 was not inventive in view of the skilled person's common general knowledge alone.

097-09-24

2. Article 056 EPC | T 0672/21 | Board 3.3.02

Article 056 EPC

Case Number	T 0672/21
Board	3.3.02
Date of decision	2024.04.15
Language of the proceedings	EN
Internal distribution code	D
Inter partes/ex parte	Inter partes
EPC Articles	Article 056 EPC
EPC Rules	
RPBA	
Other legal provisions	
Keywords	inventive step (yes) – unexpected balance of various beneficial properties (yes) – polymorphs
Cited decisions	T 0777/08, T 1684/16, T 0041/17
Case Law Book	I.D.9.9.5 , 10th edition

In [T 672/21](#) the appellant (opponent 2) had provided submissions on obviousness based on the assumption that any improved property was absent, so that the objective technical problem was the mere provision of a further polymorph. It relied in this respect on decision T 777/08.

The board, however, defined the objective technical problem in a more ambitious way. For this reason alone, the board held the appellant's submission on obviousness had to fail. The objective technical problem as defined by the board was the provision of a crystalline form of selexipag with a balance of beneficial properties, namely an intermediate stability and at the same time improved industrial processability and improved purity in terms of reduced amounts of residual solvents and residual impurities.

The board noted that according to T 777/08 "in the absence of any technical prejudice and in the absence of any unexpected property, the mere provision of a crystalline form of a known pharmaceutically active compound cannot be regarded as involving an inventive step" (headnote 1) and "the arbitrary selection of a specific polymorph from a group of equally suitable candidates cannot be viewed as involving an inventive step" (headnote 2). However, in the present case there was no absence of unexpected properties and the selection was not arbitrary, since the selected Form I had a balance of beneficial properties in terms of stability, industrial processability and purity in comparison with Form II and Form III. There was nothing in the prior art which pointed to the fact that the claimed Form I would have this

balance of beneficial properties and they were thus not expected. The present case thus differed from the situation at issue in decision T 777/08.

The board also distinguished T 41/17, relied upon by the appellant for its further argument that the alleged stability of Form I was not a surprising technical effect because the skilled person always looked for the most thermodynamically stable polymorph in order to avoid the problem of interconversion within the dosage form. In T 41/17 it was concluded that the skilled person would have performed screening of the different polymorphs disclosed in the closest prior art, which could exist in order to isolate and identify the most thermodynamically stable form thereof. By doing so, the skilled person would have arrived at the claimed polymorph, which was the most thermodynamically stable form and which, for this reason, was expected not to convert to other forms under mechanical stress. However, unlike in T 41/17, in the present case the stability was not the only property, but rather part of a balance of beneficial properties. Hence, even if the stability of Form I (which is at an intermediate level) had been expected, the same would not apply to the balance of various beneficial properties.

The board also noted that the mere fact that the skilled person would have carried out routine screening for polymorphs as such did not render the claimed Form I obvious. As set out in T 1684/16, the fact that the skilled person was taught in the prior art to investigate polymorphs in order to isolate the crystalline form having the most desirable properties was in itself not necessarily sufficient to consider a specific polymorphic form having a certain desired property or, as in the present case, balance of properties obvious.

Thus the subject-matter of claim 1 of the main request, and by the same token of claims 2 to 13, which included the subject-matter of claim 1, involved an inventive step in view of D10 as the closest prior art.

098-09-24

3. Article 056 EPC | T 1994/22 | Board 3.3.02

Article 056 EPC

Case Number	T 1994/22
Board	3.3.02
Date of decision	2024.04.15
Language of the proceedings	EN
Internal distribution code	D
Inter partes/ex parte	Inter partes
EPC Articles	Article 056 EPC
EPC Rules	
RPBA	
Other legal provisions	
Keywords	inventive step (no) – unexpected balance of beneficial properties (no) – arbitrary selection (yes) – polymorphs
Cited decisions	T 0777/08, T 1684/16, T 0041/17, T 0672/21
Case Law Book	I.D.9.9.5 , 10th edition

[See also abstract under Article 56 EPC regarding the purported technical effect of improved photostability](#)

In [T 1994/22](#) the appeal lay from the opposition division's decision to reject the oppositions filed against the European patent. Claim 1 of the main request related to Form II of selexipag, an agonist of the prostaglandin receptor PGI₂. The appellant (opponent) objected to the inventive step of the subject-matter of claim 1 of the main request in view of D10 as the closest prior art. The distinguishing feature of claim 1 of the main request in view of example 84 of D10 was the crystalline form, namely Form II of selexipag.

In view of the available experimental results, the board concluded that Form II exhibited the best stability but only intermediate industrial processability, intermediate residual solvent content and an intermediate amount of residual impurities. Contrary to the situation in T 672/21 there was no balance of beneficial properties for Form II according to the main request. The objective technical problem could therefore only be considered that of providing a crystalline form of selexipag which is the best for one property, but only intermediate for all other tested properties.

The respondent submitted that, in line with T 1684/16, there was no reasonable expectation based on the prior art that a suggested investigation in terms of polymorph screening would be successful in finding a form of selexipag having a

balance of beneficial properties in terms of stability, industrial processability, solvent content and purity.

The board disagreed. Based on T 1684/16 and in line with T 777/08, an inventive step can be acknowledged if the claimed polymorph has an unexpected property meaning that its selection is non-arbitrary. In the present case, the board saw nothing unexpected in finding a polymorph that was optimum for one property but only intermediate for several other properties. If this were unexpected and thus gave rise to an inventive step being acknowledged, an applicant or proprietor having identified a new polymorph would simply need to carry out tests for long enough to find one single property for which the identified polymorph performed best. This might result in a situation in which almost any polymorph in the world becomes inventive, which would render Art. 56 EPC meaningless.

Therefore, the selection of Form II is an arbitrary selection from the host of alternatives covered by the closest prior art. Such an arbitrary selection without any unexpected balance of properties being produced cannot contribute to inventive step. The subject-matter of claim 1 of the main request therefore does not involve an inventive step in view of D10 as the closest prior art.

099-09-24

4. Article 056 EPC | T 1994/22 | Board 3.3.02

Article 056 EPC

Case Number	T 1994/22
Board	3.3.02
Date of decision	2024.04.15
Language of the proceedings	EN
Internal distribution code	D
Inter partes/ex parte	Inter partes
EPC Articles	Article 056 EPC
EPC Rules	
RPBA	
Other legal provisions	
Keywords	inventive step (no) – post-published evidence taken into account (no) – purported technical effect not encompassed by the teaching of the application as filed (G 0002/21)
Cited decisions	G 0002/21, T 0116/18, T 1989/19
Case Law Book	I.D.4.1.2b), I.D.4.3.3c), 10th edition

[See also abstract under Article 56 EPC regarding unexpected balance of beneficial properties](#)

In [T 1994/22](#) the respondent (patent proprietor) inter alia had relied on post-published data D32 and submitted that Form II (according to claim 1 of the main request) as claimed had an improved photostability over Form III (comparative).

The respondent relied on the statements made in T 116/18 as regards G 2/21 and submitted that referring to the provision of a novel crystal of compound A (selexipag) and to a pharmaceutical product of "high quality for which constant effect can always be shown and a form which is handled easily industrially", the skilled person would have understood that the effect of improved photostability was implied by or at least related to the technical problem initially suggested in the originally filed application. Therefore, requirement (i) [in T 116/18], as encompassed by the technical teaching, was met. Furthermore, the respondent claimed the skilled person would not have had any legitimate reason to doubt that the improved photostability could be achieved with the claimed polymorphic form of selexipag. Therefore, requirement (ii) [in T 116/18], as embodied by the same originally disclosed invention, was also met in the present case.

In line with T 116/18, the board in the present case acknowledged that the mere fact that photostability or improved photostability was not contained in terms of a positive verbal statement in the application as filed and that the application as filed did not contain any data as regards photostability, as such, did not imply that the effect of improved photostability could not be relied on in terms of G 2/21 or T 116/18.

However, the board did not consider such a sweeping statement regarding "high quality" and "easy industrial handleability", which covers a plethora of potential advantageous properties, to encompass photostability, let alone improved photostability. If such a sweeping statement were sufficient, a reference to high quality would be sufficient to invoke whatever technical effect as being encompassed by an application as filed in the sense of G 2/21. This would essentially render the first criterion of order no. 2 of G 2/21 meaningless. In the present case, the application as filed was in fact directed to particle size, residual solvent content and amount of impurities, properties which are entirely unrelated to photostability. Therefore, based on these properties, having the common general knowledge in mind, the skilled person would by no means have recognised that (improved) photostability was relevant to the claimed subject-matter. Going from these specific properties to the effect of photostability would also clearly change the nature of the invention, contrary to what is required by T 116/18. Hence, the board found the effect of photostability was not encompassed by the teaching of the application as filed.

Furthermore, even if it were wrongly concluded in the respondent's favour that the technical teaching of the application as filed were to encompass photostability in the sense of T 116/18, it would not do so "together with the claimed subject-matter", as required by this decision.

The respondent submitted during the oral proceedings that the present case was also in line with T 1989/19 and that it was not a requirement that the application as filed disclosed improved photostability. In that case, the board held that once the criterion of the derivability of a technical effect in the sense of G 2/21 was fulfilled, this applied equally to the improvement in this effect. The board agreed with the view expressed in T 1989/19; however in the present case, photostability was not encompassed and thus not derivable from the teaching of the application as filed in the sense of G 2/21. Furthermore, unlike in T 1989/19, the application as filed in the present case referred to three polymorphic forms in equal terms, and the present case was not one in which the purported improvement was asserted to be present for the subject-matter of the application as filed over the subject-matter disclosed in the prior art.

It followed that improved photostability of Form II as demonstrated in D32 could not be taken into account in the assessment of the technical effects achieved by the distinguishing feature.

100-09-24

5. Article 069 EPC | T 2030/20 | Board 3.2.03

Article 069 EPC

Case Number	T 2030/20
Board	3.2.03
Date of decision	2024.01.16
Language of the proceedings	DE
Internal distribution code	D
Inter partes/ex parte	Inter partes
EPC Articles	Article 069 EPC
EPC Rules	
RPBA	
Other legal provisions	
Keywords	claim interpretation – use of the description – special (broader) meaning in the description – interpretation to assess novelty
Cited decisions	T 1473/19, T 0367/20
Case Law Book	II.A.6.3.3 , 10th edition

In [T 2030/20](#) befasste sich die Kammer mit der Auslegung der Begriffe "Tauchrohr" und "eines Durchmessers" in Anspruch 1 im Rahmen der Neuheitsprüfung.

Die Patentinhaberin wollte den Begriff „Tauchrohr" in Anspruch 1 des erteilten Patents im Sinne des unmittelbaren Wortsinns verstanden wissen, wonach das Rohr dazu geeignet sein sollte, in ein Kulturmedium einzutauchen. Ein Tauchrohr müsse demnach insbesondere lang genug ausgebildet sein, um das Kulturmedium, beispielsweise eine Flüssigkeit wie die Kulturbrühe oder ein Gel, eines angeschlossenen Einweg-Bioreaktors erreichen zu können.

Die Kammer merkte an, dass nach ständiger Rechtsprechung den in einem Patent verwendeten Begriffen die im einschlägigen Stand der Technik übliche Bedeutung zu geben sei, sofern ihnen nicht in der Beschreibung des Patents ein besonderer Sinn zugewiesen wurde (siehe Rechtsprechung der Beschwerdekammern, 10. Auflage 2022, Kapitel II.A.6.3.3; vgl. auch T 1473/19). Sei Letzteres der Fall, könne dies auch dazu führen, dass einem Anspruchsmerkmal gegenüber der im einschlägigen Stand der Technik üblichen Bedeutung im Lichte der Beschreibung eine breitere Bedeutung zukomme. Dies sei im vorliegenden Fall so.

Zwar sei es gemäß den in den Figuren dargestellten Ausführungsformen des Patents, wie von der Patentinhaberin dargelegt, bevorzugt, dass ein Tauchrohr des Patents dazu vorgesehen sei, in eine im Bioreaktor bestimmungsgemäß vorhandene

Kulturbrühe einzutauchen. Allerdings weise das Patent dem Begriff "Tauchrohr" in der Beschreibung eine über den eigentlichen Wortsinn hinausgehende, breitere Bedeutung zu, wonach ein Tauchrohr lediglich in den Reaktionsraum ragen könne, also irgendwo innerhalb des Reaktionsraums oberhalb des Flüssigkeitsspiegels enden könne.

Die vorgenommenen Änderungen im Hilfsantrag 1 betrafen die Beschreibung der Tauchrohre in Absätze 46 und 60. Die Kammer war jedoch der Ansicht, dass die unverändert belassenen Absätze der Patentschrift weiterhin definierten, dass die Tauchrohre im Sinne des Patents lediglich lang genug ausgebildet sein müssten, um in den Reaktionsraum zu ragen.

Im Hilfsantrag 4 wurde folgendes Merkmal ergänzt: "und wobei die Tauchrohre eine Länge von über 50 Prozent eines Durchmessers der Kopfplatte aufweisen". Von den Beteiligten wurde diskutiert, was unter "eines Durchmessers" zu verstehen sei.

Nach Ansicht der Kammer müsse die Wortfolge "eines Durchmessers" im Gesamtzusammenhang des Anspruchs und der Patentschrift (T 367/20) als Maß für die Ausdehnung der Kopfplatte, also als Maß für ihren Gesamtdurchmesser, verstanden werden. Bei nur isolierter Betrachtung des Wortlautes von Anspruch 1 bestehe eine technisch sinnvolle Auslegung der Wortfolge "eines Durchmessers" darin, dass der Fachmann sich bei der Definition der Länge der Tauchrohre im Bezug auf die Kopfplatte an der für die Kopfplatte charakterisierenden Größe des Gesamtdurchmessers orientiere – und nicht an dem Durchmesser lediglich eines Teiles der Kopfplatte, welcher für die Größe der gesamten Kopfplatte nicht repräsentativ sei. Sollte ein Fachmann nichtsdestotrotz Zweifel daran haben, welche Bedeutung dem Begriff "eines Durchmessers" in Anspruch 1 zukomme, würde er die Beschreibung des Patents konsultieren. Die Patentschrift stütze das o.g. Verständnis der Wortfolge "eines Durchmessers".

101-09-24

6. Article 084 EPC | T 0566/20 | Board 3.5.04

Article 084 EPC

Case Number	T 0566/20
Board	3.5.04
Date of decision	2024.02.29
Language of the proceedings	EN
Internal distribution code	D
Inter partes/ex parte	Inter partes
EPC Articles	Articles 084, 123(2) EPC
EPC Rules	
RPBA	
Other legal provisions	
Keywords	claims – claim interpretation – in the context of assessing added matter
Cited decisions	T 1127/16, T 0169/20
Case Law Book	II.A.6.1 , II.E.1.3.9 , 10th edition

In [T 566/20](#) the parties disagreed on the interpretation of the feature "the position information in association with the serial number information output from the position control device".

The appellant (opponent) submitted that the position control device could output the serial number information, possibly with the position information. In their opinion, this interpretation was grammatically correct, made technical sense and was not disclosed in the application as originally filed.

In the respondent's view, it was apparent from the claim that the output from the position control device concerned the position information in association with the serial number information. The respondent also noted that this interpretation was in accordance with the disclosure of the application as filed.

The board concurred with the appellant that outputting both the position information and the associated serial number information from the position control device was technically sensible. It further agreed with the appellant that the fact that the claim did not include a step of receiving serial number information did not necessarily mean that the position control device did not receive this information. Outputting both the position information and the serial number information allowed the vision measuring system to match position information with image information by unambiguously correlating serial number information associated with, or included in, each of them.

This interpretation did not appear to give rise to incompatibilities with the remaining features of the claim.

Moreover, the board endorsed the view that a patent proprietor would be awarded an unwarranted advantage if it were allowed to restrict the claimed subject-matter by discarding at will technically reasonable interpretations in view of the description (see T 1127/16 and T 169/20). Therefore, the fact that the description and drawings support one interpretation of an ambiguous feature was not sufficient for other interpretations of the ambiguous feature that are technically reasonable in the context of the claim to be discarded.

102-09-24

7. Article 084 EPC | T 1726/22 | Board 3.3.05

Article 084 EPC

Case Number	T 1726/22
Board	3.3.05
Date of decision	2024.04.10
Language of the proceedings	EN
Internal distribution code	D
Inter partes/ex parte	Ex parte
EPC Articles	Article 084 EPC
EPC Rules	
RPBA	
Other legal provisions	
Keywords	claims – clarity (no) – unclear characterisation by parameters
Cited decisions	T 0849/11
Case Law Book	II.A.3.5 , 10th edition

In [T 1726/22](#) the claimed subject-matter was defined by parameters; however, even though the claims related to an acetylated wood as such, the parameters, i.e. the shrinkage ratios, were defined in relation to the wood before acetylation. The application did not mention anything regarding how the shrinkage ratios, relative to the shrinkage before acetylation, could be determined on the basis of the acetylated wood.

According to the appellant, the shrinkage ratios could be easily determined during the manufacture of the acetylated wood, during which the wood before acetylation was necessarily available and its shrinkage could thus be measured easily. The board found that this argument was not convincing. It noted that it was not enough for the requirement of clarity to be fulfilled that the parameter could be measured when manufacturing the wood, as the manufacturing method was not specified in the claim. The skilled person needs to be able to determine whether a given acetylated wood falls within the scope of the claim, the claim being directed to an acetylated wood as such. As outlined in T 849/11, an applicant who chooses to define the scope of the claim by parameters should ensure, inter alia, that a skilled person can easily and unambiguously verify whether they are working inside or outside the scope of the claim; however, in the present case, it was impossible for the skilled person faced with the acetylated wood to revert to the manufacturing process during which the shrinkage before acetylation could have been measured, or to the unacetylated wood.

The appellant also argued that the skilled person could alternatively measure the shrinkage ratio by using "a reference non-acetylated wood sample of the same wood species having similar properties". In the appellant's view this meant the same wood species of the same geographic origin, and the same part of the tree, i.e. heartwood or sapwood. The appellant submitted that the skilled person could identify the wood species by isotope analysis.

The board pointed out that using a reference wood was not suggested anywhere, let alone specified in the claim. Even if it was nevertheless assumed that the skilled person had the idea to turn to using a reference wood, they would not find any instructions on how to select a suitable reference wood. It thus could not be concluded that the skilled person would necessarily select a wood using the same criteria as identified by the appellant. Considering that the choice of the reference wood, and indeed the choice of the measuring method in general, was in no way limited, it could not be concluded that repeatable and reliable results for the shrinkage ratios would be obtained on this basis, irrespective of the question of whether such a reference wood could be reliably identified, and whether such a reference wood was at all representative of the (acetylated) wood under consideration.

The board recalled that there are cases in which it is not necessary to specify the measuring method for a parameter in the claim, namely when it is ("convincingly") shown that the method to be employed belongs to the skilled person's common general knowledge, or all the methodologies known in the relevant technical field for determining this parameter yield the same result within the appropriate limit of measurement accuracy (T 849/11); however, it was a mere assertion by the appellant that the skilled person could and would use a reference wood, and that this would lead to reliable results. This assertion was not even supported by the application, nor was any other supporting information available. By contrast with the appellant's view, it thus could not be concluded that the present case would be such an exceptional case in which it would be unnecessary to specify the measuring method. The requirements of Art. 84 EPC were therefore not met.

103-09-24

8. Article 087(1) EPC | T 0419/16 | Board 3.3.04

Article 087(1) EPC

Case Number	T 0419/16
Board	3.3.04
Date of decision	2024.06.24
Language of the proceedings	EN
Internal distribution code	D
Inter partes/ex parte	Inter partes
EPC Articles	Articles 087(1), 088(1) EPC
EPC Rules	
RPBA	
Other legal provisions	
Keywords	priority (yes) – application of G 1/22 – presumption of entitlement rebutted (no) – validity of priority date (yes)
Cited decisions	G 0001/22, G 0002/22, T 0419/16 of 3 February 2022
Case Law Book	II.D.2.2 , II.D.3.1 , 10th edition

In [T 419/16](#) of 24 June 2024 the application on which the European patent was granted (the "application") was filed as a PCT application on 15 February 2005 (the "PCT application"). It named (i) parties A1, A2 and A3 as inventors and applicants for the United States of America (US) and (ii) corporation B1 as applicant for all other designated States. Party A4 was added under R. 92bis.1 PCT as applicant and inventor for the US. The PCT application claimed priority from a US provisional patent application filed on 17 February 2004 in the name of A1, A2 and A3, the inventors (the "priority application").

The board summarised the matters decided by it in its interlocutory decision T 419/16 of 3 February 2022. On novelty, it had noted that the disclosure in document D1, published after the priority date but before the filing date of the patent, would, in the absence of a valid priority, anticipate the subject-matter of claim 1 of auxiliary request 1. The board had decided that the subject-matter of claims 1 and 2 of auxiliary request 1 related to the same invention as disclosed in the previous application in the sense of Art. 87(1) EPC. The appellants had objected to the validity of the claimed priority querying whether a valid transfer of the right to claim priority from the priority application had taken place prior to the filing of the PCT application. Because the board's decision on this issue hinged on an answer to questions referred to the Enlarged Board of Appeal (the Enlarged Board) in consolidated cases

G 1/22 and G 2/22, the board had decided to stay the proceedings until a decision was issued by the Enlarged Board.

The board recalled that in G 1/22 and G 2/22 the Enlarged Board had decided that entitlement to claim priority (and any related assignments of priority rights) should be assessed under the autonomous law of the EPC. Furthermore, the Enlarged Board had decided that there was a rebuttable presumption under the autonomous law of the EPC that the applicant claiming priority in accordance with Art. 88(1) EPC and the corresponding Implementing Regulations was entitled to claim priority.

According to the board, this presumption applied in the factual situation of the case at hand. Moreover, in the situation where the PCT application was jointly filed by parties A and B, (i) designating party A (here A1, A2 and A3) as inventors and applicants for the US only and party B (here B1) for all designated States except the US, and (ii) claiming priority from an earlier patent application (here the priority application) designating party A as the applicant, the joint filing implied an agreement between parties A and B, allowing party B to rely on the priority, unless there were substantial factual indications to the contrary.

Appellant-opponent 5 argued that contrary to the opposition division's finding in the decision under appeal, there had been no valid transfer of the priority right prior to the filing of the PCT application. Appellant-opponent 5 based this objection on the reason that the transfer had not been proven by the respondent in a formal way.

In the board's opinion, in view of the Enlarged Board's decision that the joint filing of the PCT application implies an agreement between parties A and B, allowing party B to rely on the priority, the aforementioned objection could not succeed because there was no requirement under the EPC that a transfer of the priority right be proven in a formal way. Furthermore, there were no substantial factual indications brought forward by the appellants that could lead to the conclusion that the joint filing of the PCT application did not imply an agreement between the applicants of the priority application and corporation B1 as the co-applicant of the subsequent PCT application (for all States other than the US). Thus, the presumption of entitlement to priority was not rebutted, and the priority claimed from the priority application as regards the subject-matter of claims 1 and 2 was valid.

104-09-24

9. Article 087(1) EPC | T 2360/19 | Board 3.3.08

Article 087(1) EPC

Case Number	T 2360/19
Board	3.3.08
Date of decision	2024.03.05
Language of the proceedings	EN
Internal distribution code	D
Inter partes/ex parte	Inter partes
EPC Articles	Articles 087(1), 088(1) EPC
EPC Rules	
RPBA	
Other legal provisions	
Keywords	priority (yes) – application of G 1/22 – presumption of entitlement rebutted (no)
Cited decisions	G 0001/22, G 0002/22, T 0521/18, T 2719/19
Case Law Book	II.D.2.2 , 10th edition

In [T 2360/19](#) the patent was based on a European patent application which was a divisional application of an earlier European patent resulting from an international PCT application. This PCT application claimed priority from 12 US provisional applications (P1 to P12). The opposition division, applying the so-called "all applicants approach", had found that priority was not validly claimed from P1, P2, P5 and P11 because these had been filed by joint applicants (Party A1 or Party A2 being among them) and neither Party A1 nor Party A2 were named as applicants in the PCT application (and consequently in the patent in suit). This had led to a finding that the patent was not novel and to the revocation of the patent. The patent proprietors (appellants) had appealed the decision of the opposition division.

The board pointed out that there had been a dispute in the US (the inventorship dispute) regarding whether Party A1, an employee of Party A2, should also be named as one of the inventors in the PCT application (PCT/US2013/074819), and about the ownership of the patent. The inventorship dispute had been resolved in January 2018: an independent arbitrator had decided, inter alia, that neither Party A1 should be named as an inventor, nor Party A2 as a proprietor in the PCT application.

The board recalled that in G 1/22 and G 2/22 the Enlarged Board had found that "entitlement to priority should in principle be presumed to exist to the benefit of the subsequent applicant of the European patent application if the applicant claims priority in accordance with Art. 88(1) EPC and the corresponding Implementing Regulations...". This presumption was based on the concept of an implicit (implied,

tacit or informal) agreement on the transfer of the priority right from the priority applicant to the subsequent applicant "under almost any circumstances". It, notably, allowed ex-post (retroactive, nunc pro tunc, ex tunc) transfers concluded after the filing of the subsequent application. The Enlarged Board had noted, however, that "the allowability of a retroactive transfer of priority rights may have limited practical relevance if priority entitlement is presumed to exist on the date on which the priority is claimed for the subsequent European application." Moreover, the Enlarged Board had found that a priority right and its transfer was a matter exclusively governed by the autonomous law of the EPC. Consequently, there was no room for the application of national laws on legal presumptions and their rebuttal.

The board further recalled that the presumption that the subsequent applicant was entitled to the priority right was a strong presumption, under "normal circumstances". It applied to any case in which the subsequent applicant was not identical with the priority applicant, and thus also to a plurality of co-applicants for the priority application regardless of the extent to which that group overlaps with the co-applicants for the subsequent application. This was the situation in the present case. Thus, the presumption of a validly claimed priority applied.

G 1/22 and G 2/22 further provided that the presumption can be rebutted to take into account "rare exceptional circumstances" where the subsequent applicant cannot justifiably rely on the priority. The rebuttable presumption thus involved the reversal of the burden of proof, i.e. the party challenging the subsequent applicant's entitlement to priority had to prove that this entitlement was missing. Just raising speculative doubts – even if these were "serious" – was not sufficient.

The board noted that the opponent's arguments were mainly based on documents concerning the resolution of the inventorship dispute, which said nothing about priority entitlement. From this, the opponents argued that these documents did not provide any basis for inferring the existence of an implicit transfer of the priority rights from Party A1/A2 to the appellants and, therefore, that the appellants had not provided evidence that they were entitled to the priority rights they claimed. According to the board, however, the presumption in G 1/22 and G 2/22 stated that the appellants do not have to provide such evidence, but the opponents have to rebut the presumption. There was no evidence that rebutted the presumption in the present case. If at all, there was evidence supporting the presumption of an implied transfer agreement. The entire purpose of the inventorship dispute was to have Party A1 named as inventor, and Party A2 as proprietor, in the PCT application. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, it was not credible that Party A1 or Party A2 would have acted in any way to invalidate the priority claim of the patent.

The board found the priority claims to be valid and remitted the case to the opposition division for further prosecution.

105-09-24

10. Article 116(1) EPC | T 0124/22 | Board 3.5.03

Article 116(1) EPC

Case Number	T 0124/22
Board	3.5.03
Date of decision	2024.07.19
Language of the proceedings	EN
Internal distribution code	D
Inter partes/ex parte	Inter partes
EPC Articles	Article 116(1) EPC
EPC Rules	
RPBA	Articles 12(8), 15(1) RPBA 2020
Other legal provisions	Articles 5(a), 6 of the epi Code of Conduct
Keywords	oral proceedings – non-attendance of party
Cited decisions	T 0930/92
Case Law Book	III.C.5.3 , III.C.4.3.2 , 10th edition

In [T 124/22](#) the parties had been summoned to oral proceedings before the board and a communication had been issued under Art. 15(1) RPBA. By letter of reply, received one day before the scheduled oral proceedings, the respondent had stated that it would not be attending the arranged oral proceedings. No substantive submissions had been made. Subsequently, the oral proceedings had been cancelled.

The board noted that the respondent's representative had provided his videoconferencing details eight days before the scheduled oral proceedings, indicating an intention to participate. However, he had notified the board of his non-participation only one day before the scheduled proceedings. Typically, such notifications were given well in advance (see also T 930/92). According to the board, given that the board's preliminary opinion had been issued ten months ahead of the scheduled hearing, the respondent had had ample time to inform the board of its non-attendance well ahead of the hearing.

In the board's opinion, while it was not uncommon for representatives to receive late instructions, they should seek timely directions from their clients, particularly when arranged oral proceedings approach. In this instance, the representative had failed to communicate promptly with the board's registry. The board pointed out that it (and presumably the opposing party's representative) had already invested some time in preparing for the oral proceedings. It recalled that according to Art. 6 of the epi Code of Conduct, members are required to act courteously in their dealings with the EPO.

The same principle applied to behaviour towards other representatives (Art. 5(a) of the epi Code of Conduct).

The board also took the view that the respondent had effectively withdrawn its request for oral proceedings by declaring its intent not to attend them. In turn, the board did not consider the conduct of oral proceedings to be expedient (Art. 116(1) EPC). As a consequence, the decision was handed down in written proceedings (Art. 12(8) RPBA).

106-09-24

11. Rule 142 EPC | J 0002/22 | Board 3.1.01

Rule 142 EPC

Case Number	J 0002/22
Board	3.1.01
Date of decision	2024.07.19
Language of the proceedings	EN
Internal distribution code	C
Inter partes/ex parte	Ex parte
EPC Articles	Articles 020, 021 EPC
EPC Rules	Rules 011, 142, 143 EPC
RPBA	
Other legal provisions	Article 6(1) European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)
Keywords	interruption of proceedings – concept of legal incapacity – ex-officio assessment of legal incapacity – competence to declare interruption
Cited decisions	G 0001/22, G 0002/22, J 0900/85, J 0902/87, J 0903/87, J 0049/92, J 0005/99, J 0007/99, J 0007/16, J 0010/19, J 0009/21, T 0854/12, T 1680/13, T 0054/17
Case Law Book	III.D.4.1 , III.D.4.3 , III.D.4.4 , 10th edition

In [J 2/22](#) the Legal Board dealt with the legal (in-)capacity of the appellant, since the notification of the Receiving's Section communication of 21 November 2019 was null and void if the appellant – who was not properly represented – was legally incapable.

The Legal Board recalled that legal incapacity of a person meant that such a person is suffering from a disturbance of their mind which makes them unable to form the necessary voluntary intention to carry out legal transactions binding upon them. In the context of the procedural system of the EPC, this also means that they cannot act on their own in proceedings before the EPO. Moreover, the Legal Board held that the standards for assessing legal capacity regarding natural persons should be the same as those regarding professional representatives, as only unified standards according to the autonomous law of the EPC could guarantee equal treatment of the parties, as an essential element of fair trial.

According to the Legal Board, legal (in-)capacity was to be assessed ex officio, at any time during the proceedings, and it required a reliable medical opinion. There was a general presumption in favour of legal capacity of a natural person appearing as party or representative before the EPO. However, this presumption no longer held

if there were indications to the contrary, in particular from this person's conduct in the proceedings. In such a case, a person could not simply be further treated as legally capable, despite indications to the contrary, by putting the burden (only) on them to provide evidence to prove their own legal incapacity.

The Legal Board further stated that in the event of legal incapacity of an applicant or proprietor, proceedings before the EPO were to be interrupted, and were to be resumed with the person authorised to continue. The interruption occurred *ex lege*, when the conditions for it were met. The decision on and the registration of such interruption were only declaratory.

The Legal Board then turned to the issue of competence to declare an interruption. It held that the competence of the boards under Art. 21(1) EPC for appeal proceedings, including decisions on the merits and ancillary procedural matters, was not affected by the competence of the Legal Division for decisions as to entries in the European Patent Register under Art. 20 EPC. The Decision of the President of the EPO concerning the responsibilities of the Legal Division of 21 November 2013, OJ 2013, 600, did not transfer any powers and competences from the Boards of Appeal to the Legal Division on the basis of R. 11 EPC, but only concerned the allocation of functions between the first-instance departments. From the mere fact that the Legal Division was responsible for entries in the European Patent Register regarding the dates of interruption or resumption of proceedings pursuant to R. 142 EPC, it could not be derived that the Legal Division would also be responsible for the decision to interrupt.

Regarding the continued/renewed proceedings, the Legal Board stated that when proceedings were declared null and void (and interrupted) by a board, because of legal incapacity of an appellant, the case was to be remitted to the department of first instance, for the first-instance proceedings to be resumed and continued/renewed with a representative to (be appointed and) act on the appellant's behalf, and with further notifications also to be made to that representative. The concept of the appointment of a representative for legal proceedings was inherent in the system of the EPC, and could, as a matter of principle, be applied to any case such as the present one, where a representative was essential to guarantee the participation of a legally incapable person as party and thus a fair trial. Such an appointment by the administrative or judicial authority in the proceedings is also in accordance with the principles of procedural law generally recognised in the contracting states to the EPC.

107-09-24

12. Article 13(2) RPBA | T 1774/21 | Board 3.2.08

Article 13(2) RPBA 2020

Case Number	T 1774/21
Board	3.2.08
Date of decision	2024.04.18
Language of the proceedings	EN
Internal distribution code	C
Inter partes/ex parte	Inter partes
EPC Articles	Article 114 EPC
EPC Rules	
RPBA	Article 13(2) RPBA 2020
Other legal provisions	
Keywords	amendment after notification of Art. 15(1) RPBA communication (yes) – procedural request – request for non-admittance of objection – exceptional circumstances (no) – no obligation to assess and decide on admittance of objection ex officio
Cited decisions	G 0009/91, T 0755/16, T 0018/21, T 1006/21
Case Law Book	V.A.4.2.2 , V.A.4.5.6 , 10th edition

In [T 1774/21](#) the appellant had raised a new objection under Art. 123(2) EPC against a feature of the main request (patent as maintained by the opposition division) in its statement of grounds of appeal. The respondent, after first having replied to this allegedly new line of attack with counter-arguments, had requested only in its response to the board's communication under Art. 15(1) RPBA that this line of attack not be admitted into the proceedings pursuant to Art. 12(2), (4), (6) RPBA. The board rejected this request for non-admittance of the objection.


The board first explained that, in the context of the RPBA, the term "requests" included requests for non-admittance of, for example, an objection (contrary to what was suggested in T 1006/21). The general term "requests" was not limited to texts of patent applications or patents. When the RPBA sought to specifically address the issue of amendments of such texts, it expressly referred to "an amendment to a patent application or patent" (see Art. 12(4), fourth sentence, or Art. 13(1), fourth sentence, RPBA). This understanding was also confirmed in the explanatory remarks to Art. 12(2) RPBA (see Supplementary publication 2, OJ EPO 2020, 17). The board concluded that a request for non-admittance of an objection filed after the initial phase of the appeal proceedings constituted an amendment to the party's appeal case.

The respondent also argued that the request for non-admittance of the "new line of attack" should be admitted into the proceedings due to exceptional circumstances, as the appellant had failed to identify the "new line of attack" as an amendment in its statement of grounds of appeal and to give reasons why it had not been raised before the opposition division, contrary to what was required by Art. 12(4) RPBA. The appellant had countered that this objection was not "new" as it had been raised during oral proceedings before the opposition division.

The board held that, even assuming in the respondent's favour that this objection was indeed raised for the first time in the appellant's statement of grounds of appeal, the circumstances of the present case were neither exceptional nor could they justify the filing of the respondent's request for non-admittance only after the board's communication. The board pointed out that it was for the party itself to assess whether there is – in its opinion – an amendment to the other party's case and how to respond to it.

The board rejected the respondent's argument that the board was under the obligation, ex officio, to assess and decide on admittance of the "new line of attack". It explained that a board may indeed examine of its own motion the question of whether an objection was filed "late", since it was not restricted to the facts, evidence and arguments provided by the parties and the relief sought (Art. 114(1), second sentence, EPC). Moreover, Art. 114(2) EPC gave the board the power to "disregard facts or evidence" which are not submitted in due time. However, the fact that Art. 114(2) EPC stated that the EPO (therefore a board of appeal), "may" do so, also meant, that a board was not obliged ex officio to examine whether a submission was made "in due time". In the board's view such an obligation could also not be inferred from the principle of ex officio examination laid down in Art. 114(1), first sentence, EPC. In general, the principle of ex officio examination was to be applied in opposition appeal proceedings in a more restrictive manner (cf. G 9/91, point 18 of the Reasons), which was due to the fact that such proceedings could be regarded as essentially party-driven. In addition, this principle did not go so far as to require a board to examine whether an objection was late filed. Such an understanding of Art. 114(1), first sentence, EPC would be difficult to reconcile with the power given under Art. 114(2) EPC that may or may not be used. The board disagreed with point 27 of the Reasons of decision T 1006/21 in this respect.

108-09-24



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