

International Patent Filings

Tiger on the Advance

The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) has submitted its annual report on international patent filings. The USA, Japan and Germany are still in a commanding position but Korea and China are stealthily creeping up from behind.

The number of international patent filings is continuously increasing. The previous year (2006) saw a growth rate of 6.4%, corresponding to an overall worldwide application record of 145,300 filings. With 49,555 filings (respectively 34.1%) in 2006, more than one third of all international patent applications came from the USA, followed by Japan (18.5%), Germany (11.7%), Republic of Korea and France (both 4.1%), the United Kingdom (3.5%) and the Netherlands (3.0%).

Two countries of Asian origin are catching up this year in a noteworthy manner. The Republic of Korea, with a growth rate in applications of 26.6%, overtook the United Kingdom and France to become the 4th ranking country of origin for patent filings. Another emerging nation impressed with an even higher growth rate; China's filings grew by 56.8%, leaving Switzerland and Sweden behind to secure 8th position.

Also remarkable with double-digit rates of growth were Italy (11th highest filer, with a rate of growth of 16.1%) and Israel (rank 15, plus 18.3%).



Asian nations catching up in patent filing.

Skyrocketing filings from Asia

A similar picture can be seen when regarding the top applicants, where the first five positions remained unchanged. The Dutch multinational, Philips, was again the largest applicant with 2,495 applica-

tions published in 2006, followed by Matsushita/Japan (2,344), Siemens/Germany (1,480), Nokia/Finland (1,036) and Bosch/Germany (962). Once again, Asia joined the top 20 list: Huawei/China climbed 24 places up to 13th (575 filings) and LG Electronics/Korea bettered itself 12 places to 16th (567 filings).

Several life science and pharmaceutical companies were among the top 50, such as BASF/Germany (rank 7 with 714 filings in 2006), Dupont/USA (rank 17, 523 filings), Fuji/Japan (rank 25, 445 filings), Medtronic/USA (rank 41, 260 filings), Fraunhofer Gesellschaft/Germany (rank 44, 247 filings), AstraZeneca (rank 47, 240 filings) and Novartis (rank 50, 227 filings). The life sciences and related fields accounted for a total of 31,299 filings (21.5% of all filings) and were within the fastest growing technology fields of pharmaceuticals (21% increase) and biotechnology (15%). W. KOEPPLE

The World

Drugmakers' Troubles

World's largest charitable foundation worries pharmaceutical competitors.

Microsoft founder and philanthropist Bill Gates sets the nerves of pharmaceutical giants like GSK or Merck on edge, according to a *Reuters* story.

The surprising reason is business competition. In the year 2000, Gates and his wife Melinda, founded the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), which is meanwhile the largest charitable foundation in the world, with global health spending amounting to over US\$800 million per annum. BMGF mainly supports the development of vaccines and drugs for HIV research and AIDS, a highly-competitive line of business. After a multibillion donation by Warren Buffet (the world's second richest person, after Gates), the BMGF has gained further "plentiful resources to compete in the medical research arena with both government-funded institutions and commercial pharmaceutical firms", *Reuters* notes.



Melinda and Bill Gates.

As an example, the BMGF announced a US\$287 million grants programme in July 2006, involving 16 competing labs to search for a vaccine against HIV. Worldwide, there are more than 200 AIDS drugs and HIV vaccines in development at academia and various companies. Two of the most powerful players in this field are GlaxoSmithKline and Merck & Co. – both develop vaccines and AIDS drugs (and are already selling the latter). In future, pharmaceutical firms could become involved in severe rivalry with the non-commercial BMGF and its results. This rivalry could be followed by industrial sales collapses because the BMGF has no interest in earning lots of money or cajoling any shareholders. So the

pharmaceutical industry should decide whether they want to compete with such strong institutions as the BMGF – or to cooperate with them.