

Stakeholders corner

Inventor appalled by high costs for patents



Wine merchant, Marc Dulst, Director of "Qivino" from Flanders, Belgium has added another invention to the European repository of patented designs: a unique tool to keep wine as fresh as when it was uncorked first. The road from having his first ideas about the wine preservation device to launching it on the market was long, 6 years. It involved heavy time and financial investments: on research, for which he involved Leuven University, on seeking outside expert advice and on manufacturing. Launching an invention does not come cheap. However, what shocked Marc Dulst most during the whole process was the cost of registering a patent for his invention.

Mr. Dulst recently registered his patent in the United States. He filed one set of forms, paid 16,000 euros and America was covered. For Europe, it was less straightforward. Procedures were long and costly. In the end, Qivino's Director decided to cover only 11 out of 27 countries to contain costs. Showing a high stack of paper documents, Dulst sighs: "These are my patents for Europe. I had to file each of them separately and often had to pay translation fees on top of registry fees." Qivino ended up spending 33,000 euros for a European patent that covers less than half its countries. We didn't take countries like Romania, Slovakia or Turkey because the costs to translate were too high," he explains.

Marc Dulst: "Given that our future in Europe is dependent on innovative projects, we need to do all that's necessary to protect our ideas. Small companies should be encouraged and not be put off by ridiculously high translation costs. What's more, companies that are starting up could do with spending their money on other projects, rather than forking it out to patents offices and only have stacks of paper to show for it in the end. Europe should make up its mind and take one line on this. Innovation should not be nipped in the bud by excessive administrative and financial requirements and should remain attractive to the next generation of inventors in Europe".

On 13 April, the European Commission will table proposals for a unitary patent protection in Europe. Not only would it grant a single protection for the territories of all participating EU countries, but it would also drastically reduce the cost of patenting in Europe - to 20% of the current level.

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