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Patent activities in the EU

Ibrahim Laafia

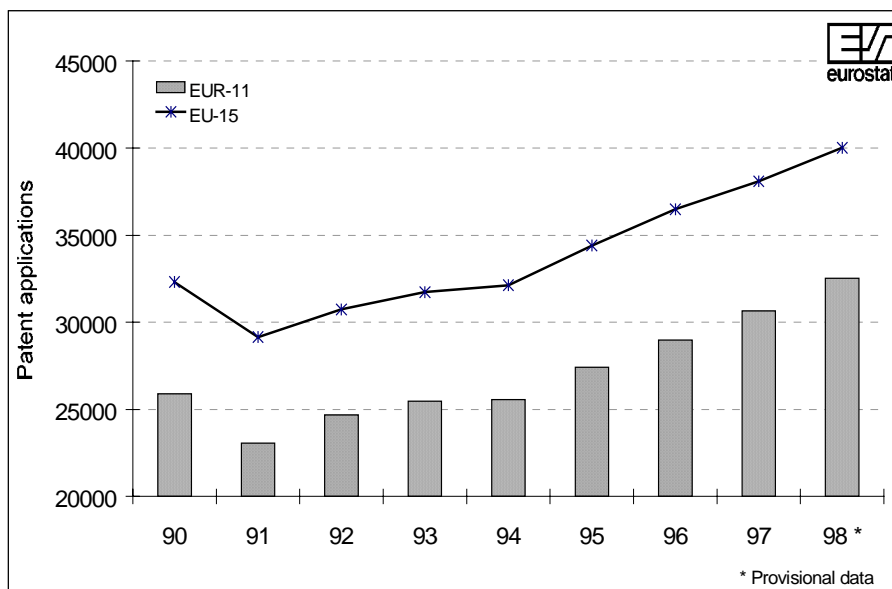


Figure 1: Trends in EU patent applications (EPO), 1990-98

- Provisional data for 1998 shows that 40 023 patent applications were filed by the EU-15.
- Germany, France and the United Kingdom accounted for 70% of the total EU-15 patent applications.
- Sweden is the highest ranked EU country in-terms of patent applications per million labour force with 453 in 1998, which is far above the EU average of 234.
- Performing Operations and Transporting (22%) section accounts for the largest share of EU-15 patent applications
- German regions appear to be most active in patenting (7 German NUTS level 1 regions and 12 German NUTS level 2 regions appear in the top 15 ranking)
- Baden-Württemberg is the most active NUTS level 1 region with 794 patent applications per million labour force.
- Oberbayern Württemberg is the most active NUTS level 2 region with 1012 patent applications per million labour force.

Introductory remark

A patent is a right granted by a government to an inventor in exchange for the publication of the invention; it entitles the inventor to prevent any third party from using the invention in any way, for an agreed period (Frascati Manual, OECD 1993). Patent data have long been used as a measure of innovative activity, technology development, and particularly for international comparisons of technology growth. Among the few indicators of technology output, patents are probably the most often used or referred to. Patents are

the most widely used source of output of inventive activity. There are good reasons for this: (a) patents have a close link to invention, (b) patent data are readily available, and (c) patent documents have a rich information content (such as name of the applicant, inventors, technology fields, etc.). The patent data reported in this publication only include the patent applications of the EU Member States filed directly with the EPO and the patent applications entering EPO via Euro-PCT route.

European Dimension

In 1998, approximately 40,023 patent applications were filed by the EU-15, that is some 24% above the 1990 level.

The number of patent applications filed by the EU-15 with the EPO and Euro-PCT (applications in their international phase) has been increasing at a steady rate with the exception of 1991 (the decrease in the number of patent applications in 1991 can be explained to a large extent by an increase in EPO fees on

January 1, 1991 which led to a rush of applications in the previous year). Since 1990, the EU-15 patent applications have grown at an average annual rate of 2.7% and in 1998, approximately 40,023 patent applications were filed by the EU-15. Figure 1 shows that in spite of a substantial decrease in 1991, the numbers of patent applications in 1998 are some 24% above the 1990 level. The long-term trend of the EUR-11 (Member States of the Euro zone) is similar to that of the EU-15.

National Perspective

In 1998, Germany accounted for 43% of the total EU patent applications

Table 1 represents the shares of the individual Member States patent applications for 1998. There are major disparities in the shares of patent applications between the Member States. Germany clearly stands out from the rest with a large share of 42.7% (17,090 patent applications), which is more than the combined total of France, the United Kingdom and Italy. Germany, France and the United Kingdom are the three dominant patenting EU countries. In 1998 they accounted for around 70.4% of the total EU-15 patent applications.

Average annual growth rates (between 1991-98) of patent applications of the most EU countries are well above the EU-15 growth rate. Portugal (12.1%) is the fastest growing country, followed by Ireland (11.2%) and Spain (9.3%). In contrast, the growth rates of the United Kingdom (1.4%) and France (2.5%) are below the EU-15 average. Low patenting countries such as Portugal, Spain, Finland and Ireland have performed exceptionally well in comparison to the high patenting countries between the 1991-98 period.

High patenting countries		Low patenting countries	
D	42.7	B	2.8
F	15.6	FIN	2.5
UK	12.1	A	2.5
I	7.8	DK	1.6
NL	5.4	E	1.5
S	4.9	IRL	0.4
		EL	0.1
		L	0.1
		P	0

* (provisional data)

Table 1: Shares of patent applications (% , 1998*)

Figure 2 shed some light on the relationships between R&D expenditure and patent applications. Countries with high average annual R&D expenditure growth (such as Ireland, Finland, Sweden) have experienced the largest increase in EPO patent application, in contrast countries with low or negative R&D expenditure

growth (such as France, Italy and the United Kingdom) have recorded the lowest increase in patent applications. The figure for Greece should be treated with care because the growth rate of R&D expenditure is based on only two years data.

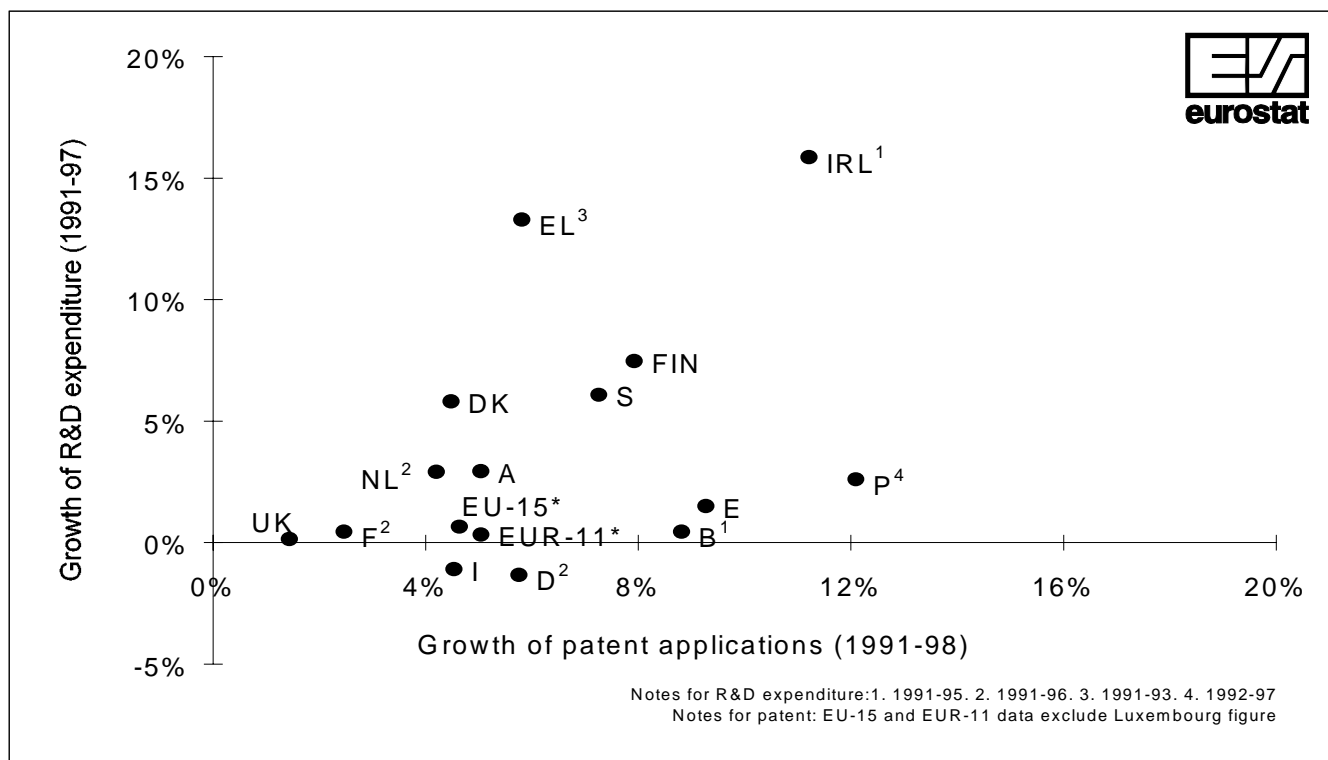


Figure 2: Average annual R&D expenditure and EPO patent applications growth

Patent applications per million labour force				Number of patent applications		
Rank	Country	1998*	1997	Rank	1998*	1997
1	S	4 53	4 58	6	1 977	2 002
2	D	4 36	4 11	1	1 709 0	1 610 1
3	FIN	4 00	3 57	8	998	890
4	NL	2 85	2 94	5	2 167	2 237
5	L	2 76	2 94	14	48	51
6	B	2 62	2 40	7	1 106	1 013
7	A	2 62	2 21	9	997	841
8	F	2 46	2 29	2	6 227	5 807
9	DK	2 23	2 33	10	629	659
10	UK	1 69	1 65	3	4 850	4 736
11	I	1 36	1 31	4	3 104	3 004
12	IRL	94	88	12	144	134
13	E	38	34	11	618	545
14	EL	12	12	13	50	49
15	P	4	5	15	20	24
EU - 15		2 34	2 26	4 002 3		
EUR - 11		2 49	2 39	3 251 7		

Patent applications per million labour force indicator is an Eurostat estimation
* (provisional data)

Table 2: Ranking (number) of EPO patent applications in 1998*

Sweden recorded the highest number of patent applications per million labour force in 1998

Analysing patent applications in terms of absolute numbers may not give an unbiased indication of patenting activities of the EU Member States. For a more comparable portrait of patent activities, data is expressed in terms of per million labour force. Comparing the ranking in terms of labour force rather than absolute numbers depicts a different picture for the high patenting countries, but for the low patenting

countries the ranking remains the same. Sweden (453, MLF) is the most active EU Member States, followed by Germany (436, MLF) and Finland (400, MLF). The ranking of France declined from second to eighth, although its 1998 figure (246 MLF) is above the EU-15 average. In contrast, the UK declines from third position to tenth and its recorded figure (169 MLF) is well below the EU-15 average (see table 2).

Patent applications by IPC-section

21.7 % of the EU patent applications are filed in the Performing Operations & Transporting section

In 1998 the largest numbers of patent applications filed by the EU-15 appear in Performing Operations & Transporting (21.7%), followed by Electricity (17.5%) and Human Necessities (15.3%) section. Patenting activities of the EU-15 in the Chemistry & Metallurgy (14.4%) also appear quite strong; in contrast, Fixed Constructions (4.9%) and Textiles & Paper (2.3%) sectors account for a relatively small proportion of the EU total. Shares of each IPC-sectors have remained more or less stable since 1990. At

individual EU country level, most EU Member States filed the largest proportion of their patent applications either for the Human Necessities section or for the Performing Operations and Transport section. The exceptions being the Netherlands, Finland and Sweden, who's largest, share was accounted for by the Electricity section. The share of patent applications accounted for by the largest IPC section varies from 40% (Luxembourg and Finland) to 18% (Belgium and the United Kingdom).

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	TOTAL
EU - 15	15.3	21.7	14.4	2.3	4.9	10.5	13.3	17.5	100
EUR - 11	14.5	22.6	14.3	2.4	5.1	11.0	12.9	17.2	100
B	15.9	18.0	28.2	2.6	4.5	5.0	13.1	12.7	100
DK	26.8	15.3	17.7	1.8	5.2	8.5	10.6	14.1	100
D	12.0	24.2	13.9	2.2	5.1	13.0	13.2	16.4	100
EL	32.6	21.0	11.8	-	6.0	18.0	5.2	5.6	100
E	22.4	24.2	13.2	2.7	6.5	8.2	9.4	13.4	100
F	17.6	19.1	13.8	1.7	4.6	9.6	14.8	18.9	100
IRL	28.4	18.4	9.6	0.7	5.6	7.0	12.7	17.7	100
I	19.4	28.3	11.5	3.7	5.2	10.9	9.2	11.7	100
L	14.9	40.8	20.1	3.8	4.2	11.5	1.7	3.1	100
NL	16.0	17.1	18.2	0.6	5.4	5.5	15.1	22.1	100
A	16.2	24.9	13.5	3.5	7.7	14.0	8.5	11.8	100
P	21.4	13.3	9.7	5.1	15.3	19.4	13.3	2.6	100
FIN	9.7	13.1	8.8	9.5	3.1	5.5	9.7	40.5	100
S	16.1	20.6	7.1	3.1	3.6	9.1	11.3	29.1	100
UK	18.4	17.2	18.0	1.5	4.6	7.9	17.4	15.1	100

A (Human necessities), B (Performing operations; transporting), C (Chemistry; Metallurgy)

D (Textiles; paper), E (Fixed constructions), F (Mechanical engineering; lighting; heating)

G (Physics), H (Electricity)

* (provisional data)

Table 3: Share of patent applications by IPC sections 1998* (%)

Patent activities at regional level

NUTS level 1				NUTS level 2		
Rank	Region	Patent per MLF	No of patent applications	Region	Patent per MLF	No of patent applications
1	Baden-Württemberg (D)	794	4018	Oberbayern (D)	1012	2082
2	Bayern (D)	677	4071	Stuttgart (D)	942	1812
3	Zuid-Nederland (NL)	583	985	Stockholm (S)	759	678
4	Hessen (D)	563	1611	Rheinessen-Pfalz (D)	749	694
5	Rheinland-Pfalz (D)	495	904	Freiburg (D)	736	754
6	Ile de France (F)	470	2482	Darmstadt (D)	717	1289
7	Nordrhein-Westfalen (D)	443	3529	Tubingen (D)	712	598
8	Manner-Suomi (FIN)	400	992	Noord-Brabant (NL)	707	809
9	Hamburg (D)	370	313	Vorarlberg (A)	693	44
10	Centre-est (F)	361	1135	Mittelfranken (D)	684	570
11	Eastern (UK)	325	874	Karlsruhe (D)	672	855
12	Niedersachsen (D)	324	1138	Oberpfalz (D)	572	298
13	Westosterreich (A)	321	441	Koln (D)	533	1011
14	Vlaams Gewest (B)	293	733	Unterfranken (D)	528	334
15	Reg. Bruxelles-Cap (B)	293	114	Dusseldorf (D)	523	1233

Notes: † Patent applications per million labour force indicator is an Eurostat estimation
* (Provisional data)

Table 4: Top 15 inventive regions (NUTS level 1 and 2) within the EU, 1998*

Highest regional concentration in Germany

According to the number of patent applications per million labour force, Germany records 7 NUTS level 1 regions and 12 NUTS level 2 regions in the top 15 (table 4). Baden-Württemberg (D) is the most active NUTS level 1 region within the EU, followed by Bayern (D) and Zuid-Nederland (NL). In 1998, Baden-Württemberg filed for 794 patent applications per million labour force, whereas Bayern and Zuid-Nederland filed for 677 and 583 patent applications per million labour force. In terms of total number of patent applications, the top five NUTS

level 1 regions accounted for around 40% of the total EU patent applications in 1998, which is almost identical to the 1990 proportion. Of the top ten regions (in terms of absolute patent numbers), Niedersachsen (12.2%) recorded the highest growth rate between 1998-90 period, followed by Manner-Suomi (9.1%) and Bayern (4.6%) (figure 3). Patent applications of the South-East (UK), on the other hand, declined by 1.2% during the same time period.

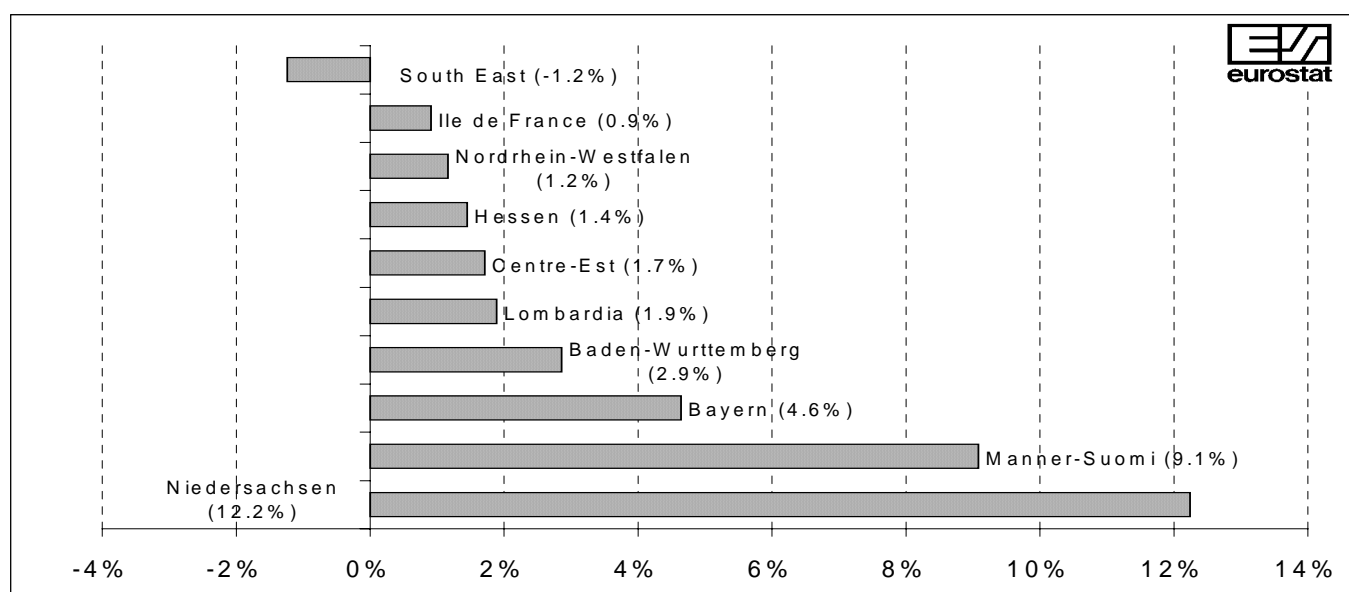


Figure 3: Average annual growth rates of the top ten NUTS level 1 regions; 1990-98

At NUTS level 2, Oberbayern (D) is the most active region, followed by Stuttgart (D) and Stockholm (S). Oberbayern filed for 1012 patent applications per million labour force in 1998, followed by Stuttgart (942) and Stockholm (759). In terms of absolute patent numbers, nine out of the top ten NUTS level 2 regions are from Germany, the only exception being Noord-Brabant (NL). Top ten NUTS level 2 regions (in terms of absolute numbers) accounted for 29% of the total EU patent

applications in 1998, representing 4% point decrease from the 1990 level. Of the top ten NUTS level 2 regions, Stuttgart (5.6%) recorded the highest growth rate of the patent applications between 1990-98, followed by Rheinhessen-Pfalz (2.5%) and Karlsruhe (2.0%). Dusseldorf, Koln, and Freiburg on the other hand experienced a slight decrease in their patent applications over the same period.

	Most inventive Region	Patents per MLF	Least inventive Region	Patents per MLF
B	Reg. Bruxelles-Cap	293	Region Wallonne	191
D	Baden-Württemberg	794	Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	34
EL	Attiki	20	Kentriki Ellada	3
E	Este	66	Canarias	10
F	Ile de France	470	Nord-Pas-De-Calais	86
I	Lombardia	282	Sardegna	13
NL	Zuid-Nederland	583	Noord-Nederland	126
A	Westosterreich	321	Ostosterreich	205
FIN	Manner-Suomi	400	Ahvenanmaa/Aland	28
UK	Eastern	325	Northern Ireland	46

Notes: Pate Patent applications per million labour force indicator is an Eurostat estimation
* (Provisional data)

Table 5: Regional disparities within the Member States (NUTS level 1), 1998

There are significant disparities in the patenting activities between the EU regions, even within a country. At NUTS level 1 (table 5) Baden-Württemberg is the most active region with 794 patent applications per million labour force. Attiki is the most active Greek region with 20 patent applications per million labour force; however in comparison to Baden-Württemberg it is some 40 times less active. The largest disparities

between regions within a country is observed for Germany where the number of patent applications (per MLF) of the most active region is some twenty-three times greater than that of the least active region. Patent applications (per MLF) are more evenly distributed amongst the Belgian and Austrian region, where the most active region differs from the least active region by some factor of 1.5.

➤ ESSENTIAL INFORMATION – METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

Eurostat's regional patent database

Eurostat maintains the regional patent database with close co-operation of the European Patent Office (EPO). Every year EPO supplies Eurostat with the latest available data, which are then processed by Eurostat to derive the regional indicators. The data is regionalised according to the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS)(*). The most detailed regional level data available is at NUTS level 3. Regional patent statistics refer to applications filed directly under the European Patent Convention or to applications filed under the Patent Convention Treaty and designating the EPO (Euro-PCT). All the patent applications are counted according to the date of filing. For the regional statistics, patent application is allocated to the region where the inventor is resident. If one application has more than one inventor, the application is divided equally among the inventors and subsequently among the regions (fractional counting). This allocation procedure is different from the one used for the EPO's report, where the statistics are recorded by the country of residence of the first applicant. The entire application is assigned to the first applicant.

International Patent Classification (IPC)

The International Patent Classification (IPC) is a retrieval system for inventions claimed in patent documents. It indicates the field of technology. An invention is assigned to an IPC-class by its function or intrinsic nature, or by its field of application (combined function-application classification system). One patent can be designated to several IPC-sub-classes. In the Eurostat's database, each patent application is divided equally among all the indicated IPC-sub-classes in order to avoid double counting.

European patent data series

Detailed regional European patent applications data series can be obtained from Eurostat reference database (New Cronos) and the upcoming CD-ROM version of the "Research & Development - Annual statistics 1999" publication. The paper version of the above mentioned publication includes data at NUTS level 1 with brief analysis.

Data published in the latest version of the "Research & Development - Annual statistics 1999" may differ *slightly* from the data published previously because of the following factors:

- (a) a new regionalisation method has been introduced to allocate patent applications to the appropriate region, and
- (b) all the regional patent data has been reprocessed using the latest version of NUTS.

1998 European patent applications data is provisional. The derived patent per million labour force indicator is estimated because of the unavailability of 1998 regional labour force data. 1998 labour force data is estimated with a simple exponential growth trend, which was then applied to the 1998 provisional European patent data to derive the patent per million labour force indicator.

For further information on definitions and explanatory notes refer to "Research & Development - Annual statistics 1999" (forthcoming).

(*) *This nomenclature was established by Eurostat to provide a single uniform breakdown of territorial units for the production of regional statistics for the EU. For further details, refer to "Regions, Nomenclature Territorial Units for Statistics - NUTS", Eurostat 1998.*

Further information:

➤ Reference publications

R&D: annual statistics 1999 (CA-25-99-407-EN-C, EUR 29.50)
 R&D: annual statistics 1999 - CD-ROM (CA-25-99-328-3A-Z, EUR 100)
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➤ Data bases

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