

Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen, colleagues and friends,

This session has the title "Trademark Protection in Europe and the Enlargement 2007". Before we enter into this session, please allow me some general remarks about the broader perspectives of our subject.

Trademarks are one column in the legal building called Intellectual or Industrial Property; in short "IP". Besides trademarks, we have columns like designs, copyrights and patents.

But if we look closer to the legal building called "IP" we see that these columns do not have a uniform structure. The most remarkable difference is that the columns trademarks and design are already truly European columns. By calling them European I mean it not in a geographical sense but in a political, namely in the meaning of the European Union of which two of the most important Balkan countries, Romania and Bulgaria, will be members in 2007 whereas these countries will apply (or are already applying) the European Union's legal framework on IP.

The legal consequence of uniformly structured European IP rights - trademarks and designs - is that by a single application before an authority at the level of the European Union, being the OHIM in Alicante, the applicant gets a single trademark or design with legal validity and enforceability throughout the entire European Union. About details we will hear in the respective presentations later.

In contrast to this European legal framework for trademarks and designs we have, among other things, the column "patents". Many of you will know about the cumbersome discussions within the European Union to create a European Community patent. But these efforts failed so far. This subject would justify a conference on its own.

Coming back to trademarks and designs, I would like to briefly highlight the economic importance of these two rights. We all know famous - this is also a legal term in this context - trademarks like Coca Cola, IBM, McDonalds, Gucci etc.. But we can see it literally daily in the streets how trademark infringements happen. We can read about the serious damages such infringements cause to the rightful owners of trademarks and to national economies in general. A presentation will deal with this problem later. But it seems that the political awareness that this is a problem with which industrial nations should deal with is increasing. The People's Republic of China - with no doubt one source of this problem - is now beginning to

feel the pain created if no clear legal environment and no instruments of enforceability exist. The People's Republic of China is now entering the arena of international trade and making more and more the experience what it means to its producers and its economy if their intellectual property does not get legal protection.

With these opening remarks I would like to open the floor for our panellists and introduce to you our speakers.