

***GUIDELINES FOR EXAMINATION OF
EUROPEAN UNION TRADE MARKS***

***EUROPEAN UNION
INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY OFFICE
(EUIPO)***

Part A

General rules

Section 9

Enlargement

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1 Introduction

This section discusses the rules relating to the accession of new Member States to the European Union and the consequences for holders of European Union trade marks. Both absolute and relative grounds are dealt with in this section.

[Article 209 EUTMR](#) contains the relevant provisions relating to enlargement and European Union trade marks. These provisions were introduced into the Regulation pursuant to the 2004 enlargement process (at that time [Article 142a CTMR](#)) and have remained unchanged during successive enlargement processes. The only modification in the text of the Regulation is the addition of the names of the new Member States.

A table in [Annex 1](#) lists the new Member States with their accession dates and official languages.

2 Rules Concerning Examination

2.1 Automatic extension of EUTMs to new Member States

[Article 209\(1\) EUTMR](#) lays down the basic rule of enlargement, which is that all existing EUTM applications and registered EUTMs are automatically extended to the new Member States without any kind of additional intervention by the European Union Intellectual Property Office, any other body or the holders of the rights concerned. There is no need to pay any extra fees or complete any other administrative formality. The extension of existing EUTM applications or EUTMs to the territories of new Member States ensures that these rights have equal effect throughout the EU and complies with the fundamental principle of the unitary character of the EUTM.

2.2 Pending EUTM applications

[Article 209\(2\) EUTMR](#) enshrines an important transitional provision, according to which EUTM applications **pending on the accession date** may not be refused on the basis of any absolute ground for refusal if this ground becomes applicable merely because of the accession of a new Member State ('grandfathering clause'). In practice, this means that if an EUTM application is non-distinctive, descriptive, generic, deceptive or contrary to public policy or morality in the language or in the territory of a new Member State, it will not be refused if its filing date is **before** this State's accession date.

For applications filed **after the accession date** the grounds for refusal of [Article 7\(1\) EUTMR](#) apply also for the new Member State. This is the case even when the EUTM application has a priority date that is earlier than the relevant accession date. The priority right does not protect the EUTM applicant against any change in the law relevant to its application. Therefore, examiners have to apply the same examination

criteria as for all the other official languages of the EU. This means that the examiner also has to check whether the EUTM application is descriptive, etc. in the new Member State.

However, this principle should be applied with caution as it merely means that the criteria for applying [Article 7\(1\) EUTMR](#) should not be made stricter as a result of the accession of new Member States. The inverse conclusion that terms that are descriptive in a language or in the territory of a new Member State may, in any event, be registered for EUTM applications filed prior to the accession date will not always be correct. For example, descriptive terms from new Member States' languages may have entered the customary languages of existing Member States or be widely known in them (e.g. vodka), and geographical indications may already have to be refused as descriptive terms (e.g. Balaton or Tokaj). Consideration must also be given to geographical indications already protected in the new Member States and to protection arising from EU legislation or bilateral treaties between the new Member States and the EU or existing Member States.

More precisely, the grounds for refusal of [Article 7\(1\)\(f\) and \(g\) EUTMR](#), relating to marks contrary to public policy or morality and deceptive marks respectively, are only affected by this provision insofar as the deceptiveness or breach of public morality is due to a meaning that is **only** understood in a language of a new Member State. The Office interprets [Article 7\(1\)\(f\) EUTMR](#) in accordance with EU-wide criteria, irrespective of the relative levels of morality in different countries of the EU.

Finally, the provision of [Article 209\(2\) EUTMR](#) does not affect the grounds for refusal of [Article 7\(1\)\(e\) or \(i\) EUTMR](#): the former relates to signs consisting exclusively of the shape, or another characteristic, which results from the nature of the goods themselves, the shape, or another characteristic, which is necessary to obtain a technical result or the shape, or another characteristic, which gives substantial value to the goods, and the latter relates to badges and emblems not protected by [Article 6ter of the Paris Convention](#) but of particular public interest.

2.3 Distinctiveness acquired through use

According to Office practice, distinctiveness acquired through use ([Article 7\(3\) EUTMR](#)) must exist on the EUTM filing date and subsist until its registration date. Where an applicant for an EUTM application filed **before** the accession date is able to demonstrate that acquired distinctiveness existed at the filing date, [Article 209\(2\) EUTMR](#) precludes an objection based on the ground that it is not distinctive through use in the new Member States. Therefore, the applicant does not have to prove acquired distinctiveness in the new Member States.

2.4 Bad faith

The Office will consider the filing of an EUTM application as having been made in bad faith if it was made prior to the accession date for a term that is descriptive or otherwise

not eligible for registration in the language of a new Member State for the sole purpose of obtaining exclusive rights to a non-registrable term or for otherwise objectionable purposes.

This has no practical effect during the examination stage, as bad faith does not constitute an absolute ground for refusal and, consequently, the Office has no authority to object *ex officio*. The Office will exercise its duties in respect of 'bad faith filings' only when a request for a declaration of invalidity is filed ([Article 59\(1\)\(b\) EUTMR](#)). The national offices of the new Member States are equally determined to act against bad faith in the context of enlargement. EUTM applicants should, therefore, bear in mind that, even if there are no grounds for refusal during the registration procedure, their EUTM registrations may be contested at a later date on the basis of [Article 59\(1\)\(b\) EUTMR](#).

2.5 Conversion

Conversion of an EUTM application into national trade mark applications for new Member States may be requested as from the accession date of those States. Conversion is also possible when a converted EUTM has a filing date prior to the accession date. However, in the case of a new Member State, the converted application will have the effect of an earlier right under national law. National law in new Member States has enacted provisions equivalent to [Article 209 EUTMR](#) providing that extended EUTMs have the effect of earlier rights in the new Member States only with effect from the accession date. In practice, this means that the 'conversion date' in a new Member State cannot be earlier than that State's accession date.

Taking Croatia's accession as an example, this means that even if a converted EUTM has a filing date of 01/05/2005, in Croatia the conversion date will not be 01/05/2005 but 01/07/2013, that is to say, Croatia's accession date.

The date of enlargement does not trigger a new 3-month time limit for requesting conversion under [Article 139\(4\) EUTMR](#).

2.6 Other practical consequences

2.6.1 Professional representation

As from the accession date of a new Member State, applicants (as well as other parties to proceedings before the Office) with their seat or domicile in that State need no longer be represented by a professional representative. As from the accession date of a new Member State, professional representatives from that State may be entered on the list of professional representatives maintained by the Office pursuant to [Article 120 EUTMR](#) and may then represent third parties before the Office.

2.6.2 First and second language

As of the accession date of a new Member State (see [Annex 1](#)), the official language(s) of that State may be used as the first language for EUTM applications filed on or after that date.

2.6.3 Translation

EUTM applications with a filing date prior to the accession date of a new Member State and existing EUTM registrations will neither be translated into nor republished in the language of that State. EUTM applications filed after the accession date of a new Member State will be translated into and published in all official languages of the EU.

2.6.4 Seniority

Seniority may be claimed from a national trade mark that was registered before the accession of the new Member State in question or even before the creation of the European Union. The seniority claim may, however, only be made after the accession date. The mark registered in the new Member State must be 'earlier' than the EUTM. As an extended EUTM has, in the new Member State, the effect of an earlier right as from the accession date, the seniority claim only makes sense when the earlier national mark has a filing or priority date prior to the accession date.

- **Example 1:** The same person files an EUTM application on 01/04/1996 and a national trade mark application in Romania on 01/01/1999. After 01/01/2007 (Romania's date of accession), the seniority of the Romanian national trade mark application may be claimed.
- **Example 2:** The same person owns an international registration designating the EU on 01/01/2005 and subsequently designating Romania on 01/01/2006. After 01/01/2007, the seniority of that Romanian designation may be claimed even though the designation itself is later than the IR designating the EU. This is because the extended EUTM takes effect from the accession date of the new Member State (in this case 01/01/2007).

2.6.5 Search

The national offices of a new Member State may carry out searches ([Article 43\(2\) and \(3\) EUTMR](#)) as from that State's accession date. Only EUTM applications with a filing date on or after the accession date are sent to national offices for a search.

3 Rules Concerning Oppositions and Cancellations

1. According to [Article 209\(4\)\(b\) EUTMR](#), an EUTM application cannot be opposed or declared invalid on the basis of a national earlier right acquired in a new Member State prior to that State's accession date.

However, EUTM applications filed on or after the accession date are not subject to this 'grandfathering clause' and may be rejected upon opposition, or declared invalid, on account of an earlier national right existing in a new Member State, provided that the earlier right is 'earlier' when the two filing or priority dates are compared.

2. An exception to this (transitional) rule is contained in [Article 209\(3\) EUTMR](#) regarding oppositions. An EUTM application filed within the 6 months preceding the accession date may be challenged by an opposition based on a national right existing in a new Member State at the date of the accession, provided that this right
 - a. has an earlier filing or priority date, and
 - b. was acquired in good faith.
3. The filing date and not the priority date is the decisive element for determining when an EUTM application can be opposed on the basis of an earlier right in a new Member State. In practice, the abovementioned provisions have the consequences illustrated in the following examples with reference to the accession of Croatia (01/07/2013).
 - a. An EUTM application filed before 01/01/2013 (the priority date is irrelevant in this context) cannot be opposed or declared invalid on the basis of a national earlier right in a new Member State under any circumstances.
 - b. An EUTM application with a filing date between 01/01/2013 and 30/06/2013 (i.e. **during the 6 months prior to the date of accession**), may be opposed by a Croatian trade mark, provided that the filing or priority date of the Croatian trade mark is earlier than the filing or priority date of the opposed EUTM application and the national mark was applied for in good faith.
 - c. An EUTM application with a filing date of 01/07/2013 or later may be opposed or declared invalid on the basis of a trade mark registered in Croatia if that mark has an earlier filing or priority date under the normal rules. Acquisition in good faith is not a condition. This applies to all national marks and earlier non-registered rights filed or acquired in a new Member State prior to accession.
 - d. An EUTM application with a filing date of 01/07/2013 or later but with a priority date before 01/07/2013 may be opposed or declared invalid on the basis of a national trade mark registered in Croatia if that mark has an earlier filing or priority date under the normal rules.

This transitional exception is limited to the right to file an opposition and does not include the right to file an application for cancellation based on relative grounds. This means that once the abovementioned period of 6 months has expired without an opposition having been lodged, the EUTM application cannot be challenged any more by an opposition or by an application for a declaration of invalidity.

4. According to [Article 209\(5\) EUTMR](#) , the use of an EUTM with a filing date prior to the date of accession of a new Member State, may be prohibited pursuant to Articles [137](#) and [138](#) EUTMR on the basis of an earlier national trade mark registered in the new Member State where the latter has a filing or priority date prior to the date of accession and was registered in good faith.

The above provision also applies to:

- applications for national marks filed in new Member States, provided that they have subsequently been registered;
 - unregistered rights acquired in new Member States falling under [Article 8\(4\)](#) or [Article 60\(2\) EUTMR](#) with the proviso that the date of acquisition of the right under national law replaces the filing or priority date.
5. Where an opposition is based on a national registered mark or other right in a new Member State, whether or not that right may validly be invoked as a ground for opposition against an EUTM application depends on whether the opposition is well founded and is not an issue of admissibility.
6. The acquisition in good faith of the earlier national mark is presumed. This means that, if good faith is questioned, the other party to the proceedings (the applicant for the opposed EUTM application in the case of [Article 209\(4\) EUTMR](#) or the owner of the registered EUTM in the case of [Article 209\(5\) EUTMR](#)) must prove that the owner of the earlier national right obtained in a new Member State acted in bad faith when filing the national application or otherwise acquiring the right.
7. [Article 209 EUTMR](#) does not contain any transitional provisions concerning the use requirement (Articles [18](#) and [47](#) EUTMR). In opposition proceedings, the obligation to prove genuine use of the mark arises when the applicant for the opposed EUTM application requests that the opponent prove use of the earlier mark pursuant to [Article 47\(2\) and \(3\) EUTMR](#) and [Article 10 EUTMDR](#) . Issues relating to enlargement could arise regarding the time and place of use of the earlier mark. Two cases can be distinguished.

a. The earlier mark is a national mark registered in a new Member State

In this case, the opponent must prove genuine use of the earlier mark. This situation can only arise in the context of an opposition directed either against an EUTM application with a filing date after the date of accession or against an EUTM application filed within the period of 6 months preceding the date of accession.

The earlier national mark must have been put to genuine use in the territory in which it is protected during the 5 years preceding the filing or priority date ² of the contested EUTM application. In this regard, it is immaterial whether the use relates to a period during which the State concerned was already a Member State of the European Union. In other words, the proof of use may also relate to a period prior to the date of accession (in the case of Croatia before 01/07/2013).

b. The earlier mark is an EUTM

Where the owner of the earlier EUTM can prove use only in the territory of a new Member State or several new Member States, since the obligation of use relates to the period of 5 years preceding the filing or priority date ³ of the contested EUTM application, use in a new Member State (or several new Member States) can only be taken into account if the State concerned was a Member State of the European Union at the date of filing or the priority date of the contested EUTM application ([Article 47\(2\) EUTMR](#) requires use *'in the Union'*). Before their

² For oppositions and invalidity applications filed before 23/03/2016, the relevant date is the publication date.

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accession dates, the new States do not constitute 'Member States of the Union'; therefore, it is not possible to prove use *'in the Union'*.

Therefore, the 5-year period should be counted only from the relevant date of accession.

8. There are no particular transitional problems relating to the opposition proceedings. The right pursuant to [Article 146\(8\) EUTMR](#) to choose a language that is not one of the five languages of the Office as the language of the proceedings applies as from the date of accession in respect of the other official languages of the European Union.

Annex 1

Member States	Accession date	Languages
Czech Republic, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia.	01/05/2004	Czech, Estonian, Greek, Latvian, Lithuanian, Hungarian, Maltese, Polish, Slovak and Slovenian
Bulgaria and Romania	01/01/2007	Bulgarian and Romanian
Croatia	01/07/2013	Croatian