FOREWORD by the Vice-President

Board of appeal case law plays a major part in the interpretation and evolution of European patent law.

In 1996, the boards of appeal again settled nearly 1,000 cases. Part I of the 1996 case law report gives a description, with statistical data, of the boards' activities. This is followed in Part II by a summary of last year's jurisprudence of the boards. The headnotes to decisions intended for publication are appended as annexes.

I hope that this publication - together with the previous years' annual reports and the compendium report which now covers the years 1978 to 1995 - will make it easier for readers to acquaint themselves with the latest developments in board of appeal case law.

Peter Messerli
Vice-President DG 3
Chairman of the Enlarged Board of Appeal