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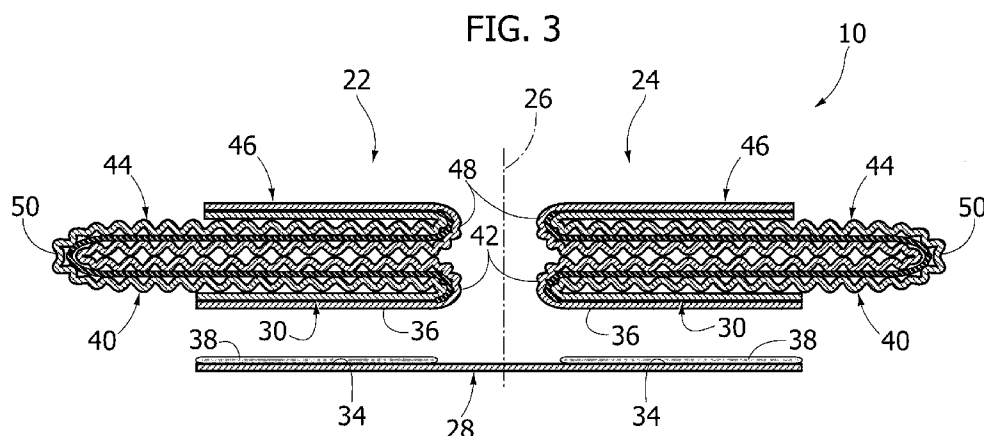
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(54) Title: A METHOD FOR PRODUCING A CLOSURE ELEMENT FOR ABSORBENT SANITARY PRODUCTS, ABSORBENT SANITARY PRODUCT, AND RESPECTIVE MANUFACTURING METHOD



(57) Abstract: A method for producing a closure element (10) for disposable pant-like absorbent sanitary products (52) formed by two parts basically symmetrical with respect to a central transverse plane (26), wherein each of said parts is able to form a side panel (76) of an absorbent sanitary product (52). The method comprises the steps of: - folding two continuous strips (22, 24) according to a configuration that comprises at least two parallel branches (30, 40, 44, 46) joined to one another by at least one fold (42, 50, 48); and - fixing permanently respective end branches (30) of said folded strips (30, 40, 44, 46) to a plane base layer (28), with said folded strips (30, 40, 44, 46) basically symmetrical respect to a central plane (26) of said base layer.

"A method for producing a closure element for absorbent sanitary products, absorbent sanitary product, and respective manufacturing method"

5 Field of the invention

The present invention relates to absorbent sanitary products and has been developed with particular attention paid to its possible application to absorbent sanitary products that can be worn as
10 pants. A typical example of absorbent sanitary products of this type is represented by the so-called training pants.

Description of the prior art

US-A-2002/0111596 (Fletcher *et al.*), discloses a
15 pant-like absorbent garment having removable side panels that are releasable and refastenable, in such a way that the absorbent garment can be opened and closed on its front side or on its dorsal side, both on the right and on the left. The removable side panels can be
20 re-used with a disposable absorbent section of the garment and are made of partially or completely elasticized material. Each side panel is formed by a strip folded so as to present four parallel branches, with two central branches joined to one another by a
25 fold and with each of the two central branches connected by a respective fold to a respective outer branch. The two outer branches are fixed to respective micro-hook closure devices.

In this known solution, each side panel is an
30 autonomous component. Consequently, the automatic machines for producing garments of this type must apply two distinct side panels for each garment. On the production line, the side panels must be alternatively applied in directions opposite to one another, which

complicates considerably the device that carries out application of the side panels.

EP-A-1523968 in the name of the present applicant discloses a closure element formed by two symmetrical parts, which, after application to a continuous chain of semifinished products, is cut together with the chain of semifinished products in a region corresponding to the plane of symmetry so as to form two side closures of two adjacent products. This solution enables application of just one closure element for each product, and all the closure elements are applied with the same orientation. The closure element has a general omega-shaped configuration, with two substantially C-shaped side parts joined by respective folds to a rectilinear central stretch. The main drawback of this solution is represented by the fact that it is problematical to make with automatic machines at high speed the folds that join the two side parts to the central stretch.

The European patent application No. 07425518 (not yet published at the date of filing of the present application) discloses a closure element with elastic side panels formed by two symmetrical side parts, obtained by folding a continuous strip. Each of the two symmetrical parts comprises four parallel branches, with the adjacent branches joined to one another by respective folds. The end branches of the two side parts are joined to a base branch by means of respective folds. Also with this solution, it is problematical to make with high-speed automatic machines the folds that join the two side parts to the base stretch.

Object and summary of the invention

The object of the solution described herein is to overcome the drawbacks of the prior art.

According to the solution described herein, said object is achieved by a method for producing a closure element having the characteristics forming the subject of Claim 1 and by a method for producing sanitary products having the characteristics forming the subject of Claim 12. The solution described herein moreover regards a sanitary product having the characteristics forming the subject of Claim 11.

The claims form an integral part of the technical teaching provided herein.

As will emerge clearly in the course of the ensuing detailed description, the solution described herein enables a simplification in the production of closure elements for pant-like sanitary products in so far as it eliminates the need to make the most problematical folds.

Brief description of the annexed drawings

The present solution will now be described in detail with reference to the attached drawings, which are provided purely by way of non-limiting example and in which:

- Figure 1 is a cross section of a closure element with elastic side panels according to the solution described herein;
- Figure 2 is a cross section illustrating the components used for producing the closure element of Figure 1;
- Figure 3 is a schematic cross section illustrating a step of the method for producing closure elements according to the solution described herein;
- Figure 4 is a schematic perspective view illustrating a method for producing absorbent sanitary products, using closure elements according to the solution described herein;

- Figure 5 is a cross section at a larger scale according to the line V-V of Figure 4;

- Figure 6 is a schematic perspective view illustrating a finished sanitary product indicated by the arrow VI in Figure 3 in conditions of use;

- Figure 7 is a cross section at a larger scale according to the line VII-VII of Figure 5;

- Figures 8, 9 and 10 are enlarged details of the part indicated by the arrow VIII in Figure 1, illustrating different variants;

- Figure 11 is a cross section corresponding to that of Figure 5 and illustrating a variant of the solution described herein;

- Figure 12 is a cross section illustrating a simplified embodiment of a closure element according to the solution described herein;

- Figure 13 is a cross section corresponding to Figure 5, illustrating the closure element of Figure 12 after application to a chain of semifinished products;

- Figure 14 is a perspective view of an absorbent sanitary product using closure elements according to Figure 12;

- Figure 15 is a cross section at a larger scale according to the line XV-XV of Figure 14; and

- Figure 16 is a cross section illustrating a variant of the closure element of Figure 11.

Detailed description of examples of embodiment

With reference to Figure 1, designated by 10 is a closure element with elastic side panels for pant-like absorbent sanitary products.

With reference to Figures 2 and 3, the closure elements 10 are obtained starting from three continuous longitudinal strips 22, 24 and 28 separated from one another.

The strips 22, 24 are substantially identical to one another and each of them comprises a central stretch 22a, 24a made of elasticized material, and two side stretches 22b, 24b made of non-elasticized material. The strips 22, 24 and 28 extend in a continuous way in a longitudinal direction orthogonal to the direction of representation of Figure 2.

Preferably, each of the strips 22, 24 comprises two layers of non-woven fabric 12 coupled to one another and between which, applied in the elasticized stretches 22a, 24a are non-pretensioned elastic films 14, of a commercially available type, which become elastic after mechanical activation of the layers of non-woven fabric 12. Alternatively, the elasticized stretches 22a, 24a can be obtained by means of pre-tensioned elastic threads (for example, made of the material marketed under the trademark Lycra® by Dupont) or else elastic films. The aforesaid elastications are made according to technologies in themselves known. In the absence of a force in the longitudinal direction, in the stretches of elasticized material 22a, 24a the layers of non-woven fabric 12 can assume an undulated shape as represented in Figure 2. Under the action of a transverse force, the stretches of elasticized material 22a, 24a lengthen, and the layers of non-woven fabric 12 distend.

The third strip 28 is constituted by a continuous plane web made of non-elasticized material, preferably formed by a single layer of non-woven fabric.

Each of the strips 22, 24 undergoes three folds at 180° about axes parallel to the longitudinal extension of the strips. Following upon said folds, each of the strips 22, 24 assumes the conformation illustrated in Figure 3. One fold is made substantially at the centre of the elasticized stretch 22a, 24a and another two

folds are made in a region corresponding to the area of transition between the central elasticized stretch 22a, 24a and the non-elasticized side stretches 22b, 24b.

At the end of the folding operation, each strip
5 22, 24 comprises four parallel branches. More precisely, each folded strip comprises a first branch 30 made of non-elasticized material, a second branch 40 made of elasticized material connected to a respective end of the first branch 30 by means of a first fold 42,
10 a third branch 44 made of elasticized material connected to a respective end of the second branch 40 by means of a second fold 50, and a fourth branch 46 made of non-elasticized material connected to a respective end of the third branch 44 by means of a
15 third fold 48.

After the strips 22, 24 are folded, they are fixed in a permanent way to the third strip 28, which remains plane. With reference to Figure 3, the two folded strips 22, 24 are set symmetrical to one another with
20 respect to a central longitudinal plane 26 of the third strip 28. The third strip 28 and the first branches 30 have respective mutually facing surfaces 34, 36, which are fixed to one another permanently, for example by means of respective layers of glue 38 or by means of
25 sealing.

After the folded strips 22, 24 have been fixed to the third strip 28, a continuous longitudinal web is obtained having in cross section the shape illustrated in Figure 1. The continuous web is cut in a transverse
30 direction into stretches of constant length to form successive closure elements 10.

In each closure element 10, the third strip 28 forms a base layer that joins the two folded strips 22, 24 to one another. The first and third folds 42, 48 are
35 set at a distance with respect to the central

longitudinal plane 26 so as to leave an empty space around the central plane 26 in a region corresponding to a central area of the base layer 28. The second branches 40 and the third branches 44 extend in a lateral direction towards the outside beyond the external side ends of the first branches 30 and fourth branches 46. Preferably, the first branches 30 and the fourth branches 46 have substantially the same length.

Figure 4 schematically shows a method for producing pant-like absorbent sanitary products. One of said products is designated by 52 in Figure 4. The products 52 are obtained starting from a continuous chain of semifinished products 54 that advances in the longitudinal direction indicated by the arrow 56. The chain of semifinished products 54 is formed according to criteria in themselves known. Typically, the chain of semifinished products 54 has a sandwich structure comprising a topsheet 58 and a backsheet 60, set between which is an absorbent layer. The chain of semifinished products 54 is provided with openings 62, set at a distance from one another in a longitudinal direction, which form the holes for the legs of the products 52. Figure 4 illustrates a sequence of production of products 52 of the type referred to as cross-direction. In machines of this type, the continuous longitudinal chain of semifinished products 54 is subjected to a fold indicated by the arrow 64, following upon which two opposite longitudinal edges 66, 68 of the chain of semifinished products 54 are superimposed on one another.

Before making the fold of the continuous chain of semifinished products 54 in the direction indicated by the arrow 64, the closure elements 10 are applied to the chain 54 in positions set at a distance from one another in the longitudinal direction. The closure

elements 10 are applied in such a way that the central plane 26 of each element 10 is substantially aligned to a transverse demarcation line 70 between each pair of adjacent semifinished products 54. The elements of Figure 10 are applied on the topsheet 58 in a region corresponding to one of the two longitudinal edges 66, 68 (to the longitudinal edge 66 in the representation of Figure 3). Just one closure element 10 is applied in an area corresponding to each demarcation line 70, and all the closure elements 10 are applied with the same orientation. The closure elements 10 are applied to the chain of semifinished products 54 by gluing, sealing, or micro-hook closure devices. In the example illustrated in Figure 3, the base layer 28 of each closure element 10 is glued to the topsheet 58 in an area corresponding to the longitudinal edge 66. Following upon folding in the direction indicated by the arrow 64, the topsheet 58 adjacent to the opposite edge 68 is glued to the fourth branches 46 of each closure element 10.

The closure elements 10 could also be applied in an opposite direction with respect to the ones of Figure 3, i.e., with the fourth branches 46 glued to the topsheet 58 in an area corresponding to the edge 66 and with the opposite edge 68 that is glued to the base layer 28 of each element 10 following upon folding of the chain of semifinished products 54 in the direction indicated by the arrow 64.

After folding of the chain of semifinished products 54 according to the arrow 64, the area of connection between each pair of adjacent semifinished products 54 assumes the form illustrated in Figure 5. The demarcation line 70 between two adjacent semifinished products 54 is positioned substantially in an area corresponding to the central plane 26 of each

closure element 10. The two folded strips 22, 24 of each closure element 10 are set on opposite sides with respect to the demarcation line 70. The base layer 28 of the closure element 10 is fixed to the topsheet 58 of the front or dorsal side of the semifinished product 54 by means of a layer of glue 72, and the fourth branches 46 of the closure element 10 are fixed by means of layers of glue 74 to the topsheet 58 of the opposite side (dorsal or front) of the semifinished products 54.

In this condition, a transverse cut is made in the demarcation line 70 between each pair of adjacent semifinished products 54. With this operation the topsheet 58 and the backsheet 60 of the dorsal side, the base layer 28 of the closure element 10, and the topsheet 58 and the backsheet 60 of the front side are cut. Following upon cutting, the finished products 52 are obtained, one of which is illustrated on the right-hand side of Figure 4.

Figure 6 illustrates an absorbent sanitary product obtained with the method described previously in the condition of use. The product 52 is provided with two side panels 76 made of elasticized material, formed by the elasticized stretch of strip 22, 24 of a closure element 10. As may be noted in particular in Figure 7, in the stretches corresponding to the layers of glue 38, 74 the material is not elasticized. This enables reduction in the thickness of the areas of connection and improvement of the adhesive connection. The area of elasticized material extends only in a region corresponding to the areas without glue, and this enables complete exploitation of the elasticized part.

In the embodiment so far described, a pant-like product 52 with elasticized sides is obtained.

According to a first variant illustrated in Figure 8, each closure element 10 can be provided with lines of preferential tearing 78 positioned in a region corresponding to the second folds 50. In this way, each side panel 56 is provided in a central position with a line of tear for removal of the product 52. Alternatively, the two branches 40, 44 could be connected to one another by means of mechanical sealing, heat sealing, ultrasound sealing, etc.

According to a further advantageous characteristic of the solution described herein, the product 52 can be of a type releasable and refastenable. As is illustrated in Figure 9, to afford the possibility of releasing and refastening the product 52, a micro-hook closure device 80 can be provided in the area of connection between the second branches 40 and the third branches 44 of each closure element 10. The micro-hook closure device 80 extends at the centre of each side panel 76 and enables releasing, inspection, and possibly refastening of the product 52 whilst this is worn.

As an alternative to the use of a micro-hook closure device 80, illustrated in Figure 10, is the use of a layer of glue 82 of a "pressure sensitive" type, which connects together in such a releasable and refastenable way the ends of the second branches 40 and third branches 44 of each closure element 10. The layer of glue 82 enables releasing and refastening of each side panel 76 in a way similar to a micro-hook closure.

As further alternative for providing a releasable and refastenable product, the solution illustrated in Figure 11 can be adopted. In this case, the fourth branches 46 of each closure element 10 are connected to the corresponding topsheet 58 by means of micro-hook closure devices 84. Each micro-hook closure device 84

is fixed to the branch 46 and to the topsheet 58 by means of respective layers of glue 74, 85. The closure device 84 can be provided on the front side or on the dorsal side of the product. The micro-hook closure device 84 enables also an adjustment of the diameter of the waist of the product 52. Alternatively, the micro-hook closure device 84 can be applied to the base layer 28. As further alternative, the base layer 28 and/or the fourth branches 46 can be fixed to the respective topsheet 58 by means of layers of glue of a type that can be opened and reclosed (pressure-sensitive glue).

Figures 12 to 16 show a simplified embodiment of the closure element 10. The items corresponding to the ones described previously are designated by the same reference numbers.

Figure 12 shows a closure element 10 formed by two strips 22, 24 made of non-elasticized material, fixed to a base layer 28 also made of non-elasticized material. Each of the two strips is folded substantially to form a C and has only a first branch 30 and a second branch 40, joined to one another by a fold 42. After folding of the strips 22, 24, the first branch 30 of each strip 22, 24 is fixed in a permanent way to the third strip 28 by means of a layer of glue 38 or by sealing, in a way similar to what has been described previously.

Figure 13 shows the fixing element 10 of Figure 12 after its application to a continuous chain of semifinished products, according to the modalities described previously with reference to Figure 4.

In a way altogether corresponding to what has been described with reference to the previous embodiment, after cutting in the demarcation lines 70 between the adjacent semifinished products, the finished products 52 are obtained, one of which is

shown in Figure 3 in the position of use. The finished product 52, unlike the version described previously, is not provided with elasticized sides but only with two non-elasticized side panels 76, which join the opposite edges of the product together along the waist line.

With reference to Figure 16, the closure element 10 of this second embodiment could be provided with a micro-hook closure device 84 applied on the outer side of the branches 40. In this way, the product 52 becomes of a type releasable and refastenable.

The closure element 10 of this second embodiment could be provided with a line of preferential tearing or else with a closure that can be opened and reclosed in a region corresponding to the fold 42 between the two branches 30, 40, in a way similar to what is illustrated in Figures 8 to 10 of the embodiment described previously.

CLAIMS

1. A method for producing a closure element (10) for disposable pant-like absorbent sanitary products (52), said element (10) being formed by two parts basically symmetrical with respect to a central transverse plane (26), each of said parts being able to form a side panel (76) of an absorbent sanitary product (52), each of said symmetrical parts (22, 24) comprising at least two parallel branches (30, 40, 44, 46) joined by at least one fold (42, 50, 48), the method being characterized in that it comprises the steps of:

- folding two continuous strips (22, 24) according to a configuration that comprises at least two parallel branches (30, 40, 44, 46) joined to one another by at least one fold (42, 50, 48); and
- fixing in a permanent way respective end branches (30) of said folded strips (30, 40, 44, 46) to a plane base layer (28), with said folded strips (30, 40, 44, 46) basically symmetrical with respect to a central plane (26) of said base layer.

2. The method according to Claim 1, characterized in that each of said continuous strips (22, 24) comprises a central elasticized stretch (22a, 24a) and two side stretches (22b, 24b) made of non-elasticized material, and in that said base layer (28) is made of non-elasticized material.

3. The method according to Claim 1, characterized in that said continuous strips (22, 24) and said base layer (28) are made of non-elasticized material.

4. The method according to Claim 1 or Claim 2, characterized in that said continuous strips (22, 24) are folded so as to form four parallel branches (30, 40, 44, 46), with the adjacent branches joined to one

another by folds (42, 50, 48), wherein two central adjacent branches (40, 44) are made of elasticized material and two end branches (30, 46) are made of non-elasticized material.

5 5. The method according to Claim 1 or Claim 3, characterized in that said continuous strips (22, 24) are folded according to a C-shaped configuration.

10 6. The method according to Claim 4, characterized in that a line of preferential tearing (78) is provided in a region corresponding to the fold (50) between said central branches (40, 44).

15 7. The method according to Claim 5, characterized in that a line of preferential tearing is provided in a region corresponding to the fold (42) between said branches (30, 40) folded to form a C.

 8. The method according to Claim 4, characterized in that the two central branches (40, 44) are connected to one another by means of a releasable and refastenable closure device (80, 82).

20 9. The method according to Claim 5, characterized in that said branches (30, 40) folded to form a C are connected to one another by means of a releasable and refastenable closure device (80, 82).

25 10. The method according to Claim 4 or Claim 5, characterized in that micro-hook closure devices (84) are fixed to the branches (46, 40) of said strips (22, 24) opposite to said base layer (28).

30 11. A disposable pant-like absorbent sanitary product, comprising an absorbent structure and two side panels (76), characterized in that each of said side panels (76) is formed by one half (22, 24) of a closure element (10) obtained by means of a method according to one or more of Claims 1 to 10.

35 12. A method for producing disposable pant-like absorbent sanitary products, comprising the steps of:

- forming a continuous longitudinal chain of semifinished products (54) having a first longitudinal edge (66) and a second longitudinal edge (68) opposite to one another;

5 - forming closure elements (10) each including a base layer (28) and two parts (22, 24) symmetrical with respect to a central plane (26) of said base layer (28);

10 - fixing said closure elements (10) to said chain of semifinished products (54) in positions set at a distance from one another in a longitudinal direction at a first longitudinal edge (66) of the chain of semifinished products (54), with the central plane (26) of each closure element (10) set in an area
15 corresponding to a demarcation line (70) between each pair of adjacent semifinished products (54);

20 - folding said chain of semifinished products (54) so as to superimpose said opposite longitudinal edges (66, 68) on one another and fix the second longitudinal edge (68) to said closure elements (10); and

25 - cutting said chain of semifinished products (54) and said closure elements (10) along said demarcation line (70) in such a way that following upon cutting of the two symmetrical parts (22, 24) of each closure element (10) respective side panels (76) of two successive products (52) will be formed,

 said method being characterized in that the step of formation of said closure elements (10) comprises the steps of:

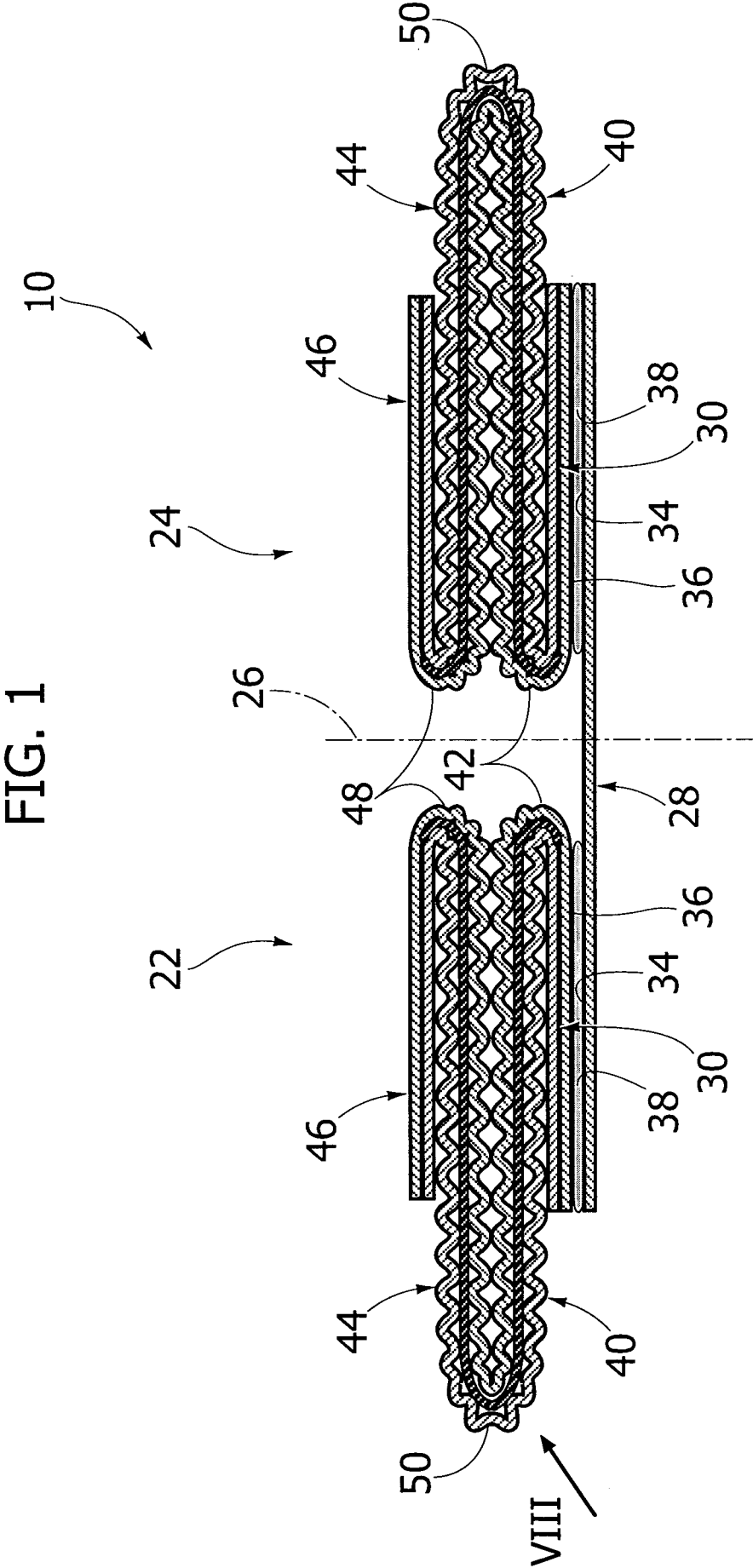
30 - folding two continuous strips (22, 24) according to a configuration that comprises at least two parallel branches (30, 40, 44, 46) joined to one another by at least one fold (42, 50, 48); and

35 - fixing permanently respective end branches (30) of said folded strips (30, 40, 44, 46) to a plane base

layer (28), with said folded strips (30, 40, 44, 46) basically symmetrical with respect to a central plane (26) of said base layer.

13. The method according to Claim 12, characterized in that each closure element (10) is fixed to the first longitudinal edge (66) of the continuous chain of semifinished products (54) by means of a system chosen between: sealing, layer of glue (72), and micro-hook closure device.

10 14. The method according to Claim 12, characterized in that the second longitudinal edge (68) of the continuous chain of semifinished products (54) is fixed to each closure element (10) by means of a system chosen between: sealing, layer of glue (74), and
15 micro-hook closure device (84).



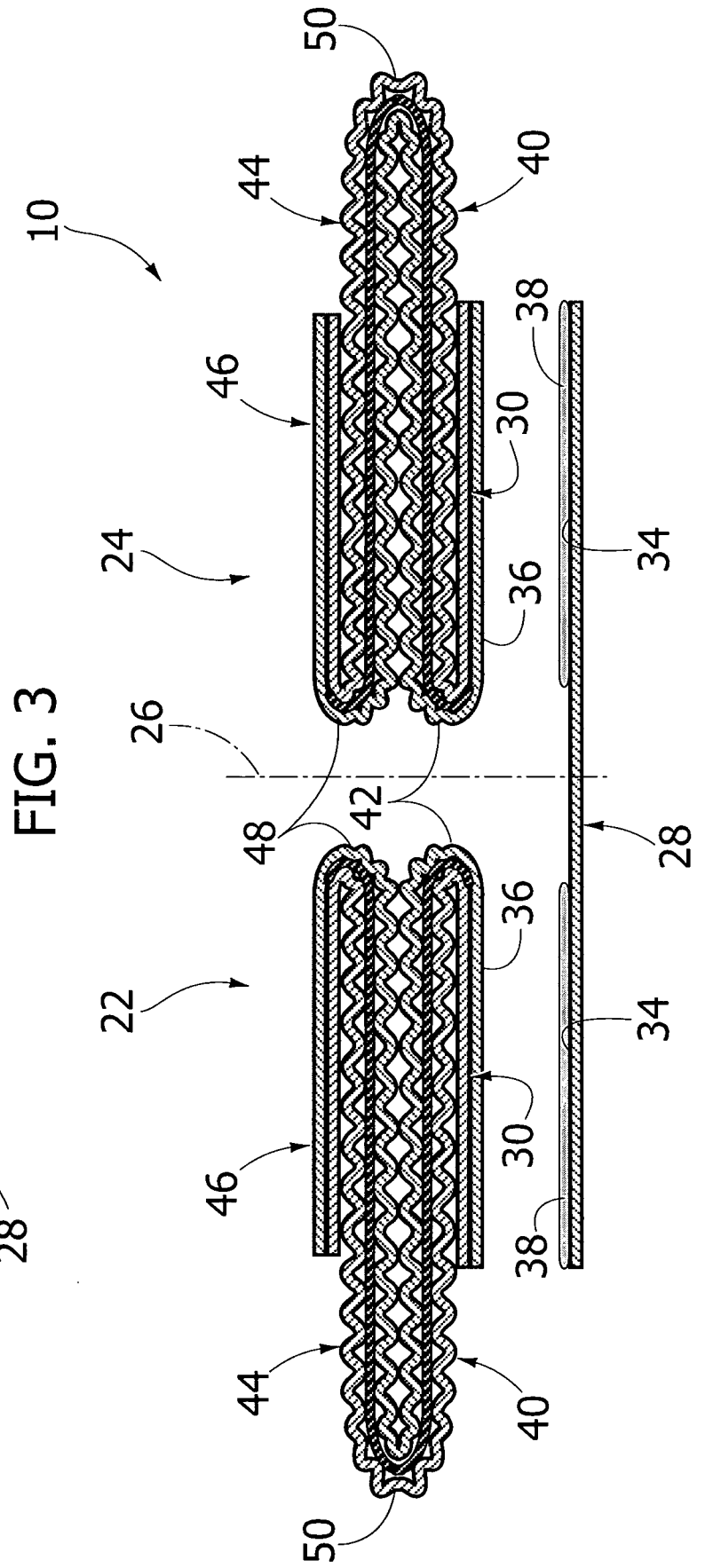
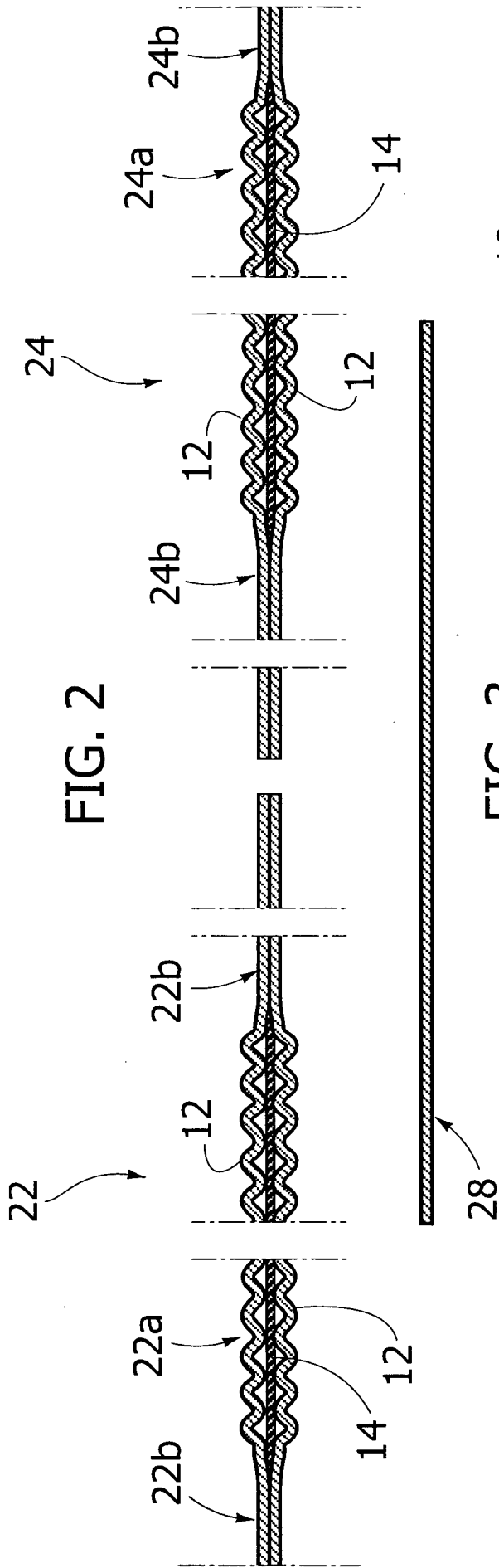


FIG. 4

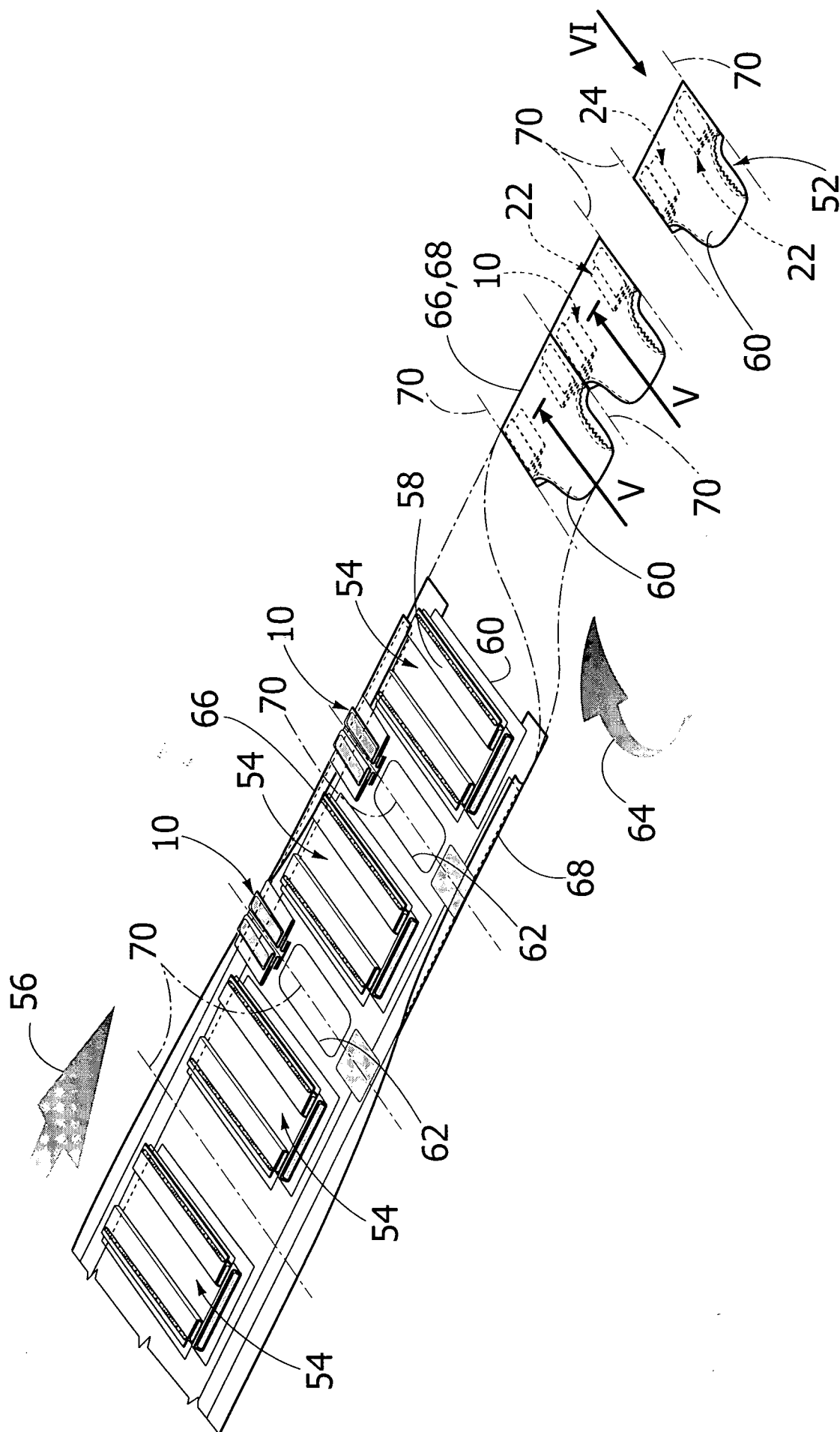


FIG. 5

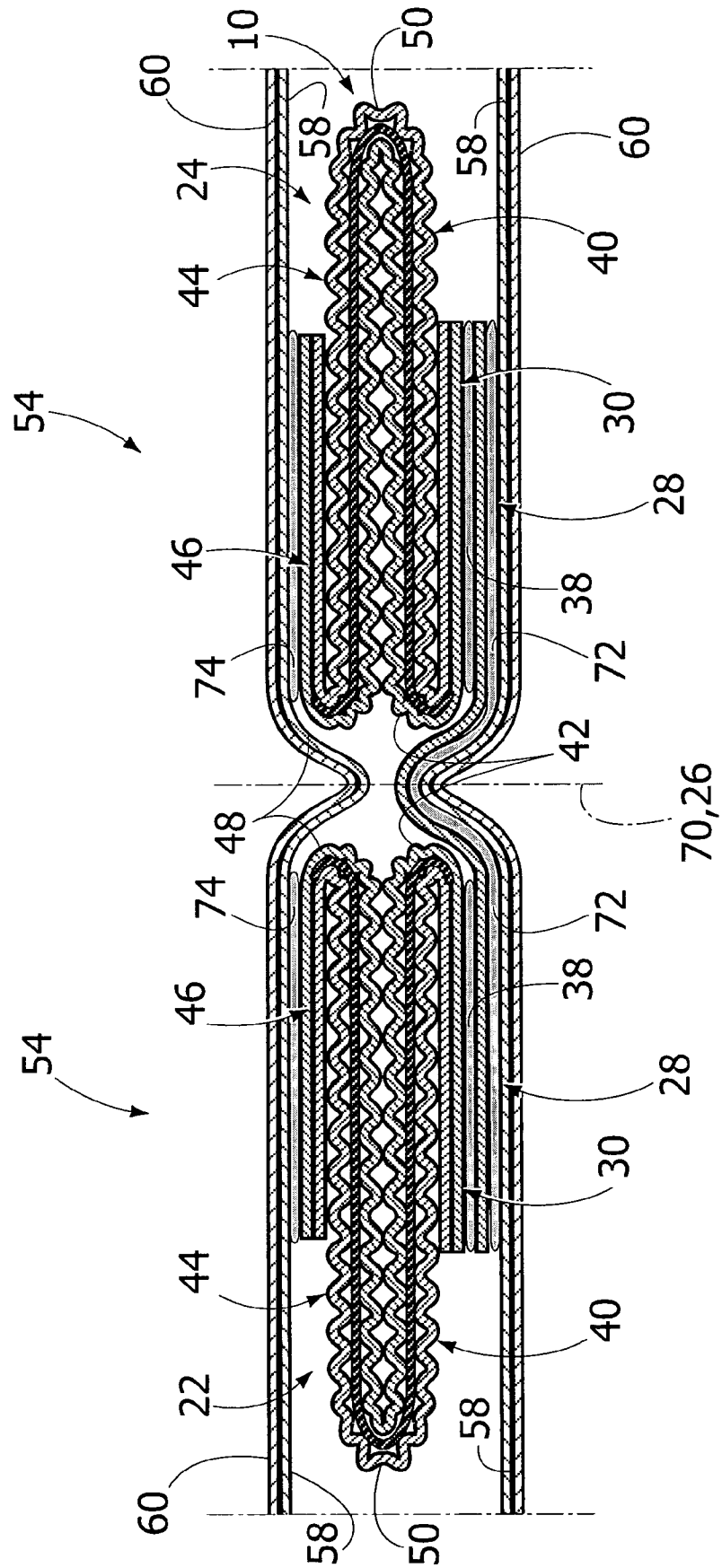


FIG. 6

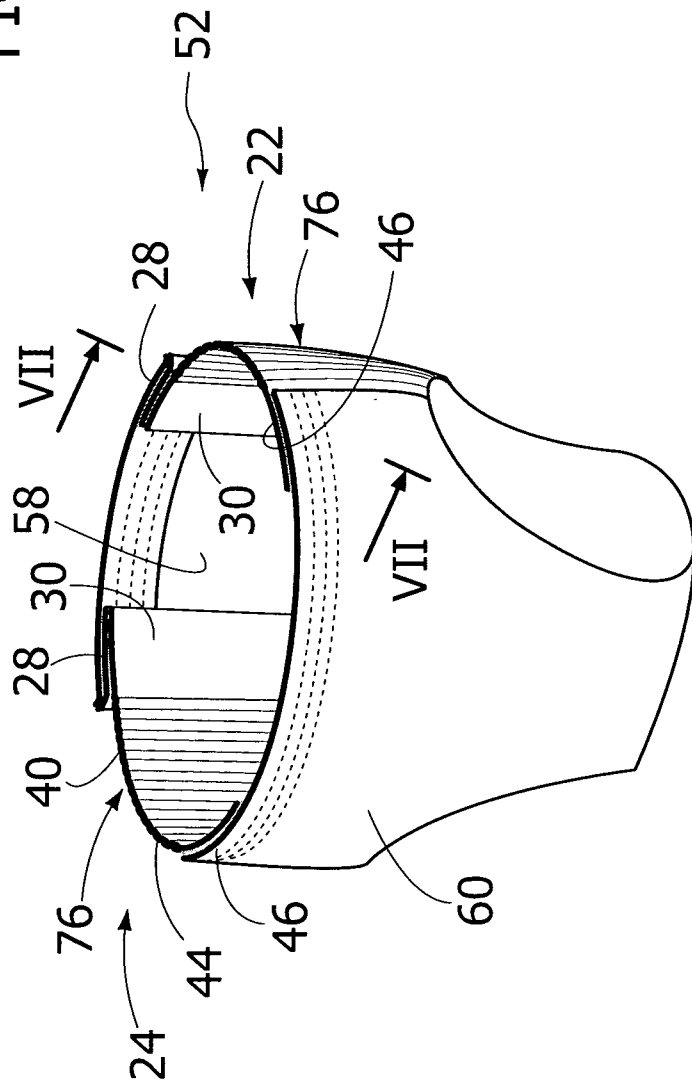


FIG. 7

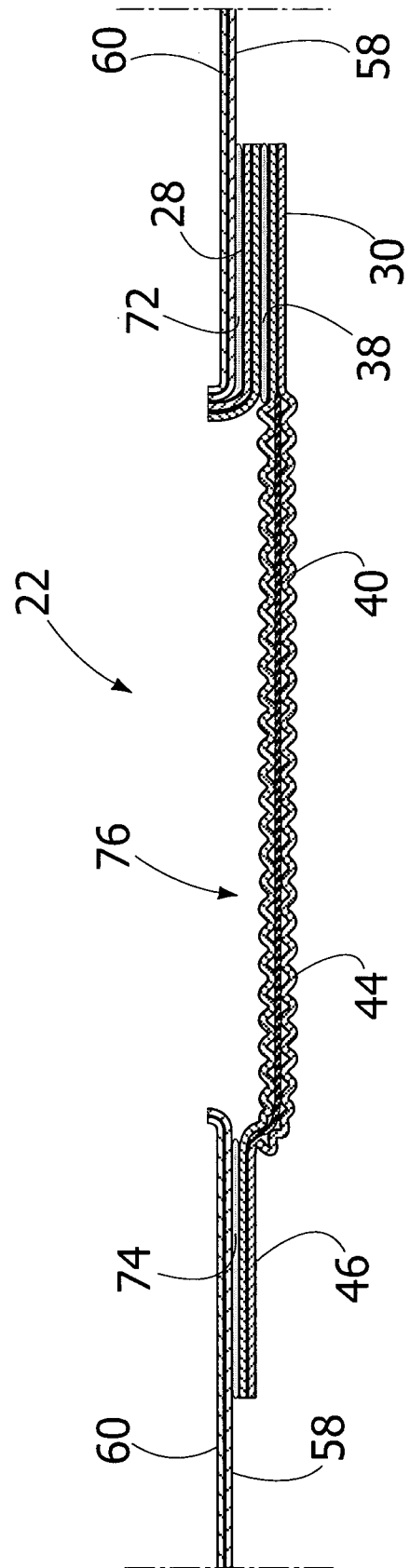


FIG. 8

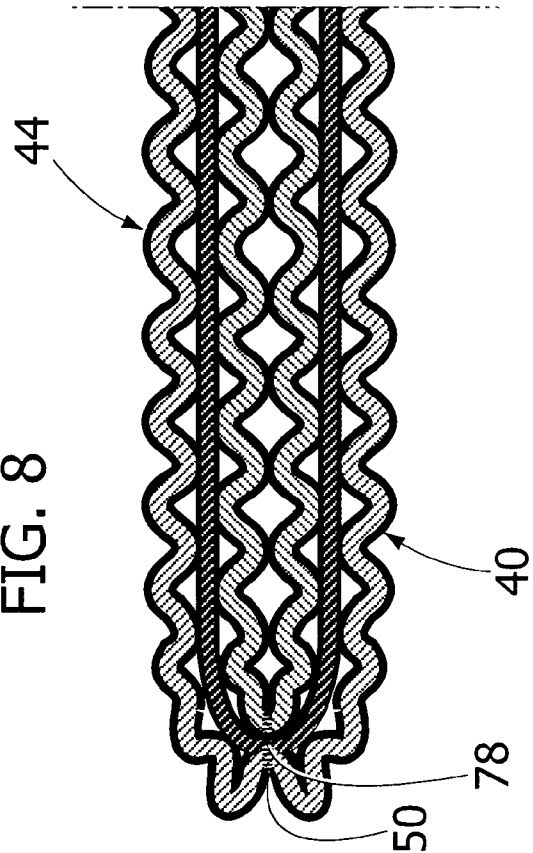


FIG. 9

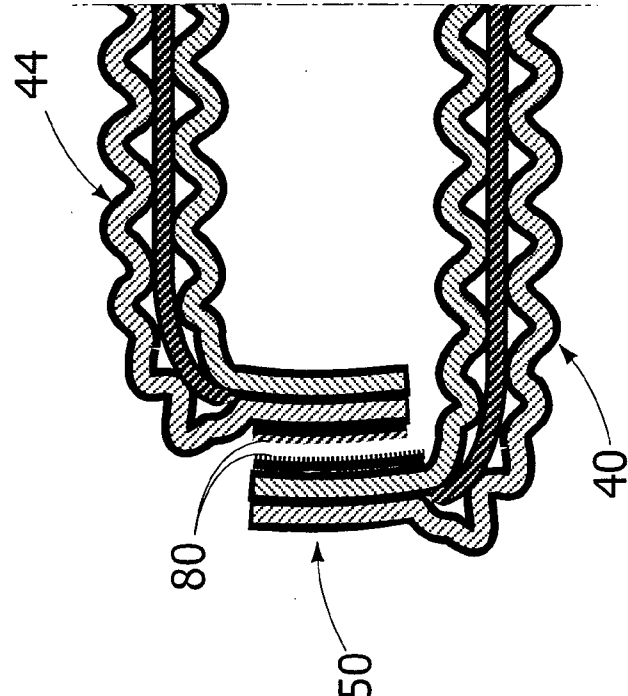


FIG. 10

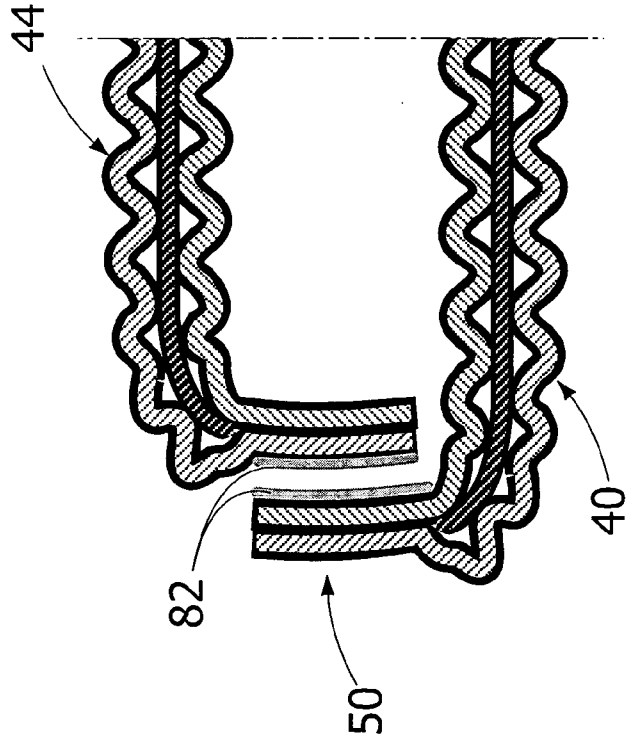


FIG. 12

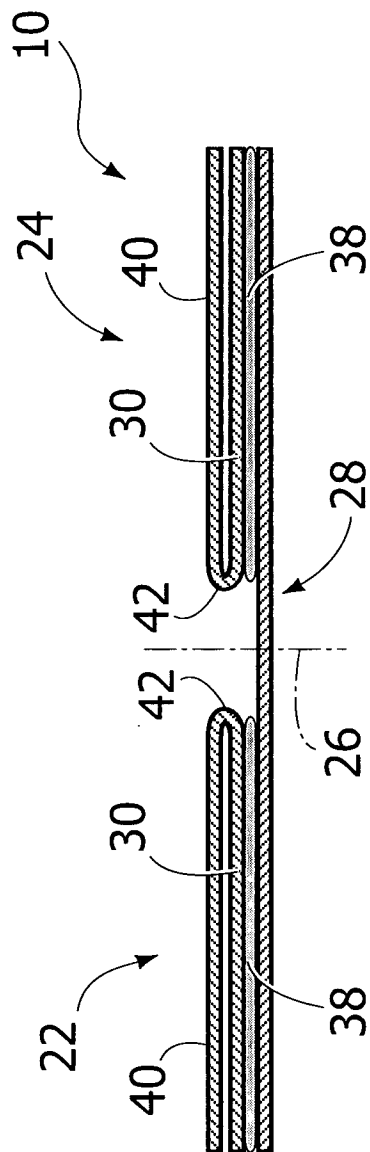


FIG. 13

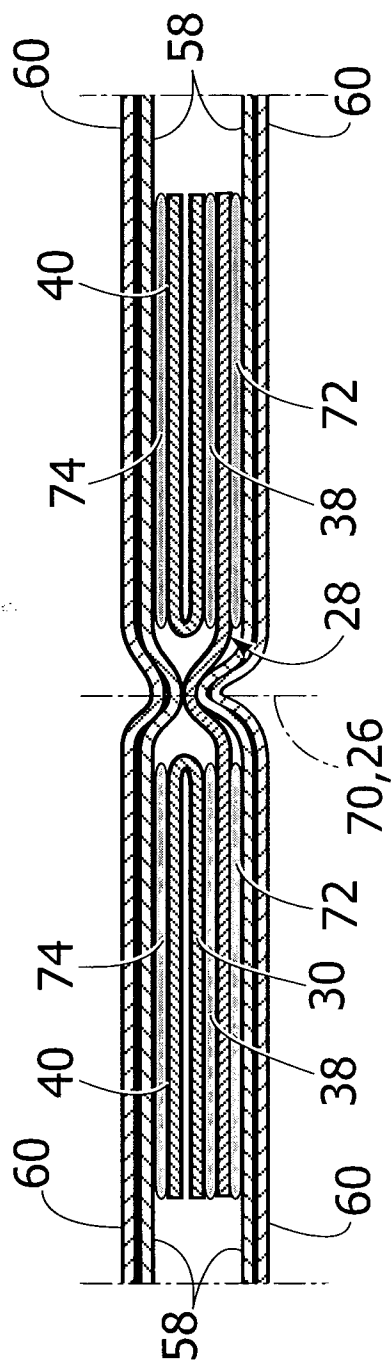


FIG. 15

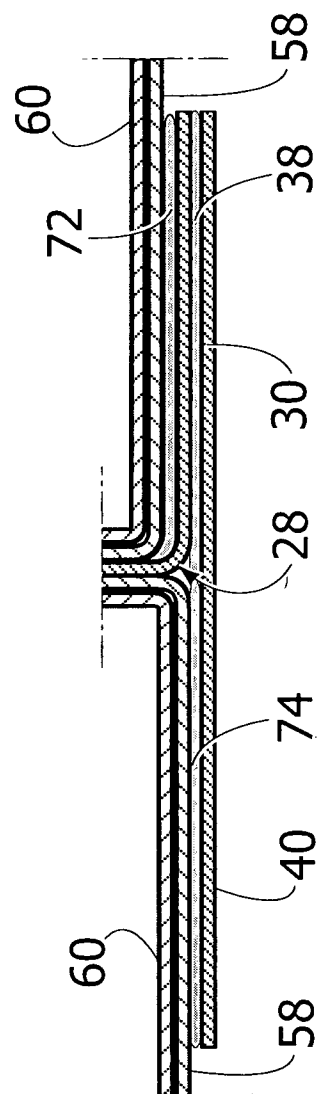


FIG. 16

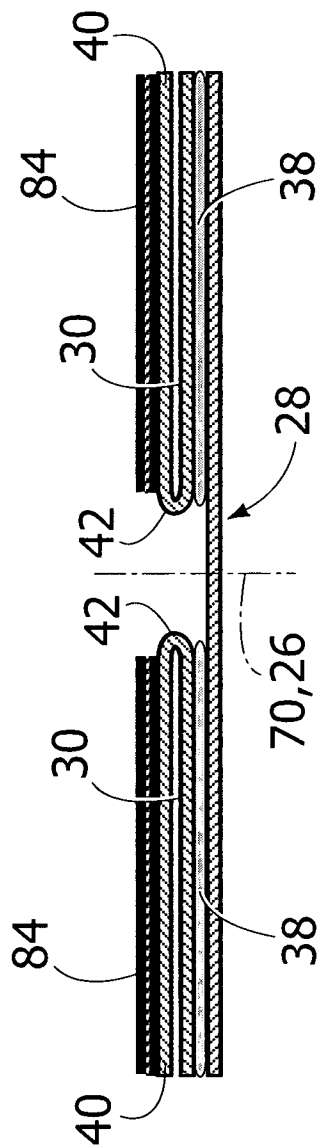
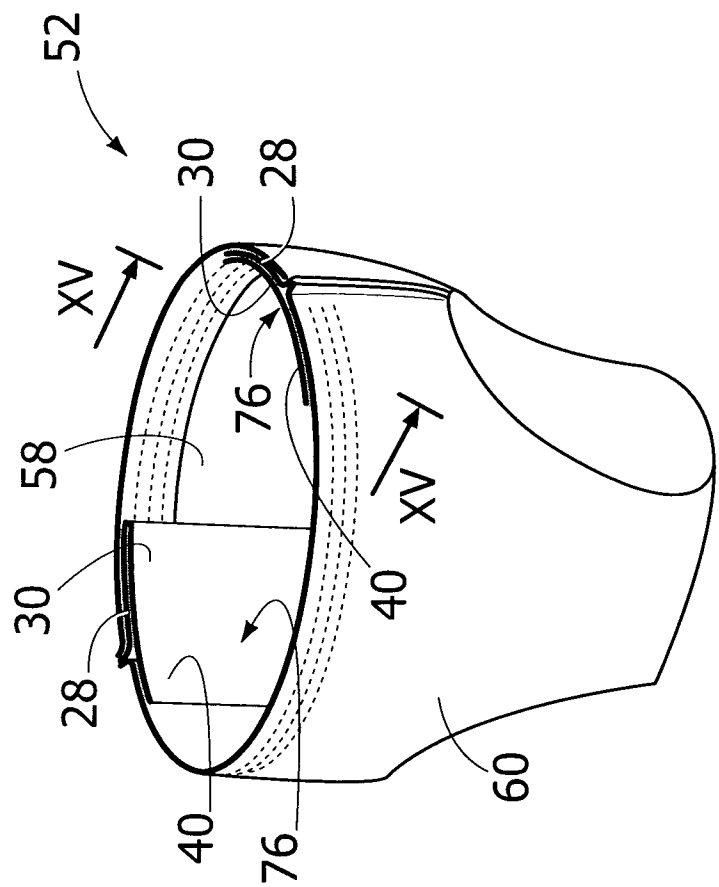


FIG. 14



INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No

PCT/IB2008/003044

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
 INV. A61F13/15 A61F13/56

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
 A61F

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

EPO-Internal

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	EP 1 523 968 A (FAMECCANICA DATA S P A [IT]) 20 April 2005 (2005-04-20) the whole document	1-14
A	US 2003/078558 A1 (KARAMI HAMZEH [US] ET AL) 24 April 2003 (2003-04-24) the whole document	1-14
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1 April 2009

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