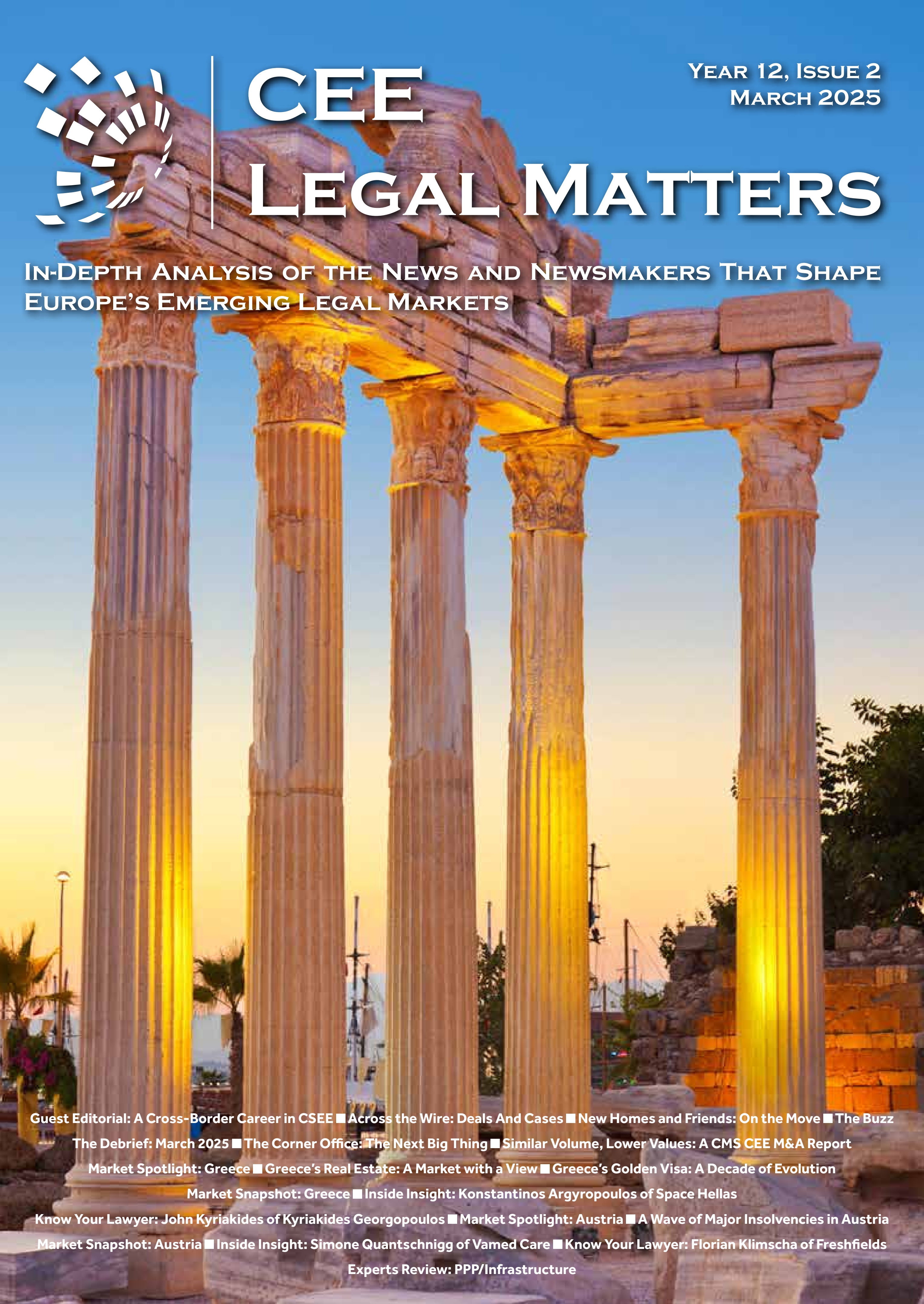

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Letters to the Editors:

If you like what you read in these pages (or even if you don't), we really do want to hear from you. Please send any comments, criticisms, questions, or ideas to us at: press@ceelm.com

GUEST EDITORIAL:
A CROSS-BORDER CAREER IN CSEE

By Horst Ebhardt, Managing Partner, Kinstellar Vienna

I still vividly remember the sunny September day when, as a young lawyer, I arrived in Prague. I was joining a US law firm that had just opened offices in the old city. Its immense beauty, at that time still unknown but immediately close to me, was captivating. The air of a country awakening from decades of communist rule, the leadership and inspiration of Vaclav Havel, and the strong sense that everything would now change for the better, created a uniquely positive environment. It did not feel revolutionary but cheerful, like a true Prague Spring. At the time, I did not know that my arrival would be the defining element of my career as a lawyer in Central and South-Eastern Europe (CSEE). I know it today and feel lucky to have witnessed the emergence of the region, both as a lawyer and as a local.

The words "positive transformation" best describe the re-emergence of CSEE as an important regional economy. People called CSEE an "emerging market," even though this wasn't quite right. This definition ignored historical context, such as the fact that Czechoslovakia had been the world's 7th largest industrial nation in the 1930s (a spot now held by France). As an M&A lawyer, I often encountered this past, with laws from the 1930s suddenly being applied to transactions in the 1990s. While they seemed out of place, their existence reminded me of the rich and sophisticated legacy of the region. Gradually discovering this, I felt deep respect.

Advising on M&A transactions in CSEE in the past often required using foreign laws due to the lack of comprehensive local laws and regulations. This approach allowed transformative ownership changes and investment by foreign investors despite the gaps. Governments and investors hired large international law firms, which led to many such firms setting up offices in CSEE. These firms also advised on new legislation, playing a significant role in the region's development.

Foreign law firms trained local talent, who rose to top positions. Transactions required creativity, blending high-quality international documentation (often governed by US, UK, German, or Austrian law) with local laws. This required lawyers, in the true sense of these widely used terms, to think outside the box and to be truly innovative.

This transition created a solid market of law firms in CSEE, including strong national, regional, and a few large international firms. The presence of top international firms has set the bar for documenting transactions. Now, running transactions in CSEE is similar to those in major financial centers.

What I most cherish has been the opportunity to spend time in many of the CSEE countries while working on transactions. This has allowed me to make true and lasting friends among my fellow lawyers, whether working on my team or across the table. My favorite example: I once negotiated a transaction in Romania for almost two years and my main counterparty was a lawyer from a leading national firm. While our discussions were often very confrontational, we eventually closed the deal and became close friends. A few years later, I had the honor of becoming the godfather to her son.

I am deeply grateful to this wonderful and diverse region, which has allowed me to build a fulfilling career as an M&A lawyer and be part of a complex and precious community. I look forward to many more exciting years ahead.

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ACROSS THE WIRE: DEALS AND CASES

Date	Firms Involved	Deal/Litigation	Deal Value	Country
13-Feb	Divjak Topic Bahtijarevic & Krka	Divjak, Topic, Bahtijarevic & Krka advised on the concentration notification for a joint venture between Koncar and Siemens Energy Group, resulting in the formation of Koncar - Transformatorski Kotlovi.	N/A	Albania; Bosnia and Herzegovina; North Macedonia; Serbia; Ukraine
17-Jan	BPV Huegel; Schoenherr	Schoenherr advised Headwall Photonics on the acquisition of Austria-headquartered EVK DI Kerschhaggl. BPV Huegel advised the sellers.	N/A	Austria
17-Jan	CMS; Linklaters; Wolf Theiss	Wolf Theiss advised Erste Group Bank on the successful issuance of EUR 750 million fixed to floating rate green preferred senior notes due 2033. CMS, working with Linklaters, advised the international banking syndicate working on the issuance including Danske Bank, Erste Group, Landesbank Baden-Wuerttemberg, Landesbank Hessen-Thueringen, Societe Generale, and TD Global Finance.	EUR 750 million	Austria
17-Jan	Brandl Talos; Herbst Kinsky; Schoenherr	Brandl Talos advised Graph Therapeutics on a USD 3.1 million pre-seed financing round led by Squareone and Merantix Capital, with participation from NAVEC Investment Management and angel investors, including the Atomico Angel Program. Herbst Kinsky advised NAVEC. Schoenherr advised Squareone. Fladgate reportedly advised the Atomico Angel Program.	USD 3.1 million	Austria
17-Jan	Freshfields	Freshfields advised RELX Group on its exit from Austria's exhibition market to Messezentrum Salzburg, WSE Wiener Standortentwicklung, and Mac. Brand Spaces.	N/A	Austria
23-Jan	PHH	PHH advised ATG Entertainment on establishing a new musical theater in Vienna together with the City of Vienna.	N/A	Austria
24-Jan	Schoenherr; Wolf Theiss	Schoenherr advised the managers involved on the Erste Group Bank's issuance of EUR 1 billion 3% mortgage Pfandbriefe due 2032. Wolf Theiss advised the Erste Group Bank.	EUR 1 billion	Austria
29-Jan	CMS; Eisenberger & Herzog	E+H advised ECOwind on its sale of the Baerofen wind park to Puespoek following an auction process. CMS advised the buyer.	N/A	Austria
29-Jan	Clifford Chance; Eisenberger & Herzog; Poellath	E+H, working with Clifford Chance, advised Interpath Holding on the acquisition of the Kerkhoff Group including its Austrian subsidiary Kerkhoff Consulting. Poellath advised the shareholders of the Kerkhoff Group on the sale.	N/A	Austria
3-Feb	Goodwin Procter; Wolf Theiss	Wolf Theiss, working alongside Goodwin Procter, advised McWin Capital Partners on its partnership with Austrian scale-up ElephantSkin.	N/A	Austria
4-Feb	Eisenberger & Herzog; Willkie Farr & Gallagher	E+H, working with Willkie Farr & Gallagher, advised 3i Group on its investment in OMS Pruefservice.	N/A	Austria
4-Feb	Schoenherr	Schoenherr advised ImWind and Bloch3 on obtaining an environmental impact assessment permit in Austria for the Rustenfeld wind farm.	N/A	Austria
5-Feb	RPCK | Rastegar Panchal	RPCK advised Farm-ING on its conversion from a GmbH into a flexible company.	N/A	Austria
5-Feb	Eisenberger & Herzog; Lindner Stimmler; Willkie Farr & Gallagher	E+H, working with Willkie Farr & Gallagher, advised Comply365 on its acquisition of Aviation Safety & Quality Solutions. Lindner Stimmler advised the shareholders of ASQS.	N/A	Austria
5-Feb	Binder Groesswang; Hogan Lovells; Schoenherr; White & Case	White & Case advised the lenders on the financing for the acquisition of Cellnex's business in Austria. Binder Groesswang reportedly advised the lenders as well. Schoenherr, working with Hogan Lovells, reportedly advised the sponsors.	N/A	Austria

Date	Firms Involved	Deal/Litigation	Deal Value	Country
5-Feb	Brandl Talos; Dechert; Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher; Wolf Theiss	Brandl Talos advised Highland Europe on its investment in SmaXtec as part of a round led by KKR. Dechert's Munich-based office advised the shareholders of SmaXtec. Gibson Dunn and Wolf Theiss reportedly advised KKR.	N/A	Austria
6-Feb	Cerha Hempel	Cerha Hempel advised ODDO BHF on establishing its Austrian branch.	N/A	Austria
11-Feb	Oberhammer; Pedersoligattai; Taylor Wessing	Taylor Wessing advised Art of Mobility on its acquisition of KTM's 50.1% stake in MV Agusta Motor. Pedersoli Gattai reportedly advised MV Agusta Motor. Oberhammer reportedly advised KTM.	N/A	Austria
17-Jan	Clifford Chance; CMS; Spasov & Bratanov	Spasov and Bratanov, working with Clifford Chance, advised the International Finance Corporation and Raiffeisenbank International on the EUR 90 million financing for R Engineering to construct a solar power park. CMS advised R Engineering.	EUR 90 million	Bulgaria
13-Feb	Djingov, Gouginski, Kyutchukov & Velichkov; Kinstellar	Kinstellar advised UniCredit Bulbank as the lead manager on the private placement of a EUR 25 million corporate bond issuance by Minimart. Djingov, Gouginski, Kyutchukov & Velichkov advised Minimart.	EUR 25 million	Bulgaria
20-Jan	Divjak Topic Bahtijarevic & Krka; Goodwin Procter; Massumi + Consoli	Divjak, Topic, Bahtijarevic & Krka, working with Massumi + Consoli, advised Cuadrilla Capital on its acquisition of Repsly from Resolve Growth Partners. Goodwin Procter reportedly advised Resolve Growth Partners.	N/A	Croatia
3-Feb	Gugic, Kovacic & Krivic; Kovacevic Prpic Simeunovic; Mamic, Grgic, Vinter; Pesut, Matic, Galekovic, and Zgombic; Tus & Grzic; Vukina & Partners	Kovacevic Prpic Simeunovic advised Mlin i Pekare on its reverse takeover of Cakovecki Mlinovi. Vukina & Partners advised OTP Bank, which financed the transaction. Tus and Grzic advised PBZ Croatia Osiguranje on the sale of its stake. Mamic, Grgic, Vinter advised the management board of Cakovecki Mlinovi. Pesut, Matic, Galekovic, and Zgombic reportedly advised the sellers of the initial stake in Cakovecki Mlinovi. Gugic, Kovacic & Krivic reportedly advised AZ, a pension management company that sold its stake in Cakovecki Mlinovi.	N/A	Croatia
5-Feb	Vukmir & Associates	Vukmir & Associates, working with Taylor Wessing, advised Dertour on its acquisition of I.D. Riva Tours.	N/A	Croatia
7-Feb	BDK Advokati; CMS (Bardek, Lisac, Musec, Skoko, and Partners); DLA Piper; Gugic, Kovacic & Krivic; Mamic Peric Reberski Rimac; Miskovic & Miskovic; Wolf Theiss	CMS' Croatian affiliate Bardek, Lisac, Musec, Skoko, and Partners advised Privredna Banka Zagreb as the leading mandated arranger, coordinator, and agent on a EUR 283 million club loan, which also included Erste & Steiermaerkische Bank, Zagrebacka Banka, and OTP Banka, for Podravka's acquisition of companies from the Fortenova Group. Podravka also received a EUR 50 million equity investment from the EBRD, following the acquisition. Miskovic & Miskovic, BDK Advokati, and Gugic, Kovacic & Krivic, and DLA Piper advised Podravka. Mamic, Peric, Reberski, Rimac advised Fortenova Group. Wolf Theiss advised the EBRD.	N/A	Croatia
13-Feb	Cytowski & Partners	Cytowski & Partners advised Hypefy and Interactive Brokers on a USD 1.75 million seed round for Hypefy that also saw Euroventures and Intercapital participate.	USD 1.75 million	Croatia
16-Jan	Kocian Solc Balastik	Kocian, Solc, Balastik advised Webglobe on the acquisition of Cesky Webhosting.	N/A	Czech Republic
16-Jan	Kinstellar; Tarpan Legal	Kinstellar advised European Imaging Group Limited on its acquisition of Megapixel from Tomas Matejcek. Tarpan Legal reportedly advised the seller.	N/A	Czech Republic
16-Jan	White & Case	White & Case advised Rohlik.cz Finance II on a CZK 4 billion retail offering of senior secured fixed rate bonds due in 2029 which feature an equity-linked bonus.	CZK 4 billion	Czech Republic
17-Jan	Finreg Partners	Finreg Partners advised Fundster on obtaining an investment crowdfunding license in the Czech Republic.	N/A	Czech Republic
17-Jan	Nedelka Kubac Advokati	Nedelka Kubac Advokati advised Energeticky a Prumyslovy Holding on its acquisition of a 50% stake in West Burton Energy from TotalEnergies.	N/A	Czech Republic
17-Jan	Kocian Solc Balastik	Kocian, Solc, Balastik advised Bakalari Software on changes within the Educleus Group following Vanda Seidelova's sale of a stake in it.	N/A	Czech Republic
17-Jan	Clifford Chance; Dentons	Clifford Chance advised a club of banks including ING Bank, Erste Group Bank and its Czech subsidiary Ceska Sporitelna, and Komercni Banka on a EUR 268 million facility agreement supporting a new joint venture partner's entry and the expansion of Unibail-Rodamco Westfield's Centrum Cerny Most in Prague. Dentons reportedly advised Unibail-Rodamco Westfield.	EUR 268 million	Czech Republic

Date	Firms Involved	Deal/Litigation	Deal Value	Country
23-Jan	Ashurst; Brouxel & Rabia; Kinstellar; Wolf Theiss	Kinstellar, working with Luxembourg-based Brouxel & Rabia, advised Genesis Growth Equity Fund I on the acquisition of a majority stake in LLP Group from Adam Bager, Tim Smulders, Barbara Dreska, and Jiri Stiller. Wolf Theiss, working with Ashurst, advised the sellers.	N/A	Czech Republic
24-Jan	AK Evan; Havel & Partners	Havel & Partners advised the Emeis/SeneCura Group on the sale of its Czech nursing home and Alzheimer center operations to the Penta Healthcare Group. Jan Evan Advokatni Kancelar advised the Penta Healthcare Group.	N/A	Czech Republic
27-Jan	BBH	BBH advised Skoda Group on the acquisition of a production hall in Ostrava used by Skoda Vagonka.	N/A	Czech Republic
28-Jan	Barta Legal; Havel & Partners	Havel & Partners advised Tensor Ventures and Elevator Ventures on their investment in Wultra. Barta Legal advised Wultra.	N/A	Czech Republic
29-Jan	Dentons; Havel & Partners	Havel & Partners advised Komercni Banka's Investment platform Upvest and the RSJ investment group on acquiring a 25% stake (with a call option of up to 49%) in Centrum Cerny Most from Unibail-Rodamco-Westfield. Dentons advised the sellers.	N/A	Czech Republic
29-Jan	Kocian Solc Balastik	Kocian, Solc, Balastik represented REMA in a long-running compensation claim against the Czech state, securing a final court ruling confirming that the Ministry of the Environment erred in a 2005 licensing procedure.	N/A	Czech Republic
31-Jan	CMS	CMS advised AEW on the sale of the Myslbek office and retail project to Max Realitni Fond SICAV.	N/A	Czech Republic
4-Feb	Glatzova & Co	Glatzova & Co advised Rouvy on its acquisition of FulGaz and on establishing a partnership with Ironman Group.	N/A	Czech Republic
4-Feb	Clifford Chance	Clifford Chance advised Allwyn on its acquisition of a majority controlling interest in Logflex MT Holdings Limited.	N/A	Czech Republic
5-Feb	Clifford Chance	Clifford Chance advised Ares Management Real Estate Secondaries funds on its joint venture with Cedar Capital Partners and on the European Hotel Portfolio recapitalization by the joint venture.	N/A	Czech Republic
5-Feb	PRK Partners	PRK Partners advised Barcelo on the sale of a five-star hotel in Brno to the Czech Inn Hotels Group.	N/A	Czech Republic
5-Feb	CMS; Taylor Wessing	CMS advised EGLS Founders Holding on its partnership arrangements with Kamco Invest centering on European Green Logistics Space. Taylor Wessing advised Kamco Invest.	N/A	Czech Republic
5-Feb	Cerha Hempel	Cerha Hempel advised Sony Music Entertainment on its acquisition of Supraphon.	N/A	Czech Republic
5-Feb	Glatzova & Co; Kinstellar	Kinstellar advised the BHM Group on the acquisition of a majority stake in Prague Port Group from HD&PB. Glatzova & Co reportedly advised the sellers.	N/A	Czech Republic
10-Feb	Euskaltax; Gomez-Acebo & Pombo; Havel & Partners	Havel & Partners, working with Gomez-Acebo & Pombo, advised the Czech Republic-based industrial group Advanced Industrial Technology Group on establishing a joint venture with the Spanish shareholders of Egile Corporation. Euskaltax reportedly advised the Egile Corporation.	N/A	Czech Republic
11-Feb	Cytowski & Partners; Dentons; DLA Piper; Weinhold Legal	Weinhold Legal and Cytowski & Partners advised Czech Republic-based technology company ThreatMark on its series A financing round, securing an investment exceeding USD 23 million from London-based Octopus Ventures and The Riverside Company investment firm. Dentons' New York office reportedly advised Octopus Ventures. DLA Piper's New York office reportedly advised The Riverside Company.	USD 23 million	Czech Republic
17-Jan	Dentons; Havel & Partners	Dentons advised AutoWallis Group on its acquisition of the Milan Kral Group. Havel & Partners advised the Milan Kral Group.	N/A	Czech Republic; Hungary
24-Jan	Hengeler Mueller; PRK Partners	PRK Partners, working with Hengeler Mueller, advised XXXLutz Deutschland on its acquisition of the Porta Group from Porta Westfalica.	N/A	Czech Republic; Slovakia
17-Jan	Ristal Keba Partners; Sirel & Partners; TGS Baltic	TGS Baltic advised IVC Evidensia on its acquisition of Tartu Loomakliinik. Ristal Keba Partners and Sirel & Partners advised the sellers, Karerin OU and Kersti Paju.	N/A	Estonia
27-Jan	Cobalt	Cobalt advised CybExer Technologies on a EUR 1.5 million investment from SEB via the Baltic Venture Debt investment program.	EUR 1.5 million	Estonia
29-Jan	Walless	Walless advised Lidl on opening a new store in Tallinn.	N/A	Estonia
29-Jan	Pohla & Hallmagi	Pohla & Hallmagi advised Fort Aero on obtaining court approval for its reorganization plan previously approved by creditors.	N/A	Estonia
4-Feb	TGS Baltic	TGS Baltic advised the City of Tallinn on the merger of multiple city hospitals, including East Tallinn Central Hospital, West Tallinn Central Hospital, Tallinn Children's Hospital, and Tallinn Ambulance Service, into a unified Tallinn Hospital.	N/A	Estonia

Date	Firms Involved	Deal/Litigation	Deal Value	Country
5-Feb	Cobalt	Cobalt advised SmartCap on launching a EUR 100 million Defense Fund.	N/A	Estonia
11-Feb	Schjodt; TGS Baltic	TGS Baltic advised the management team of Verge Eesti on acquiring the company's Estonian business from its Norwegian parent. Schjodt reportedly advised the sellers.	N/A	Estonia
4-Feb	AG Legal; Castren & Snellman; Cirio; Deloitte Legal; Herbert Smith Freehills; Kromann Reumert; Norton Rose Fulbright; Paczewski Tropaczynski; Perez-Llorca; Reed Smith; Squire Patton Boggs; TGS Baltic; Wikborg | Rein	TGS Baltic advised Clear Channel Outdoor Holdings on the sale of its Europe-North out-of-home advertising segment to Bauer Radio Limited for an expected USD 625 million, pending adjustments. Squire Patton Boggs, AG Law Limited, Cirio Law Firm, Kromann Reumert, Wikborg Rein, Castren & Snellman, Perez-Llorca, Reichlin Hess, Reed Smith, Deloitte and Herbert Smith Freehills, CMS, Norton Rose Fulbright, and Paczewski Tropaczynski reportedly advised the sellers as well.	USD 625 million	Estonia; Latvia; Lithuania
17-Jan	Apostolos Georgiades & Associates; Drakopoulos	Drakopoulos advised Guy Carpenter on the acquisition of the remaining 51.5% stake in Carpenter Turner from Noorstar Investments. Apostolos Georgiades & Associates reportedly advised the sellers.	N/A	Greece
17-Jan	Reed Smith	Reed Smith advised Phoebe Energy on securing non-recourse financing of EUR 341.4 million from Eurobank and Piraeus Bank for a 550-megawatt photovoltaic project in Ptolemaida, Western Macedonia, Greece.	EUR 341.4 million	Greece
29-Jan	Bernitsas	Bernitsas advised Georgoudis Parthenon on its partnership with the Aceitunas Guadalquivir Olives Group, backed by Alantra Private Equity.	N/A	Greece
29-Jan	Kyriakides Georgopoulos	Kyriakides Georgopoulos advised Aviation Capital Group and High Ridge Aviation on the sale and transfer of two Airbus A320-251N aircraft from ACG to HRA and their lease novation with Greek operator Sky Express.	N/A	Greece
5-Feb	Bernitsas	Bernitsas advised AP Hermes Securitization on the acquisition of an NPL portfolio of unsecured and secured loans with a total legal claim of approximately EUR 700 million.	N/A	Greece
5-Feb	KLC	KLC advised the National Bank of Greece on the project financing of Greece's inaugural battery energy storage project sponsored by Elsewedy Electric SAE.	EUR 41 million	Greece
5-Feb	Zepos & Yannopoulos	Zepos & Yannopoulos advised Intertrade Hellas on a EUR 23 million financing to support its EUR 150 million investment plan.	EUR 23 million	Greece
11-Feb	Bernitsas	Bernitsas advised CVC and Hellenic Healthcare Group on the disposal of a 60% stake in HHG to PureHealth Holding PJSC in a transaction that values HHG at EUR 2.2 billion.	N/A	Greece
3-Feb	Cytowski & Partners; Dentons	Cytowski & Partners advised Hungary-based Axoflow on its USD 7 million seed series with the participation of the EBRD, Credo Ventures, and E2.VC. Dentons reportedly advised the EBRD.	USD 7 million	Hungary
5-Feb	Forgo Damjanovic & Partners; Havel & Partners; Invicta; Oppenheim	Oppenheim and Invicta advised JRD Energo Group and its co-investors on the sale of JRD's Hungarian photovoltaic power plant portfolio with a 29.440 kilowatt built-in capacity to the Hungarian subsidiary of Obton. Forgo, Damjanovic & Partners and Havel & Partners advised Obton.	N/A	Hungary
6-Feb	CMS; DLA Piper	DLA Piper advised the Government Debt Management Agency (AKK), acting on behalf of the Republic of Hungary, on an international syndicated revolving credit facility agreement for a total amount of EUR 1.5 billion with 13 undisclosed Hungarian and international banks. CMS advised the coordinating banks.	EUR 1.5 billion	Hungary
17-Jan	Allen Overy Shearman Sterling; Dentons	Dentons advised Photoneo on the sale of its business to the Chicago-based Zebra Technologies. A&O Shearman's London office reportedly advised Zebra.	N/A	Hungary; Slovakia
21-Jan	Bratschi	Bratschi successfully represented Mabco Constructions in an ICSID investment arbitration against the Republic of Kosovo.	N/A	Kosovo
5-Feb	Kalo & Associates	Kalo & Associates advised the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development on a partnership with Raiffeisen Bank Kosovo under the Norway Western Balkans Growth Support Program.	N/A	Kosovo
17-Jan	TGS Baltic	TGS Baltic advised the Latvian Electronic Public Media Council on the merger of Latvian Radio and Latvian Television creating a single national public media entity known as Latvian Public Media.	N/A	Latvia
17-Jan	Walless	Walless advised Indexo Real Estate Fund on its acquisition of the Olimpia shopping center in Riga for over EUR 40 million.	EUR 40 million	Latvia

Date	Firms Involved	Deal/Litigation	Deal Value	Country
17-Jan	TGS Baltic; Walless	TGS Baltic advised Colonna on the sale of a portfolio of 11 Rimi grocery stores across Latvia to Lumi Retail Property Fund. Walless advised the buyers.	N/A	Latvia
29-Jan	Cobalt; Schoenherr; TGS Baltic; Vinge	TGS Baltic, working with Vinge, advised Bergs Timber on the sale of its Latvian sawmill business Vika Wood to Nextwood One, part of the Austrian HS Timber group. Schoenherr and Cobalt advised HS Timber on the deal.	N/A	Latvia
5-Feb	Cobalt	Cobalt advised Apollo Group's Estonian subsidiary Treeland on increasing its ownership in the Latvian restaurant chain Lido AS to 96% via share acquisition from KE Projekti.	N/A	Latvia
5-Feb	Cobalt; Eversheds Sutherland	Cobalt, working with Dentons, advised AirBaltic on the sale of a minority stake to Lufthansa Group. Eversheds Sutherland Bitans advised Lufthansa Group.	N/A	Latvia
5-Feb	Ellex (Raidla); Thommessen Law Firm; Wikborg | Rein	Ellex, working with Thommessen, advised Accent Equity on the acquisition of Brimer from Entec Group. Wikborg Rein reportedly advised the Entec Group.	N/A	Latvia
13-Feb	Cobalt	Cobalt advised Linstow Baltic on an agreement with Snabb to operate parking services at the Origo shopping center, Radisson Blu Latvija, Radisson Elizabete, and several open-air locations in central Riga.	N/A	Latvia
17-Jan	Cobalt; Walless	Walless advised InMedica on its sale to Mehilainen. Cobalt advised Mehilainen.	N/A	Lithuania
17-Jan	Sorainen; Walless	Walless advised KJK Fund III and GS Invest on the acquisition of Metalas ir Mediena from Rosizeil Importing. Sorainen reportedly advised the sellers.	N/A	Lithuania
20-Jan	Fort	Fort Legal advised on the sale of Zalgirio Verslo Centras to an Aggressive Capital-managed fund.	N/A	Lithuania
23-Jan	TGS Baltic	TGS Baltic advised Zalvaris on its EUR 5 million Siauliu Bankas-arranged public bond issuance and the subsequent admission of those bonds to trading on the Nasdaq Baltic First North market by Nasdaq Vilnius.	EUR 5 million	Lithuania
24-Jan	Reynolds Porter Chamberlain; Walless	Walless, working with Reynolds Porter Chamberlain, advised Ebury on the acquisition of Lithuania-based ArcaPay. TGS Baltic advised ArcaPay.	N/A	Lithuania
28-Jan	Walless	Walless advised Rontgen Aviation Fund on its establishment in Lithuania and on obtaining approval from the Bank of Lithuania.	N/A	Lithuania
5-Feb	Dentons; Freshfields; Sorainen; TGS Baltic	Dentons advised the Republic of Lithuania on the issuance of two EUR-denominated benchmark bonds under its Euro Medium Term Note Program. TGS Baltic reportedly advised the Republic of Lithuania as well. Freshfields and Sorainen reportedly advised the underwriters.	EUR 2 billion	Lithuania
5-Feb	Cobalt; Sorainen; TGS Baltic	Cobalt advised German defense company Rheinmetall on a joint project with Lithuania's EPSO-G Invest and Giraites Ginkluotes Gamykla to establish a 155-millimeter artillery ammunition manufacturing plant in Baisogala, Lithuania. TGS Baltic reportedly advised EPSO-G Invest. Sorainen reportedly advised Giraites Ginkluotes Gamykla.	N/A	Lithuania
5-Feb	Motieka & Audzevicius; Triniti (Triniti Jurex)	Triniti Jurex advised Nordic Minds on the sale of a majority stake in Tolimojo Keleivinio Transporto Kompanija to C Company. Motieka advised C Company on the matter.	N/A	Lithuania
16-Jan	DLA Piper	DLA Piper advised Enterprise Investors fund on a EUR 58 million investment in eTravel, alongside the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development as a co-investor.	EUR 58 million	Poland
17-Jan	Dentons	Dentons advised Exus Renewables on establishing business operations in Poland and the acquisition of a 53-megawatt wind farm portfolio.	N/A	Poland
17-Jan	Greenberg Traurig	Greenberg Traurig advised Resource Partners-backed Buglo Play on its acquisition of Elverdal and LeikkiSet.	N/A	Poland
17-Jan	Gide Loyrette Nouel; Norton Rose Fulbright	Gide Warsaw advised the shareholders of Private Label Tissue and Italian Paper on the sale of their shares to Velvet Care. Norton Rose Fulbright advised Velvet Care.	N/A	Poland
17-Jan	Act Legal (BSWW)	Act Legal Poland advised WBW Invest on an investment from Marguerite and Griffin Capital Partners, as well as on the sale of shares in WBW 2 – the special purpose vehicle owner of the OnTrain brand.	N/A	Poland
17-Jan	Allen Overy Shearman Sterling; Clifford Chance	Clifford Chance advised Solaris Bus & Coach on EUR 700 million syndicated financing in the form of credit and guarantee lines granted in order to fuel the company's further development. Allen & Overy Shearman Sterling advised the banking consortium.	EUR 700 million	Poland
23-Jan	BNT Attorneys; JDP	JDP advised Trei Real Estate on EUR 38 million financing from Munich-based Deutsche Pfandbriefbank AG. BNT Attorneys advised Deutsche Pfandbriefbank.	EUR 38 million	Poland
24-Jan	Dentons; DWF	DWF advised Eiffage Immobilier Polska on the forward sale of a build-to-rent residential project in Warsaw's Praga-Polnoc district to Heimstaden Bostad. Dentons advised Heimstaden Bostad.	N/A	Poland

Date	Firms Involved	Deal/Litigation	Deal Value	Country
29-Jan	Greenberg Traurig	Greenberg Traurig advised Cornerstone Investment Management on the redevelopment of the V-Tower in Warsaw, with Atlas Ward as the contractor.	N/A	Poland
29-Jan	Baker McKenzie; Norton Rose Fulbright	Norton Rose Fulbright advised a consortium of Polish banks including BNP Paribas Bank Polska and mBank on a PLN 321 million (approximately EUR 69 million) financing facility provided to R.Power. Baker McKenzie reportedly advised R.Power.	PLN 321 million	Poland
29-Jan	DWF	DWF advised TFG Group on the development and financing of Canopy by Hilton Warsaw with PORR being selected as the general contractor and Pekao Bank providing project financing.	N/A	Poland
3-Feb	Ingen Housz; Jagodzinski Skrzypek; Kondracki Celej; Sparring; SZA Schilling, Zutt & Anschuetz; Van Campen Liem	Kondracki Celej, working with SZA Schilling, Zutt, Anschutz, Ingen-Housz, and Sparring Legal, advised Impact Ventures and Verge HealthTech Fund on participating in the EUR 4.4 million pre-series A round for Prosoma. JSP Skrzypek and Partners, and reportedly Van Campen Liem, advised Prosoma.	EUR 4.4 million	Poland
3-Feb	Kondracki Celej; Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman; Sparring	Kondracki Celej, working with Sparring, advised bValue Fund on a USD 10 million investment in Fudo Security. Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman reportedly advised Fudo Security.	USD 10 million	Poland
3-Feb	SSK&W	SSK&W advised Xplorer Fund on its exit from Photon Entertainment to Fidiasz ASI.	N/A	Poland
3-Feb	DLA Piper; Linklaters	Linklaters advised Qualitas Energy on its acquisition of a 117-megawatt-peak solar farm portfolio from Ib Vogt in Poland. DLA Piper advised Ib Vogt.	N/A	Poland
4-Feb	Allen Overy Shearman Sterling; White & Case	White & Case advised joint bookrunners Citigroup Global Markets Europe, Danske Bank, PKO Bank Polski, Societe Generale, UBS Europe, and UniCredit Bank on PKO Bank Polski's EUR 750 million 3.375% senior preferred notes issuance due 2028. Allen & Overy Shearman Sterling advised PKO Bank Polski on the issuance.	EUR 750 million	Poland
4-Feb	CK Legal; Lesniewski, Borkiewicz, Kostka & Partners	CK Legal Chabasiewicz Kowalska advised Untitled Kingdom on the sale of its assets to Monterail. Lesniewski, Borkiewicz, Kostka & Partners advised Monterail.	N/A	Poland
4-Feb	Arqis; Wolf Theiss	Wolf Theiss, working with Arqis, advised Constellation Capital on its acquisition of Exportverpackung Sehnde Group, including the Polish entity Export Pack Polska.	N/A	Poland
5-Feb	Clifford Chance; White & Case	White & Case advised Orlen on its issuance of USD 1.25 billion in unsecured bonds on the US Rule 144A bond market. Clifford Chance advised the banks.	USD 1.25 billion	Poland
5-Feb	Gessel; Oles, Rysz, Sarkowicz	Gessel advised the Founders of Szopex on the sale of a 75% stake in the company to the CCC Group. Oles, Rysz, Sarkowicz reportedly advised CCC Group.	N/A	Poland
5-Feb	Greenberg Traurig; SKJB Szybkowski Kuzma Jelen Brzoza-Ostrowska	Greenberg Traurig advised Manova Partners on the negotiation of six lease agreements for the Cedet building with companies of the Polski Fundusz Rozwoju group. SKJB Szybkowski Kuzma Jelen Brzoza-Ostrowska advised Polski Fundusz Rozwoju.	N/A	Poland
5-Feb	Hengeler Mueller; Rymarz Zdort Maruta; Soltysinski Kawecki & Szlezak	Rymarz Zdort Maruta advised PGE Polska Grupa Energetyczna on the implementation of the Baltica 2 investment project involving the construction of an offshore wind farm in a joint venture with Orsted Group. Hengeler Mueller and SK&S advised Orsted.	N/A	Poland
5-Feb	Crido Legal; Schoenherr	Schoenherr advised Connectis on the acquisition of SpeedApp. Crido reportedly advised the sellers.	N/A	Poland
5-Feb	Gessel; Gide Loyrette Nouel	Gessel advised Maabarot Products on the sale of Laboratoria Natury to Farmaceutici Procemsa. Gide Loyrette Nouel advised Farmaceutici Procemsa.	N/A	Poland
10-Feb	Baker McKenzie; Greenberg Traurig; White & Case	Greenberg Traurig advised Diagnostyka on its initial public offering and admission to trading on the regulated market of the Warsaw Stock Exchange. White & Case advised the underwriters. Baker McKenzie advised Diagnostyka's majority shareholder Mid Europa.	PLN 1.7 billion	Poland
10-Feb	CMS; WKB Wiercinski Kwiecinski Baehr	CMS advised HB Reavis on Alior Bank's headquarters relocation to Varso Place in Warsaw. WKB advised Alior Bank.	N/A	Poland
11-Feb	MFW Fialek	MFW Fialek advised Enterprise Investors on its acquisition of a majority stake in Salus Centrum Medyczne.	N/A	Poland
13-Feb	Act Legal (BSWW)	Act Legal advised Victoria Dom on its bond issuance under the developer's Third Public Bond Issue Program.	PLN 50 million	Poland
13-Feb	Allen Overy Shearman Sterling; Allen Overy Shearman Sterling; Deloitte Legal	Deloitte Legal advised mBank on approximately PLN 80 million in facilities for a joint venture between 1 Asset Management and Solida Capital Europe. Allen Overy Shearman Sterling advised the borrowers.	PLN 80 million	Poland

Date	Firms Involved	Deal/Litigation	Deal Value	Country
13-Feb	Allen Overy Shearman Sterling; Clifford Chance	Clifford Chance advised Nord/LB as the lender on the financing of OX2's 100-megawatt Rutki Solar Farm in southwestern Poland. A&O Shearman reportedly advised OX2.	N/A	Poland
13-Feb	SKJB Szybkowski Kuzma Jelen Brzoza-Ostrowska	SKJB Szybkowski Kuzma Jelen Brzoza-Ostrowska advised Lublin East on securing a loan to refinance completed warehouse facilities and finance the final stage of the 7R Park Lublin logistics park.	N/A	Poland
14-Feb	Allen Overy Shearman Sterling; Koda; Schoenherr	A&O Shearman advised LaSalle Investment Management on the sale of the Wronia 31 office building in Warsaw's Central Business District to UNIQA Real Estate Management. Koda reportedly advised UNIQA. Schoenherr reportedly advised on the deal as well.	N/A	Poland
4-Feb	Cobalt; Konieczny Wierzbicki	KWKR and Cobalt advised Luxembourg-based investment fund Radix Ventures on its investment in Naco Technologies.	N/A	Poland; Latvia
5-Feb	Eversheds Sutherland	Eversheds Sutherland advised the Foreign Expansion Fund 2 FIZAN of Polski Fundusz Rozwoju on debt financing to Euvic for the acquisition of stakes in five companies operating in the IT sector in Lviv, Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Vinnytsia.	N/A	Poland; Ukraine
17-Jan	Filip & Company	Filip & Company advised Credit Europe Bank Romania on a cross-border merger by absorption into Credit Europe Bank.	N/A	Romania
17-Jan	Nyerges & Partners	Nyerges & Partners advised R.Power Renewables on participating in Romania's first Contracts for Difference auction, securing CfD contracts for five photovoltaic projects with a combined capacity of 85 megawatts.	N/A	Romania
21-Jan	Schoenherr; Wolf Theiss	Wolf Theiss advised Nokian Tyres on a virtual power purchase agreement with Enery. Schoenherr advised Enery.	N/A	Romania
27-Jan	Suciu Popa	Suciu Partners, working alongside Hogan Lovells, advised BWX Technologies on the acquisition of Kinectrics.	N/A	Romania
27-Jan	Filip & Company	Filip & Company advised PayPoint Services and its sole shareholder Star Payments on a financial debt restructuring process by contracting a syndicated loan from UniCredit Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.	N/A	Romania
29-Jan	PwC Legal (D&B David and Baias)	PwC's Romanian affiliate D&B David and Baias advised the FAN Courier shareholders on the acquisition of a 60% stake in Marian's Trading, a customs brokerage company.	N/A	Romania
29-Jan	Vlasceanu & Partners	Vlasceanu & Partners advised Econergy on winning a photovoltaic contract-for-difference auction.	N/A	Romania
29-Jan	Magureanu, Bourdenet & Associates; Stratulat Albulescu; Wolf Theiss	Stratulat Albulescu advised Catalyst Romania Fund II on leading a EUR 5 million investment round for DotLumen, with the participation of the European Innovation Council Fund, Tigrim Capital, and SeedBlink. Magureanu, Bourdenet & Associates advised DotLumen. Wolf Theiss advised the European Innovation Council.	EUR 5 million	Romania
3-Feb	Vlasceanu & Partners	Vlasceanu and Partners advised Premier Energy subsidiary Alive Renewable Holding Limited on its acquisition of Development Power Solar Energy.	N/A	Romania
4-Feb	PeliPartners	PeliPartners advised the Argo Capital Property group on the sale of the Shopping City Suceava mall.	N/A	Romania
5-Feb	RTPR; Wolf Theiss	RTPR advised the Integral Capital Group private equity fund on the acquisition of a majority stake in Embryos from the three founders of the business. Wolf Theiss advised the sellers.	N/A	Romania
5-Feb	Dechamps; Essex Court Chambers; Lexters; Pelinari & Pelinari	Pelinari & Pelinari and Lexters, working alongside Dechamps International Law and Essex Court Chambers, successfully defended the Romanian state in an ICSID renewable energy dispute against Findoc and others.	N/A	Romania
7-Feb	Popescu & Asociatii	Popescu & Asociatii successfully represented the Romanian Academy in a restitution dispute concerning 4,500 hectares of forest land.	N/A	Romania
11-Feb	CMS	CMS advised DRI on physical power purchase agreements with OMV Petrom for three separate solar projects.	N/A	Romania
12-Feb	Dragne & Asociatii	Dragne & Asociatii successfully represented Baneasa Business & Technology Park and Baneasa Rezidential in a real estate dispute that lasted more than 12 years and involved more than 1,000 parties.	N/A	Romania
13-Feb	Baciu Partners	Baciu Partners successfully represented Asociatia Suporter Club UTA in a case against Asociatia Fotbal Cub UTA Arad.	N/A	Romania
14-Feb	CMS	CMS advised M Core Group on its acquisition of a strip mall portfolio in Romania from MAS as well as on the acquisition financing.	N/A	Romania
14-Feb	CMS; Vlasceanu & Partners	Vlasceanu & Partners advised Ecoenergy's Romanian subsidiary Heliolux on obtaining EUR 38 million in project financing from Raiffeisen Bank International for the 92-megawatt Parau photovoltaic solar project. CMS reportedly advised Raiffeisen Bank.	EUR 38 million	Romania

Date	Firms Involved	Deal/Litigation	Deal Value	Country
4-Feb	Allen & Overy (Gedik Eraksoy); Sullivan & Worcester	Sullivan & Worcester advised the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development on its unfunded risk participation in Turkiye's Akbank SCF program. Allen & Overy Shearman Sterling's Turkish affiliate law firm of Gedik & Eraksoy reportedly advised the EBRD as well.	N/A	Romania; Turkiye
17-Jan	AP Legal	AP Legal advised Inn-Flex on its acquisition of Parir Print. Sole practitioner Tomislav Stankovic reportedly advised the sellers.	N/A	Serbia
28-Jan	Schoenherr	Moravcevic, Vojnovic and Partners in cooperation with Schoenherr advised RP Global on the sale of 100 % of the share capital in a portfolio comprising a 200-megawatt onshore wind power project located east of Belgrade and a 768-megawatt pipeline of wind and solar projects in Serbia to Alcazar Energy Partners.	N/A	Serbia
5-Feb	DLA Piper; ZSP Advokati	ZSP advised NLB Komercijalna Banka on a EUR 45.5 million facility for Delta Real Estate for the refinancing of Crown Plaza Belgrade. DLA Piper advised Erste Group Bank AG, Erste Bank Novi Sad, and UniCredit Bank Serbia as the exiting lenders regarding Crowne Plaza Hotel as well as with respect to the financing of an office complex in Belgrade operated by Delta Group.	EUR 45.5 million	Serbia
20-Jan	AP Legal; Dentons	AP Legal and Dentons advised NLB Komercijalna Banka Beograd and Nova Ljubljanska Banka Ljubljana on a EUR 89 million facilities agreement to MK Fintel Wind Beograd.	EUR 89 million	Serbia; Slovenia
17-Jan	CEE Attorneys	CEE Attorneys advised Slovak hockey forward Michal Kristof on the termination of his representation agreement with his agent.	N/A	Slovakia
24-Jan	Squire Patton Boggs	Squire Patton Boggs successfully represented the Slovak Republic in an investment treaty claim originally worth USD 2.11 billion.	USD 2.11 billion	Slovakia
29-Jan	Dentons	Dentons advised VUJE on a cooperation agreement with Newcleo.	N/A	Slovakia
5-Feb	Kinstellar	Kinstellar advised Mitiska REIM fund First Retail International 2 on the acquisition of land in Bratislava for the construction of the Podunajska Brana retail park via a joint venture between Mitiska Group and Asset Services.	N/A	Slovakia
5-Feb	Havel & Partners	Havel & Partners advised the founders of Luigi's Box on establishing an employee stock ownership plan.	N/A	Slovakia
7-Feb	Nechala and Partners	Nechala & Partners announced it successfully represented Zdruzenie Realitnuch Kancelarii Slovenska and software provider BackOffice in their complaint before the Slovak Antimonopoly Office regarding United Classifieds.	N/A	Slovakia
17-Jan	White & Case (GKC Partners)	White & Case's Turkish affiliate law firm GKC Partners advised Gulermak Heavy Industries Construction & Contracting on its TRY 4.845 billion IPO on Borsa Istanbul.	TRY 4.845 billion	Turkiye
21-Jan	Sadik & Capan	Sadik & Capan advised Cotcast on an investment round that saw the participation of DCT Trading and angel investors.	N/A	Turkiye
24-Jan	Kilinc Law & Consulting; White & Case (GKC Partners)	White & Case Turkish affiliate law firm GKC Partners advised Koni Teknik Muhendislik on its acquisition of all of the share capital of Socar Turkiye. Kilinc Law & Consulting advised Socar and its affiliates Bursagaz and Kayserigaz.	N/A	Turkiye
24-Jan	Baker McKenzie (Esin Attorney Partnership); Dentons (BASEAK); Kinstellar (KST Law)	Dentons and its Turkish affiliate Balcioglu Selcuk Ardiyok Keki advised Grand Games on its USD 30 million series A led by Balderton Capital with participation from existing investors Bek Ventures and Laton Ventures. Kinstellar's Turkish affiliate KST Law advised Balderton. Baker McKenzie Turkish affiliate Esin Attorney Partnership reportedly advised BEK Ventures.	USD 30 million	Turkiye
27-Jan	White & Case (GKC Partners)	White & Case's Turkish affiliate law firm GKC Partners advised a consortium of lenders including Turkiye Is Bankasi, EBRD, Garanti BBVA, and TSKB on a USD 70 million cash facility and a EUR 14.87 million letter of guarantee facility for Polat Enerji.	USD 85 million	Turkiye
27-Jan	Allen Overy Shearman Sterling	A&O Shearman advised Aygaz on a USD 20 million term loan facility.	USD 20 million	Turkiye
29-Jan	Lexist Law Firm	Lexist advised the Aydin Group on its sale of a 5% Stake in the TOM Financial Group to the Dubai Islamic Bank.	N/A	Turkiye
29-Jan	Aksan	Aksan advised Yapi Kredi Portfoy Yonetimi and Istanbul Teknokent on establishing a new venture capital investment fund, Yapi Kredi Portfoy Yonetimi Entertech Birinci Girisim Sermayesi Yatirim Fonu.	N/A	Turkiye
3-Feb	Aksan	Aksan advised APY Ventures on its investment in Minted Connect.	N/A	Turkiye
4-Feb	Kolcuoglu Demirkan Kocakli	Kolcuoglu Demirkan Kocakli advised Arkel and its shareholders including Mediterra Capital on the sale of Arkel to Innovalift.	N/A	Turkiye
4-Feb	Allen & Overy (Gedik Eraksoy); Allen Overy Shearman Sterling	Allen & Overy Shearman Sterling and its Turkish affiliate Gedik & Eraksoy advised the joint bookrunners on Turkiye Is Bankasi's debut international Additional Tier 1 bond issuance, raising USD 500 million.	USD 500 million	Turkiye
5-Feb	Abcoo	Abcoo represented Eczacibasi Holding on a promise-to-sell real estate agreement in return for revenue sharing with Mia Ordinary Partnership. Sole practitioner Fatih Yildirim reportedly advised Mia Ordinary Partnership.	N/A	Turkiye

Date	Firms Involved	Deal/Litigation	Deal Value	Country
5-Feb	Allen & Overy (Gedik Eraksoy); Allen Overy Shearman Sterling; Linklaters; Paksoy	Paksoy, working with Linklaters, advised Turkcell on its USD 1 billion Eurobond offering. Allen Overy Shearman Sterling and its Turkish affiliate Gedik Eraksoy reportedly advised the joint bookrunners.	USD 1 billion	Turkiye
10-Feb	Lexist Law Firm	Lexist advised Birlesim Grup Enerji on its initial public offering on Borsa Istanbul, which raised approximately TRY 1.4 billion.	TRY 1.4 billion	Turkiye
12-Feb	Lexist Law Firm	Lexist advised the Turkish Privatization Administration of the Ministry of Treasury & Finance of Turkiye on the privatization of Fenerbahce Kalamis Marina.	USD 504 million	Turkiye
14-Feb	Unsal Avuktalik Ortakligi; White & Case (GKC Partners)	White & Case's Turkish affiliate GKC Partners advised Yapi Kredi on the restructuring of the financial indebtedness of seven Turkish shopping malls belonging to the Forum AVM Group, in tandem with the Kucukler Holding and VK Holding acquisition of a 40% stake in the group. Unsal Attorney Partnership advised Kucukler Holding.	N/A	Turkiye
23-Jan	Sayenko Kharenko	Sayenko Kharenko advised Piraeus Bank on an agreement with the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation on the provision of a USD 20 million portfolio guarantee to the bank.	USD 20 million	Ukraine
29-Jan	Sayenko Kharenko	Sayenko Kharenko advised Trimble on obtaining merger clearance for its joint venture with AGCO.	N/A	Ukraine
3-Feb	Sayenko Kharenko	Sayenko Kharenko provided pro bono support for a cultural initiative that aims to set war-time poems, written by Ukrainian defenders, to music.	N/A	Ukraine
4-Feb	Avellum	Avellum advised Ukrnafta on obtaining approval from the Antimonopoly Committee of Ukraine for the acquisition of Shell's Ukrainian business – a network of petrol stations.	N/A	Ukraine
4-Feb	Integrites	Integrites advised German-French defense contractor KNDS on a joint venture with a Ukrainian partner to maintain, refurbish, and overhaul Gepard self-propelled air defense systems.	N/A	Ukraine
4-Feb	Sayenko Kharenko	Sayenko Kharenko advised the Export and Investment Fund of Denmark and additional banks on a EUR 370 million project finance facility for the expansion of DTEK's Tyligulska wind farm.	EUR 370 million	Ukraine
5-Feb	Dentons	Dentons advised Guris on the connection of its solar power plant to the connection grid of its wind farm in Ukraine.	N/A	Ukraine
11-Feb	Vasil Kisil & Partners	Vasil Kisil & Partners successfully represented Kamianske Agro, part of the Dnipro Agro Group, in a tax dispute exceeding UAH 18 million.	UAH 18 million	Ukraine
13-Feb	Sayenko Kharenko	Sayenko Kharenko advised the Export and Investment Fund of Denmark on a EUR 3.17 million loan facility to Ristone Holdings.	EUR 3.17 million	Ukraine

Deals and Cases

■ Full information available at:
www.ceelegalmatters.com
■ Period covered:
January 16, 2025 - February 15, 2025

Did We Miss Something?

We're not perfect; we admit it. If something slipped past us, and if your firm has a deal, hire, promotion, or other piece of news you think we should cover, let us know. Write to us at: press@ceelm.com

NEW HOMES AND FRIENDS: ON THE MOVE

Czech Republic: PRK Partners Enters Partnership with Quantera Global

PRK Partners has announced a partnership with Quantera Global.

Quantera Global is an independent transfer pricing advisory firm.

According to PRK Partners, "this alliance will allow our clients to benefit from the combination of our expertise in tax law and transfer pricing with Quantera Global's global experience."

"Our collaboration with Quantera Global further enhances our ability to deliver sophisticated and comprehensive solutions to our clients," added PRK Partners Partner Miriam Galandova. "We are proud to be able to offer unparalleled guidance in navigating the complexities of transfer pricing and ensuring compliance with evolving regulatory standards."

Ukraine: Asters Launches Forensic Practice

Asters has launched a new Forensic practice headed by Counsel Sviatoslav Ogreba.

According to the firm, the practice "focuses on fraud detection, economic crime investigation, and developing protective measures against financial, operational, and reputational risks. Its lawyers provide a comprehensive analysis of the companies' activities to support decision-making for business owners, investors, and senior management."

Ogreba has been with the firm since 2019. Earlier, he worked for the National Bank of Ukraine between 2015 and 2019. Earlier still, he was an Auditor with PwC between 2014 and 2015 and KPMG between 2011 and 2012.

"The ongoing war in Ukraine has created unprecedented challenges for local businesses," said Ogreba. "Office destruction, persistent cyberattacks, military mobilization, and widespread business migration – these conditions have created opportunities for fraudsters while making investigations more complex. We have launched Forensic practice in response to growing demand for sophisticated business protection services, offering our clients expert guidance and practical solutions for risk mitigation and decision-making."

Turkiye: Akcan Yavuz Attorney Partnership Opens For Business

Former Ozok Law Office Partners Zeynep Yavuz and Sule Akcan have come together to launch the Akcan Yavuz Attorney Partnership.

According to Akcan Yavuz Attorney Partnership, "this milestone in our career marks the culmination of years of hard work and growth. We are deeply grateful to everyone who has supported us throughout this journey. Your trust and encouragement have been invaluable. We remain committed to delivering top-quality service and focusing on an effective, solution-oriented approach."

Before setting up the new firm, Yavuz was with Ozok Law Office as a Partner between 2019 and 2025. Earlier, she was a Partner with Akol, Ozok, Namli between 2015 and 2019. Earlier still, she was an Associate with ASC Law Firm between 2011 and 2015 and a Lawyer with the Garanti Bank between 2007 and 2011.

Before teaming up with Yavuz, Akcan was also a part of Ozok Law Office – first as a Senior Associate between 2019 and 2021 and then as a Partner between 2022 and 2025. Earlier, she was with Akol, Ozok, Namli as well, as an Associate between 2015 and 2019. Earlier still, she worked for Aksu, Caliskan, Beygo as an Intern Lawyer between 2012 and 2013 and as an Associate between 2013 and 2015.

Poland: Peterka Partners Opens New Office in Rzeszow

Peterka Partners has opened a new office in Rzeszow, the capital of the Subcarpathian Voivodeship near the Polish-Ukrainian border.

According to Peterka Partners, the Rzeszow office will be helmed by Senior Associates Dagmara Klimek and Dawid Lewicki. Initially, the team will comprise approximately 6–8 lawyers.

Klimek has been with Peterka Partners since 2022 when she joined as a Senior Associate. Earlier, she worked for JDP as an Associate between 2020 and 2021. Earlier still, she worked at Izabela Szpyt Law Office, first as a Legal Assistant between 2015 and 2016, then as a Lawyer between 2016 and 2017, and finally as a Trainee Attorney at Law between 2018 and 2020.

Lewicki has been with the firm since 2022 when he joined as a Senior Associate. Earlier, he worked for Jobs Skowronska Samsel Attorneys at Law as an Associate between 2021 and 2022. Earlier still, he was a Prosecutors Assistant between 2018 and 2021 and a Trainee Attorney at Law with Tokarczyk and Partners between 2014 and 2018.

Bosnia and Herzegovina: AMB Legal Group Launches in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Former iQR Asset Management Partner and Head of Legal and Compliance Dino Aganovic, Wiener Osiguranje Vienna Insurance Group Head Of Legal and Secretary Davor Majstorovic, and MTEL in-house counsel Vladimir Bjekic have joined forces to launch AMB Legal Group in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Before setting up the AMB Legal Group, Aganovic was with iQR Asset Management as Partner and Head of Legal and Compliance between 2021 and 2023 and as CEO between 2023 and 2024. Earlier, he was the Head of Legal and Compliance at Heta Asset Resolution between 2015 and 2021, and, earlier still, he was with Hypo Alpe-Adria-Leasing as the Director of the Legal team between 2013 and 2014 as well as a Member of the Supervisory Board between 2014 and 2016. Moreover, he worked for Intermerkur Nova and Mersteel as a Head of Legal and HRM between 2011 and 2013 and was an Attorney Apprentice with Attorney at Law Mirsad Arslanagi between 2009 and 2011.

Majstorovic has been the head of the legal department at Wiener Osiguranje Vienna Insurance Group since 2016 and Secretary of that company between 2018 and 2019. Earlier, he worked for Addiko Bank Bosna & Hercegovina as an Associate for Legal Affairs between 2012 and 2014 as well as a Senior Associate for Legal Affairs between 2014 and 2016. As of 2021, he became Attorney at law, specializing in corporate, finance, and civil law.

Before forming AMB Legal Group, Bjekic spent almost 14 years in-house with MTEL a.d. Banja Luka, a subsidiary of Telekom Serbia a.d. Belgrade, which he joined in 2010 as an apprentice. From 2011 to 2016, he worked as a Chief Associate for Human Resources and Union Relations and, from 2016 to 2024, he worked as a Chief Associate for Contracts and Insurance Affairs. He's a long-time Arbitrator at the Agency for peaceful settlement of labor disputes Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

PARTNER MOVES

Date	Name	Practice(s)	Moving from	Moving to	Country
17-Jan	Philipp Pallitsch	Real Estate; Infrastructure/PPP/Public Procurement	SHMP Schwartz Huber-Medek Pallitsch	Dorda	Austria
5-Feb	Bernhard Mueller	Infrastructure/PPP/Public Procurement	Dorda	PwC Legal	Austria
7-Feb	Philipp Kapl	Corporate/M&A	Binder Groesswang	Kinstellar	Austria
7-Feb	Ji Hye Lee	Corporate/M&A	Jipyong	Oppenheim	Hungary
16-Jan	Adriana Mierzwa-Bronikowska	Infrastructure/PPP/Public Procurement	DLA Piper	Dentons	Poland
17-Jan	Dawid Krakowiak	Energy/Natural Resources	DLA Piper	Deloitte Legal	Poland
17-Jan	Andrzej Debiec	Tax	Hogan Lovells	Roedl & Partner	Poland
17-Jan	Katarzyna Debinska-Pietrzyk	Real Estate	Hogan Lovells	Roedl & Partner	Poland
17-Jan	Wojciech Marchwicki	Litigation/Disputes	Hogan Lovells	Roedl & Partner	Poland
17-Jan	Piotr Skurzynski	Competition	Hogan Lovells	Roedl & Partner	Poland
17-Jan	Agnieszka Szczodra-Hajduk	Labor	Hogan Lovells	Roedl & Partner	Poland
17-Jan	Adriana Dobre	Litigation/Disputes	Stratulat Albulescu	Bancila Diaconu si Asociatii	Romania
5-Feb	Tiberiu Protopopescu	TMT/IP	Protopopescu & Partners	Schoenherr	Romania
3-Feb	Zeynep Yavuz	Banking/Finance	Ozok Law Office	Akcan Yavuz Attorney Partnership	Turkiye
3-Feb	Sule Akcan	Banking/Finance; Corporate/M&A	Ozok Law Office	Akcan Yavuz Attorney Partnership	Turkiye
13-Feb	Gulistan Baltaci Hatay	Litigation/Disputes	Dentons (BASEAK)	Esenyel & Partners	Turkiye
13-Feb	Semih Sander	Maritime/Shipping	Dentons (BASEAK)	Esenyel & Partners	Turkiye
17-Jan	Markiyan Malskyy	Litigation/Disputes	Kochanski & Partners	Arzinger	Ukraine

IN-HOUSE MOVES

Date	Name	Moving from	New Company/Firm	Country
6-Feb	Dino Aganovic	iQR Asset Management	AMB Legal Group	Bosnia and Herzegovina
6-Feb	Davor Majstorovic	Wiener Osiguranje Vienna Insurance Group	AMB Legal Group	Bosnia and Herzegovina
6-Feb	Vladimir Bjekic	MTEL	AMB Legal Group	Bosnia and Herzegovina
14-Feb	Hana Nevralova	Metrostav	JSK	Czech Republic
24-Jan	Eniko Uveges	Grundfos	Grundfos	Hungary
31-Jan	Laszlo Palocz	Indotek Group	Kinstellar	Hungary
17-Jan	Andrei Muresan	Schoenherr	Tiriac Group	Romania
17-Jan	Mihai Selegean	BRD - Groupe Societe Generale	Rizoiu & Asociatii	Romania
17-Jan	Tamara Mohoric Selak	Skupina Zito	LON	Slovenia
17-Jan	Meltem Ozker Gunduz	Novo Nordisk	GE HealthCare	Turkiye
21-Jan	Merve Oney Barlas	TurkNet	TurkNet	Turkiye

On the Move

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PARTNER APPOINTMENTS

Date	Name	Practice(s)	Firm	Country
20-Jan	Vinzenz Waldhof	Real Estate	KWR Karasek Wietrzyk Rechtsanwaelte	Austria
10-Feb	Mona Holzgruber	Corporate/M&A	Binder Groesswang	Austria
17-Jan	Tsvetina Stefanova-Boyadzhieva	Real Estate	Gugushev & Partners	Bulgaria
14-Feb	Daniel Pospisil	Banking/Finance; Real Estate	JSK	Czech Republic
17-Jan	Dora Karagiorgou	Labor	Koutalidis	Greece
17-Jan	Manolis Kasotakis	Litigation/Disputes	Koutalidis	Greece
17-Jan	Agnieszka Rapcewicz	TMT/IP	Just Law	Poland
20-Jan	Jeremiasz Kusmierz	Corporate/M&A; Labor	Penteris	Poland
17-Jan	Madalina Fildan-Raileanu	Corporate/M&A; Energy/Natural Resources; Real Estate	PeliPartners	Romania
17-Jan	Ana Atanasiu	Litigation/Disputes	PeliPartners	Romania
17-Jan	Oana Bucsa	Competition	PeliPartners	Romania
17-Jan	Alexandra Ionita	Real Estate	PeliPartners	Romania
24-Jan	Adina Vlaicu	Compliance	Popescu & Asociatii	Romania
24-Jan	Andreea Mihalache	Infrastructure/PPP/Public Procurement; Litigation/Disputes	Popescu & Asociatii	Romania
24-Jan	Mirel Radescu	White Collar Crime	Popescu & Asociatii	Romania
24-Jan	Bogdan Cordos	Energy/Natural Resources	RTPR	Romania
17-Jan	Andrej Jelenkovic	Litigation/Disputes	Karanovic & Partners	Serbia
5-Feb	Martina Gavalec	Corporate/M&A	CMS	Slovakia
5-Feb	Natalia Janoskova	Banking/Finance; Real Estate	CMS	Slovakia
21-Jan	Polona Fink	Labor; TMT/IP	Rojs, Peljhan, Prelesnik & Partners	Slovenia
5-Feb	Fazilet Karabacaklar	Labor	Egemenoglu	Turkiye
5-Feb	Sezen Yilmaz	Corporate/M&A	Egemenoglu	Turkiye
5-Feb	Duygu Ozturk Dincer	Banking/Finance	Lexist	Turkiye
28-Jan	Oleksii Maslov	Litigation/Disputes	Avellum	Ukraine

OTHER APPOINTMENTS

Date	Name	Firm	Appointed To	Country
16-Jan	Anneli Krunks	Ellex	Head of FinTech	Estonia
5-Feb	Merlin Liis-Toomela	Ellex	Head of Data Protection & IT Law	Estonia
29-Jan	Dalma Ordogh	KPMG Legal Hungary	Director	Hungary
7-Feb	Eva Kovacs	Jalsovszky	Head of Real Estate	Hungary
17-Jan	Mindaugas Zolynas	Fort Legal	Managing Partner	Lithuania
17-Jan	Anna Partyka-Opiela	Rymarz Zdort Maruta	Head of ESG	Poland
14-Feb	Dagmara Klimek	Peterka Partners	Co-Head of Rzeszow Office	Poland
14-Feb	Dawid Lewicki	Peterka Partners	Co-Head of Rzeszow Office	Poland
24-Jan	Serban Paslaru	Tuca Zbarcea & Asociatii	Equity Partner	Romania
24-Jan	Sviatoslav Ogreba	Asters	Head of Forensic Practice	Ukraine
13-Feb	Kyrylo Kazak	KPD Consulting	Managing Partner	Ukraine

THE BUZZ

In The Buzz we check in on experts on the legal industry across CEE for updates about developments of significance. Because the interviews are carried out and published on the CEE Legal Matters website on a rolling basis, we've marked the dates on which the interviews were originally published.

Striking Serbia: A Buzz Interview with Igor Zivkovski of Schoenherr

By Andrija Djonovic (March 10, 2025)

The recent 30-day lawyer strike has sent ripples across Serbia's legal and business environment, disrupting key judicial and administrative functions and raising concerns about prolonged instability. Schoenherr Partner Igor Zivkovski discusses the strike's impact, investor sentiment, as well as a promising corporate bond program, and the evolving regulatory framework as Serbia navigates a period of uncertainty.

"The strike has disrupted the entire legal and business ecosystem, creating uncertainty in the market," Zivkovski begins. "It affects representation before public bodies, courts, and notaries, which is a major component of legal work in Serbia. While client advisory and transactional work continue, many lawyers rely on court representation for their livelihood, and the prolonged disruption puts their financial stability at risk," he explains.

This disruption follows an earlier suspension of work in January, a move that garnered significant support from the Bar Association," Zivkovski adds. "By backing the protest movement, the Bar Association has emphasized the need to address long-standing challenges within the legal system, reflecting the profession's broader commitment to meaningful reforms."

As for public opinion, Zivkovski goes on to say that some support the ongoing movement while others are frustrated by the delays. "Regardless, it is clear that the next steps taken by both the government and the legal community will be crucial. This moment presents an opportunity for meaningful change, but if the issues remain unresolved, we could face prolonged instability."

Focusing on how this uncertainty impacts foreign investment, Zivkovski says that Serbia continues to attract foreign investors, primarily due to competitive business costs, strategic location, and overall ease of doing business. However, "the ongoing administrative and judicial challenges have drawn investors' attention to the broader political and economic landscape. While the investment climate remains stable, ensuring predictability and transparency will be important for maintaining Serbia's attractiveness for future investments." Zivkovski believes that the way systemic issues are addressed in the coming months will be key to maintaining investor confidence.

Aside from the strike, Zivkovski underlines a promising initiative on the part of the Ministry of Finance – the corporate bond issuance program. "The program aims to stimulate companies to issue corporate bonds by covering a portion of the costs and providing legal and technical support. The first issuance of these green corporate bonds is scheduled for March and has already been approved by the Serbian Securities Commission. According to the Ministry of Finance, nine more companies are preparing to issue bonds under the same framework," he reports. "This initiative is diverse, transparent, and efficient, offering long-term economic benefits to companies, investors, and the broader Serbian economy. If successfully executed, the program could enhance liquidity, improve access to capital, and promote stronger corporate governance practices," Zivkovski outlines.

Finally, Zivkovski reports that there are no significant legislative changes in motion. "Given the current political situation and the absence of a fully functional government following the Prime Minister's resignation in late January, we are in a wait-and-see mode." Until a new government is in place and operational, Zivkovski indicates that it is unlikely that any major legislative initiatives will take shape. "The next few months will be crucial in determining how the political landscape evolves and what legislative priorities emerge," he concludes.

What Is Green in Austria? A Buzz Interview with Ivo Deskovic of Taylor Wessing

By Andrija Djonovic (March 17, 2025)

Sustainability-related disputes, cyber security issues, and corporate restructurings are shaping Austria's legal dispute landscape, with courts and arbitration increasingly tackling ESG issues and greenwashing claims, according to Taylor Wessing Partner Ivo Deskovic who highlights a surge in insolvencies as well as the long-anticipated implementation of the *EU Class Action Directive*.

"One of the most interesting trends we observe is the increasing relevance of sustainability-related disputes," Deskovic begins. Whether in courts or arbitration, sustainability and ESG issues are becoming a key topic. "With the *EU Green Deal* and stricter regulations, we are seeing a rise in cases related to greenwashing – an issue that was barely on the radar a few years ago but is now emerging as a serious legal battleground."Another hot topic is that of cyber security-related disputes. "After a cyber-attack, when systems are back under control, the question always arises as to who has to pay for the damages caused, not only to the attacked company but also to its customers and suppliers."

Additionally, Deskovic reports that crisis-driven disputes remain a significant factor. "A prime example is a long-running case involving a bank's supervisory board, which was finally decided recently in favor of our clients – the dispute revolved around whether board members violated their duty of care in overseeing the bank's operations, and the ruling confirmed they did not. This decision is important because it clarifies the level of duty of care required from executives during times of financial crisis – a crucial precedent given the current wave of corporate challenges," he explains.

Continuing, Deskovic says that there has been a surge in "major restructurings and insolvencies, which naturally lead to a high volume of disputes." Pointing to the examples of Signa and other high-profile cases like KTM, Deskovic stresses that the "big question now is how will these restructurings play out in terms of disputes." Looking back, the first COVID-19 lockdowns triggered widespread expectations of mass bankruptcies, however, "due to government interventions, businesses were kept afloat longer than anticipated. Now that these support measures have ended, we are finally seeing a delayed wave of restructurings," Deskovic explains. Whether this will result in a market clean-up or prolonged uncertainty remains to be seen. "For investors, it's a period of risk assessment, but for the labor market, the restructuring process seems to be having a relatively mild impact for now." Additionally, Deskovic indicates that with Austria's new government in place, "we'll need to see how policy shifts might influence economic recovery and insolvency proceedings in the coming years."

Finally, Deskovic reports that Austria implemented the EU *Class Action Directive* last year. "This is another area with a lot of potential for change. The *Class Action Directive* was introduced at the European level, but Austria delayed its implementation." According to him, now that the framework is in place, it is to be expected that first-class actions under the new law will soon take place. "Austrian class actions won't operate exactly like American-style lawsuits. Instead, they'll function more as mass actions, consolidating multiple claims into a single procedure when overarching legal questions need to be resolved," Deskovic explains. Previously, under what is known as "Class Actions Austrian Style" claimants had to assign individual claims to a single plaintiff, but under the new system, there will be a more unified approach. "What's particularly interesting is that the first two or three legal entities have already registered as qualified entities. While the system is still untested, it could mark the beginning of a new era of collective litigation in Austria and we anticipate significant developments in this space in the near future," he concludes.

Due to government interventions, businesses were kept afloat longer than anticipated. Now that these support measures have ended, we are finally seeing a delayed wave of restructurings.

Taking Things Slow in Montenegro: A Buzz Interview with Bojana Nikcevic of Jovovic, Mugosa & Vukovic

By Andrija Djonovic (March 17, 2025)

Jovovic, Mugosa & Vukovic Attorney at Law Bojana Nikcevic discusses the impact of judicial delays, activities of the Bar Association, and the legislative changes that are set to reshape Montenegro's competition law, business regulations, and corporate compliance in the country.

"Unfortunately, political and social circumstances continue to have a significant influence on the legal sector," Nikcevic begins. "While there have been some improvements in the judiciary – most notably with the long-awaited appointment of new heads of courts and prosecutor's office – Montenegro still faces a severe shortage of judges which has led to considerable delays in court proceedings, with many cases being prolonged well beyond reasonable timeframes. In fact, some cases that should have been prioritized have been ongoing for 10 to 15 years, placing a significant strain on the court system and those seeking legal resolutions," Nikcevic elaborates.

Additionally, Nikcevic reports that "one of [Montenegro's Bar Association's] key priorities at the moment is negotiating with the Ministry of Justice to amend the attorneys' fee schedule, which was last updated in 2017. Given rising inflation and the increased cost of living, legal professionals have seen their costs rise while fee structures have remained stagnant." According to her, the Bar Association is also working on amending other regulations governing the legal profession to further strengthen the position of lawyers.

Nikcevic also reports on several important amendments to key laws in the past two months with relevant ministries launching public consultations on multiple fronts. "One of the most notable developments is the proposed amendment to the Law on the Protection of Competition. If adopted, the amendments would significantly expand the powers of the national competition agency," she says. Currently, if the agency identifies a violation, it must initiate proceedings before the misdemeanor court. "Under the proposed changes, the agency itself would have the authority to impose administrative fines directly, without requiring judicial intervention. This would mark a significant shift in competition law enforcement and could lead to increased activity for legal professionals specializing in antitrust matters."

Another major development, according to Nikcevic, is the introduction of a new *Law on Business Companies*, which will replace the existing framework from 2020. "The previous law created multiple challenges for businesses, and the government has decided to enact a completely new law rather than attempt piecemeal amendments. The adoption of this law will be followed by complementary legislation on company registration, which is expected to significantly streamline the process of establishing businesses in Montenegro," she explains. "These reforms should improve market conditions and generate increased legal work, particularly in corporate structuring and regulatory compliance."

"While we are not seeing drastic shifts in investment or major structural changes in the economy, businesses are facing challenges in navigating regulatory and administrative processes," Nikcevic argues. "The combination of judicial delays, pending legislative reforms, and broader economic uncertainty means that companies are taking a cautious approach," she explains. At the same time, these very challenges are generating legal work. "As businesses look for ways to adapt to new regulations – particularly in corporate law, competition, and compliance – lawyers are playing an increasingly important role in guiding them through these changes. We expect that, as new laws take effect, inquiries and legal workload in these areas will continue to rise," Nikcevic concludes.

While there have been some improvements in the judiciary – most notably with the long-awaited appointment of new heads of courts and prosecutor's office – Montenegro still faces a severe shortage of judges which has led to considerable delays in court proceedings.

Digital's the Name of the Game in Hungary: A Buzz Interview with Zoltan Kozma of DLA Piper

By Andrija Djonovic (March 17, 2025)

Hungary's legal and business landscape is undergoing significant transformation, driven by a steady increase in M&A activity, rapid digitalization, and evolving regulatory frameworks, according to DLA Piper Hungary Partner and Head of Intellectual Property and Technology Zoltan Kozma.

"Over the past few months, we've seen a slight increase in M&A activity," Kozma begins. "While we are still far from the highs of 2021, there is steady growth, particularly in the technology sector, which dominates deals. Renewable energy is another major driver of transactions, as investors continue to seek opportunities in the green transition and the financial sector remains active, with digitalization playing a crucial role in shaping M&A trends," he adds.

"The EU's digital agenda has introduced a massive wave of legislation, impacting many areas of work," Kozma continues. "For example, Hungary was the first EU country to implement the *NIS2 Directive*, which focuses on cybersecurity, but this rapid implementation created significant challenges. Companies are still struggling to navigate the regulatory landscape, particularly because new amendments followed immediately after the law was enacted, leading to confusion among businesses."

Furthermore, according to Kozma, another major legal development is the *Digital Operational Resilience Act* for the financial sector, which "aims to enhance the resilience of financial entities against cyber threats. The *AI Act* is also a game-changer – now that it's in force, it places extensive obligations on businesses – not just AI developers but also AI users. This means that companies across various industries must revise contracts, implement AI compliance frameworks, and even update corporate policies to ensure AI governance is in place."

Focusing specifically on the *AI Act*, Kozma says that it is having a profound impact on legal advisory services. "It requires businesses to adopt specific contractual clauses when using AI, prompting law firms to handle *AI Act* compliance and policies. Additionally, the *EU Data Act*, part of the broader *Digital Decade Program*, is another crucial regulation affecting IoT users, data generators, and software developers. Although already enacted, many companies are still trying to fully grasp its implications."

Adding more to the topic of digitalization, Kozma reports that "the electronic land registry system went live in the past few months, streamlining property transactions and improving administrative efficiency. Additionally, introduced a digital citizenship program along with a new electronic signature system." According to him, this will expedite administrative procedures for Hungarian citizens and enhance interactions with government agencies.

Shifting gears to defense, Kozma states that the sector is becoming increasingly active. "While it was relatively quiet in the past, geopolitical circumstances have led to rising M&A activity and a growing number of R&D projects in defense. We are also seeing more work in defense procurement, which is expected to expand in the coming years."

Meanwhile, in employment law, immigration policies have become stricter for third-country nationals. "Hungary has imposed new rules that make it more difficult for foreign employees to work in the country. Only university graduates receive standard work permits; others get two-year guest permits – a restriction that is causing significant complications for companies seeking to bring in foreign talent," Kozma explains.

Finally, Kozma says Hungary continues to be a major hub for the film industry, thanks to its generous tax credit system. "A growing number of international productions are choosing Hungary, and new studios are being built to accommodate demand. This has created a stable and expanding market for specialized law firms handling film industry transactions," he concludes.

Vibrant M&A Market in Romania: A Buzz Interview with Loredana Chitu of Dentons

By Andrija Djonovic (March 20, 2025)

Dentons Partner and and Head of the Capital Markets group in Bucharest Loredana Chitu highlights Romania's vibrant M&A market, driven by strong investor interest in energy, technology, and logistics-focused real estate, while also cautioning that ongoing geopolitical and economic challenges, as well as upcoming elections, could influence investment activity throughout 2025.

"2024 was quite a vibrant year for M&A in Romania – we saw strong activity across several key sectors, particularly in energy, technology – with a focus on data centers and AI, real estate, with a notable focus on logistics investments, and consumer." Chitu begins. "Investors were actively interested in buying or divesting, and overall, we were pleased with the market's momentum," she says, indicating that Romania's economy continues to expand, driven by increased consumption, fiscal policies, and available liquidity. However, looking ahead to 2025, "this trend seems contingent on several factors – most notably, the absorption of EU Recovery and Resilience Facility funds, which specialists frequently cite as a key future driver of investment for Romania."

Furthermore, Chitu says that 2025 has already brought both positive developments and challenges. "On one hand, Romania's strategic role in CEE is growing, particularly due to geopolitical instability worldwide. This trend was already noticeable in recent years, but, in particular, we are now seeing increased FDI screening, especially in strategic industries, which makes sense given the region's heightened importance."

At the same time, Romania's electoral cycle – with upcoming elections – has created significant political noise. "While we haven't necessarily seen deals being canceled outright, investors are being more cautious in their decision-making, assessing whether the timing is right for transactions," Chitu shares. Additionally, Romania, "like other CEE jurisdictions, faces increasing budget deficits, which limits government maneuverability and adds pressure to an already complex economic environment. Given this, we expect to see new tax and fiscal policy changes in 2025, which could directly impact the M&A pipeline and overall investment appetite."

Focusing on positives, Chitu reports that Romania has achieved full Schengen integration, which stands to facilitate cross-border trade and the movement of goods. "We also expect increased focus on Romania's OECD accession, which has already prompted several positive legislative changes, particularly enhancing corporate governance standards – not just for state-owned enterprises but for the broader market as well." Additionally, she reports that RRF funds have been a major stimulus for private equity investment. "We've seen PE funds in Romania actively tapping into RRF funding, particularly alternative investment funds. This influx of capital is fueling investment activity, especially in Romania's startup ecosystem, which surpassed the EUR 100 million investment threshold last year." Moreover, Chitu expects to see "intensified defense sector activity, including increased funds allocated to acquiring defense-related assets and solutions."

As for infrastructure, Chitu opines that "Romania must advance its infrastructure agenda, particularly in railways, roads, healthcare, and digital networks. Execution of projects in these sectors is expected to accelerate, driven in part by RRF funds absorption, changes brought by OECD requirements, and broader ESG compliance trends."

Finally, looking at capital markets, Chitu says that "depending on how market conditions evolve, the stock exchange could either benefit significantly from the higher volatility that these changes can bring, or face increased liquidity challenges if investors move away from listed securities to mitigate risks. At the same time, we hope that market reforms and increased investment activity will drive liquidity up and lead to more capital market transactions in 2025," she concludes.

Estonia's in a Cost-Cutting Mood: A Buzz Interview with Annika Vait from Rask Law Firm

By Teona Gelashvili (March 20, 2025)

From changes in government and potential alterations in tax reform to budget cuts in the court system and EU fines, the past few months have brought significant changes to Estonia's legal and political landscape, according to Rask Partner Annika Vait.

"All in all, it's been a few eventful months with lots of developments," Vait points out. "First, Estonia's government has gone through political shifts. The coalition will continue without the Social Democratic Party, with four ministers being already recalled. The Reform Party and Estonia 200, both liberal, remain in power and have decided to start bilateral coalition negotiations." According to Vait, what makes this particularly interesting is that "the prime minister has publicly stated that changes to tax regulations are coming." According to Prime Minister Kristen Michal, "Estonia returns to a simple income tax system." What is unusual about the idea is that "the changes in corporate income tax and personal income tax, which the prime minister wishes to cancel, have been legally adopted but have not yet entered into force," Vait adds. "There's a chance these tax changes won't be implemented after all, which is something foreign investors are watching closely."

Another major issue, Vait notes, is the ongoing discussion around budget cuts in the court system. "The government has decided that every sector – except national security and important investments – must cut costs. This has sparked public debate on whether it's appropriate for the legal system," Vait emphasizes. "Judges are already dealing with high workloads, and there's a concern that additional cuts will make court proceedings even longer. Beyond delays, there's also a real fear that the quality of procedural management and court decisions will suffer. For the first time, we're seeing judges consider stepping down by themselves – two have already announced their resignations, one from the district court and one from the Supreme Court."

"Last week, we also received important news from the Estonian Bar Association," Vait continues. "A new seven-member board was elected. What stands out about this new board is its diversity – board members come from both large and small law firms, and the combination of younger and more experienced lawyers, as well as women and men, reflects the modernization of the Bar Association, like what we see in contemporary private corporations."

On the European front, Vait notes that Estonia has been fined twice by the EU Court for failing to transpose the directives. "One involves the competition directive, where Estonia received a EUR 400,000 fine, plus an additional daily fine of EUR 3,000 for each day of further delay. The competition directive is still not transposed to Estonian legislation." Vait says. "The other fine concerns the EU whistleblower protection directive, which should have been implemented back in 2021. Our law on whistleblowing only came into force last year, leading to a EUR 500,000 fine. Although most of the work with whistleblowing protection regulation has now been completed, there are still some regulatory aspects that need to be finalized."

Lastly, Vait mentions that the Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs has released a report on crime trends in Estonia. "Fraud cases resulted almost in EUR 42 million in damages," she says. "The report also highlighted an increase in computer fraud crimes, which rose by 14% compared to the previous year." According to Vait, this trend aligns with developments in other countries, meaning that "while the numbers may be concerning, they're not unpredictable."

> *The changes in corporate income tax and personal income tax, which the prime minister wishes to cancel, have been legally adopted but have not yet entered into force. There's a chance these tax changes won't be implemented after all, which is something foreign investors are watching closely.*

THE DEBRIEF: MARCH 2025

In The Debrief, our Practice Leaders across CEE share updates on recent and upcoming legislation, consider the impact of recent court decisions, showcase landmark projects, and keep our readers apprised of the latest developments impacting their respective practice areas.

This House – Reached an Accord

Peterka & Partners Partner Adela Krbcova draws attention to the updates in the labor legislation. "On March 7, 2025, the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Parliament approved an amendment to the *Czech Labor Code*, known as the 'Flexi Amendment,'" she reports, noting that while "dismissal without cause was not adopted," still, "there are mechanisms that should make the termination procedure faster." Krbcova adds that the amendment also "provides better protection for parents and caregivers. It also tends to reduce the administrative burden on employers. The proposal includes significant changes to unemployment allowances and requalification as well." These, and some other changes, according to Krbcova, "are expected to come into effect on June or July 1, if there are no further delays in the Senate or in the finalization of the legislative process."

As for Poland, Linklaters Warsaw Head of TMT/IP Szymon Sieniewicz highlights amendments to the TMT law. "On February 12, 2025, the government released a new amendment to the *Act on the National Cybersecurity System* aiming to implement the *NIS2 Directive* in Poland," Sieniewicz notes. "The most important changes affect public entities with updated surveillance measures. Furthermore, rules governing joint duties among public entities have been clarified. Regarding surveillance measures, rules for application and issuing decisions have undergone changes, and maximum financial penalties for managers have been reduced."

Additionally, Sieniewicz says, "guidelines from the Polish Personal Data Protection Office regarding personal data breaches were updated in February. According to these guidelines, all incidents posing any risk level must be reported to the Polish privacy regulator. This strict approach diverges from broader European risk assessment frameworks and places demand on businesses operating in Poland to promptly refine their compliance strategies due to the increased potential for incident reporting."

In Hungary, according to VJT & Partners Partner Endre Varady, AI and cybersecurity take center stage. "Hungary's TMT sector has seen major developments in AI and cybersecurity over the past month, shaping both regulation and business strategy," he says. "A long-awaited milestone was the introduction of the cybersecurity audit decree, providing busi-

Anca Diaconu,
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Nestor Nestor Diculescu Kingston Petersen

Adela Krbcova,
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Carla Busic,
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MGG Law Office

nesses with clarity on compliance. Companies can now finalize agreements with auditors, set audit dates, and understand the scope." However, Varady points to the remaining key challenge of how thousands of businesses will complete audits by the end of 2025. "Given past flexibility, the regulator may introduce a grace period, though the law mandates full compliance, but it remains to be seen."

This House – Under Review

Wolf Theiss Poland Associate Zofia Zarebska reports that "the Polish Sejm has already begun the legislative process to implement the *Pay Transparency Directive*. However, the proposed amendments to the *Labor Code* have sparked considerable debate, raising concerns among both employees' and employers' representatives." A major issue she says, "is the ambiguous wording of several key provisions, particularly the definition of 'work of equal value.' This term is central to determining employers' obligations and employees' rights under the proposed changes."

The application of work of equal value, according to Zarebska has so far been minimal. "Under the current legal framework, employees are entitled to equal pay for equal work or work of equal value," she notes. "In practice, however, legal challenges based on this principle have been rare. This is largely due to the difficulty of comparing different types of work and the lack of clarity for employees on whether their roles qualify as being of equal value."

The new legislation "aims to change this by granting employees access to information about both their own wages and the average pay levels within their organization, broken down by gender, for categories of employees performing the same work or work of equal value," Zarebska says. "As a result, employers will be required to assess which roles within their workforce are of equal value." The amendments, however, "offer little guidance on how these assessments should be carried out or which positions should be classified as equivalent," she adds. "This challenge is further complicated by Article 4(2) of the directive, which mandates the use of analytical tools or methods to assist in evaluating and comparing the value of work. These tools should enable employers and social partners to develop gender-neutral job evaluation and classification systems, ensuring pay structures are free from discrimination." With the directive requiring full implementation by June 7, 2026, "it is likely that additional legislation will be necessary to address these gaps and provide clear guidelines for employers," Zarebska concludes.

This House – The Latest Draft

According to Nestor Nestor Diculescu Kingston Petersen Partner and Head of the Competition Anca Diaconu, Romania's draft *FDI Guidelines* was a major recent update. "In a significant step toward enhancing regulatory transparency, Romania has unveiled draft guidelines that seek to refine critical aspects of the FDI screening framework," she notes. "While the initiative signals a push for a more predictable approach, it does not resolve all ambiguities – leaving investors with critical gaps to navigate as scrutiny intensifies."

Dora Dranovits,
ESG Practice Coordinator,
DLA Piper Hungary

Endre Varady,
Partner,
VJT & Partners

Jelena Gazivoda,
Senior Partner,
JPM & Partners

Kostadin Sirleshtov,
Managing Partner,
CMS Sofia

A central aspect of the guidelines, according to Diaconu, "is the formalization of investment value computation. The EUR 2 million notification threshold now explicitly accounts for all funds committed by an investor, encompassing both cash/non-cash consideration, tangible/intangible assets, shares/ownership transfers, debt remission, compensation, services, or any other in-kind consideration. Notably, the valuation of share acquisitions is based on the price paid. In case of a share capital increase not implying share transfers, the investment value is the total amount of the contribution (both the nominal value of the subscribed shares and issue premium)." As to all other investments not involving payment of a price, "the value is ascertained as the market value of the acquired shares/assets, determined based on the acquirer's own valuation," she says. Additionally, "where an investment forms part of a broader multi-jurisdictional transaction without an explicitly allocated price for the Romanian leg, valuation will be based on parties' own assessments," Diaconu emphasizes. "Absent such allocation, the total value of the multi-jurisdictional transaction will be considered."

Beyond valuation, Diaconu points out that "the guidelines also confirm that the concept of 'control' is consistent with its definition under merger control rules but remain silent on one of the regime's more complex elements – the test of 'lasting and direct links' or 'effective participation in the management' remains open to interpretation." She adds that "for investors, the guidelines do not eliminate uncertainty altogether. Lack of clarity around key concepts means that assessing potential exposure will remain a crucial exercise in mitigating risks."

Greenberg Traurig Partner Agnieszka Stankiewicz draws attention to the new mortgage loan policy in Poland, announced by the government on February 13, 2025. "During the parliamentary elections in 2023, the current ruling parties promised to implement zero-interest mortgage loans to replace another low-interest (2%) mortgage loan program," she notes. "Both programs were generally believed to benefit developers and banks by stimulating house prices and making it more attractive to finance housing via banks. In the run-up to the presidential elections to be held in May and June this year, the government has done an about-face and decided to invest in social and low-rent housing." Based on the new governmental program, Stankiewicz says, "in 2025, municipalities will receive PLN 2.5 billion in funding for the construction of municipal housing and for cheap rentals – according to the draft bill adopted by the government. By 2030, the annual budget program implementation is to increase to PLN 10 billion."

Sieniewicz reports that the work on the draft Polish law concerning AI systems is progressing steadily. "On February 10, 2025, the Ministry of Digital Affairs published an amended draft law aimed at establishing a framework for overseeing AI systems in Poland," he says. "The main changes involve a new market surveillance authority, which will conduct oversight primarily remotely. Additionally, it regulates individual opinions (formerly known as interpretations) and introduces mechanisms to ease sanctions in exceptional cases." Of particular interest, according to Sieniewicz, "is the introduction of regulatory sandboxes, offering SMEs cost-free environments to test innovative AI technologies. The presented draft has been referred for further governmental work and public consultations."

DLA Piper Hungary ESG Practice Coordinator Dora Dranovits reports, "the EU Commission's Omnibus package, published on February 26," is likely "the most important development in the ESG legal practice in the last month." According to the Commission, "the package aims to reduce the administrative burdens of European companies and thus enhance their competitiveness on the global market. In both the *Draghi Report* and the *Budapest Declaration*, extensive administrative tasks were named as one of the main obstacles to European competitiveness, and the EU pledged to reduce the administrative obligations of companies by 25% in the first half of 2025," she continues. "This pledge manifested in the Omnibus proposal that cuts back the scope of the reporting obligations under the *CSRD* and *EU Taxonomy* by a staggering 80% and also narrows the companies' sustainability due diligence obligations to their Tier 1 suppliers, among other changes."

Dranovits adds that "the proposed changes are welcomed by some industry players, but are heavily criticized by sustainability professionals, NGOs, some Member States, and companies. Critics claim that the Omnibus package is a step (or more like leaps) toward deregulation in the field of ESG reporting, taken without underlying impact studies and other preparatory measures that should be taken into consideration when proposing changes on such a scale." Dranovits further notes that "the package now will go through the usual legislative process, however, the delay in the effect of the CSRD by 2 years may be fast-tracked, clearing the air for companies that fell within its scope by January 1 this year."

The Verdict

Stankiewicz also draws attention to the recent court judgments in Poland. "Since the autumn of 2022, Polish banks have been facing challenges regarding their WIBOR-based variable interest rate loan agreements due to the alleged violation of a number of laws, ranging from the *Polish Civil Code* or the *Mortgage Act* to EU directives," she notes. "At the end of last year, there were over 1,000 cases against banks and the number is growing. The most far-reaching demand being made is to invalidate loan agreements, which, if upheld by the courts, would be a huge challenge for the entire banking sector." According to Stankiewicz, "banks had been confident that such outcome was highly unlikely but at the end of January 2025, the first court judgment declared a WIBOR-based loan invalid. The court annulled the agreement and ordered payment of a substantial amount of money plus interest to borrowers. The judgment is not yet final and most certainly will be appealed by the bank concerned. Although the banking sector is trying to keep a cool head about this new development, the financial consequences of invalidating WIBOR-based loans would be a disaster for banks of a magnitude greater than in the case of Swiss franc loans, which have been plaguing the Polish banking sector for the last five years (on a sector-wide basis, the total cost of Swiss franc loans is already approaching PLN 100 billion)."

Critics claim that the Omnibus package is a step (or more like leaps) toward deregulation in the field of ESG reporting, taken without underlying impact studies and other preparatory measures that should be taken into consideration when proposing changes on such a scale.

In the Works

According to CMS Sofia Managing Partner Kostadin Sirleshtov, "finally, Bulgaria has a stable government, and the just-published *Governmental Strategy* puts a special focus on the energy sector." The confidence of the industry resulted in "Bulgaria's government approving the transfer of a 50% stake in the Han Asparuh offshore block from OMV Offshore Bulgaria, part of Romanian oil and gas group OMV Petrom, to NewMed Energy Balkan, a subsidiary of Israel's NewMed Energy," he notes. Furthermore, "United Group, Southeast Europe's leading telecommunications and media powerhouse, has taken a major step into the production of green electricity with an initial EUR 120 million investment in Bulgaria in both solar and wind. By 2027, these projects will supply 160% of the electricity needed for the Group's Bulgarian operations. In March 2025, the Sinitovo solar project reached its financial close thus adding an additional 50-megawatt peak to the Bulgarian electricity grid after 15 years in development. Similarly, Chint/Astronergy put into operation its first merchant project Boychinovci."

In Serbia, "March 2025 was marked by the announcement of the results of the second round of auctions for the market premium, launched by the Ministry of Mining and Energy at the end of November 2024," according to JPM & Partners Senior Partner Jelena Gazivoda. She adds that "investors submitted applications for 41 projects (seven applications for wind power plant projects, of which five projects achieved quotas, and 34 applications for solar power plant projects, of which five projects achieved quotas). The offered quota of

424.8-megawatt for solar and wind power plants was significantly exceeded." Gazivoda adds that "the total capacity of the power plants that received incentives is 645-megawatt, and the total planned investment value is EUR 782 million, which all confirms the high competitiveness in the sector of renewable energy sources in the Republic of Serbia and its potential for further growth."

Regulators Weigh In

"Since the last year and a half, we have seen a renewed increase in the Antimonopoly Committee of Ukraine's (AMCU) attention to the pharmaceutical markets," Redcliffe Partners Partner Yuriy Terentyev highlights. "The first signals came in the second half of 2023 when smaller regional distributors began voicing accusations regarding market foreclosure by the two dominant wholesale distributors, as well as by the leading national pharmacy chains. The AMCU initially used its advocacy tools to improve the competitive environment across all levels of distribution. This was shortly followed by the initiation of a case concerning the alleged abuse of dominance by the two dominant wholesale distributors in the middle of 2024."

"In March 2025, the pharmaceutical market was shocked by intense actions at the highest political levels in Ukraine, including initiatives from the President, Verkhovna Rada, and the National Security and Defence Council," Terentyev reports. "This resulted in the approval of legislation that introduced revolutionary changes to the pharmaceutical market, moving it toward more prescriptive regulation. This included controversial provisions limiting the markups for pharmaceuticals and market shares for distributors." He adds that "the AMCU is investigating an abuse of dominance case against the two major distributors, with results possibly emerging as early as mid-2025. It is not yet clear what consequences the current case may bring in terms of defining the unlawful behavior and the amount of the fine, nor whether it will open the door for private damages claims." Finally, Terentyev says, "we also anticipate increased scrutiny from the authorities toward pharmacy chains, as certain business practices – such as requests for significant marketing contributions – have sparked negative reactions from market participants."

Varady notes that "AI is no longer just a buzzword in Hungary – it is transforming industries." Notably, he says, "the government has appointed Laszlo Palkovics as the Government Commissioner for coordinating AI development and legislation, opening opportunities for AI tenders, best-practice sharing, and strategic planning." Market sources have also hinted at a revision of Hungary's *AI Strategy*, with an updated version expected soon, Varady notes. According to him, "regulatory compliance is also in focus. The *EU AI Act's* February deadline requires businesses to ensure AI literacy and eliminate prohibited AI practices. Although Hungary has not yet appointed an AI regulator, one is expected by August 2025, meaning enforcement of these new obligations could begin this year."

At the same time, "despite limited local guidance, the EU Commission's AI guidelines offer valuable insights into prohibited practices and system classification," Varady reports. "One notable clarification is that financial predictive models based on simple rule-based statistical methods – common in the banking and insurance industries – do not fall under the *AI Act*, as they lack autonomous learning capabilities. This distinction is crucial for financial institutions and other businesses relying on predictive analytics, as it helps determine whether compliance obligations apply to their systems."

According to Sirleshtov, Bulgaria's government aims for major investments in energy interconnectivity, new nuclear and renewable energy capacities, and storage. "The process of the selection of new members of the Energy and Water Regulatory Commission is to be completed by the Parliament with all candidates demonstrating high expectations and moral standards," he says. "The new Government appointed new CEOs of the National Energy Company and the Independent Bulgarian Electricity Exchange."

MGG Law Office Associate Carla Busic says that in Croatia, "as part of the collaboration between the Croatian State Intellectual Property Office (SIPO) and the European Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO), in March 2025, the SIPO appointed certified IP Scan and IP Scan Enforcement experts." According to her, "appointed experts were chosen mainly from the trademark and patent representatives list and were required to go through the EUIPO's training."

"IP Scan essentially represents IP pre-diagnostic service. It refers to professional support for small and medium-sized enterprises that, based on a review of the company's business model, products, services, and growth plans, recommend which intangible assets to protect and how intellectual property can help the business grow," Busic explains. "IP Scan Enforcement refers to the support of small and medium-sized enterprises with regard to intellectual property rights infringements."

"Both services are supported by the EUIPO's SME fund, enabling users to get up to 90% of costs reimbursed," Busic highlights. "With the inclusion of IPR experts and representatives in the EUIPO's IP Scan and IP Scan. Enforcement

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Zofia Zarebska,
Associate,
Wolf Theiss

services, the EUIPO, and the SIPO jointly endeavor to raise awareness of intellectual property rights and their importance within business." She adds that "this initiative may be particularly exciting for the technology and media sector in Croatia in which there seems to still be lack of awareness and strategy on how to protect and utilize potential and existing intellectual property rights within their businesses."

Pekic Law Office Partner Stefan Pekic highlights that in terms of Serbia's corporate/M&A, "the regulator is striving to expand ways for corporate financing," and "issuing corporate bonds by private companies is becoming more attainable." In this vein, Pekic reports that, a few weeks ago, "Elixir Group was approved by the regulator to issue the first green corporate bonds in Serbia. Such financing will help this company build a factory to reduce its ecological footprint. For decades, corporate finances in Serbia relied mainly on credits from commercial banks, and broadening the sources of financing will improve the liquidity of the market and accelerate development and growth."

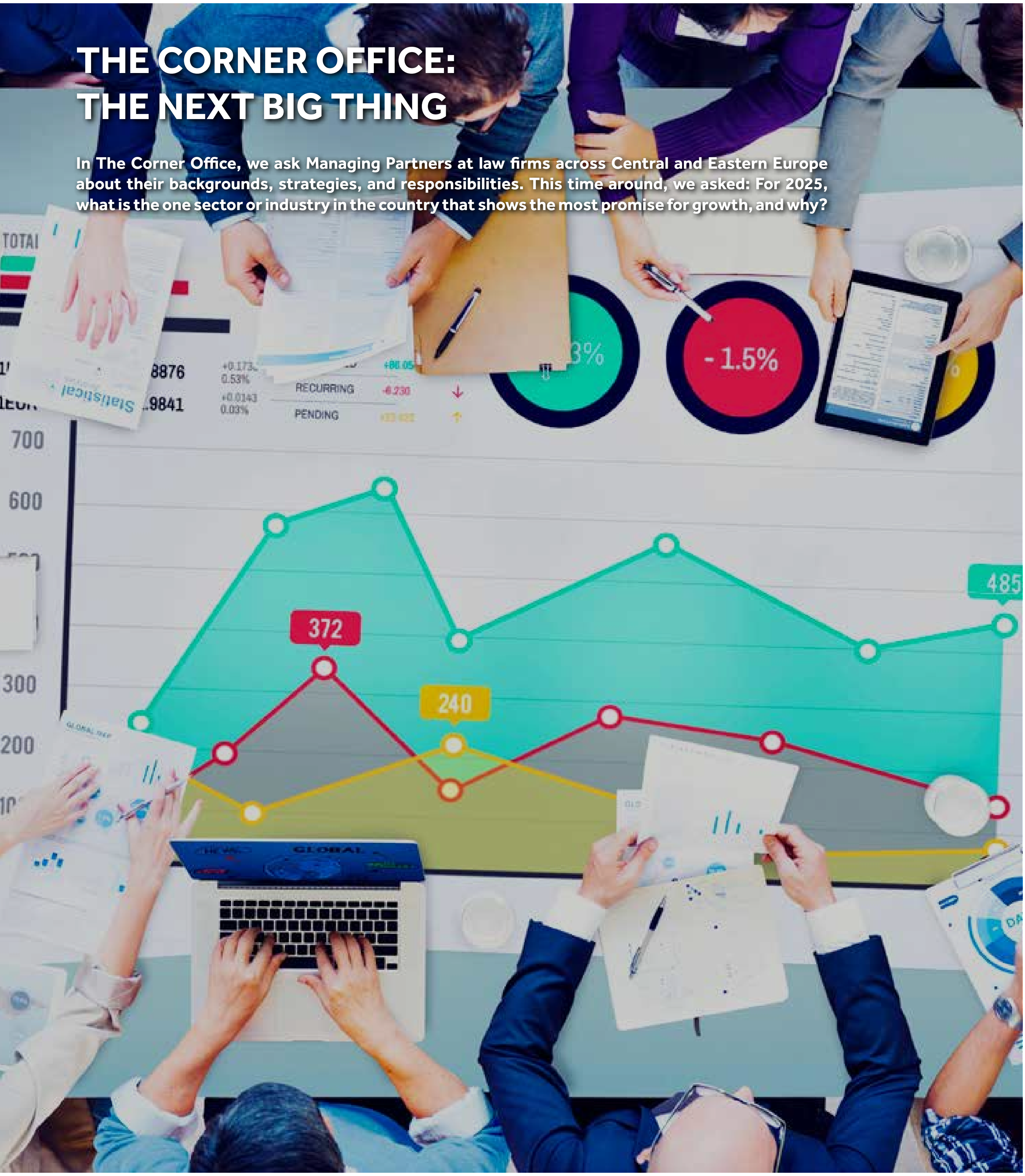
In Related News

Gazivoda notes that "February 27, 2025, was the announced date of entry into force of the sanctions against NIS introduced by the Office of Foreign Assets Control at the beginning of January 2025. Immediately before the deadline, Gazprom Neft transferred 5,15 % of its shares to its parent company Gazprom, formally fulfilling the condition that Gazprom Neft's ownership was reduced to less than 50% (Gazprom Neft currently holds 44.85% shares)." In the meantime, she says, "the entry into force of the sanctions against the NIS was postponed for one month, i.e, until March 28, 2025. Since the application of the sanctions was only postponed, there is still a huge concern about the impact of the sanctions against the NIS on the entire economy of the Republic of Serbia. The solution to this issue is complex, it requires a long time and the cooperation of the main decision-makers, and the deadline is running out again (March 28) – thus, the end of March brings with it a new concern and a new expectation regarding an additional extension of the deadline in which a sustainable solution could be expected to be found."

Finally, Stankiewicz says that "on the commercial banking front, there is a lot of interest from alternative credit providers in getting a foot in the door in Poland. Based on a Strategy& report, Poland's private debt market could reach PLN 9.2 billion in a pessimistic scenario and PLN 16.9 billion in an optimistic scenario by 2030, with a baseline projection of PLN 14.3 billion." She adds that "bank finance is still readily available in Poland, however, some lenders will not finance development or construction loans and in other cases, the leverage level offered by banks may not be satisfactory to borrowers. As a result, an increasing number of alternative credit providers are scouting Poland to understand the regulatory framework for senior and junior lending. This has yet to translate into spectacular transactions, but there does seem to be both supply and demand to achieve that goal."

THE CORNER OFFICE: THE NEXT BIG THING

In The Corner Office, we ask Managing Partners at law firms across Central and Eastern Europe about their backgrounds, strategies, and responsibilities. This time around, we asked: For 2025, what is the one sector or industry in the country that shows the most promise for growth, and why?



Octavian Popescu, Popescu & Asociatii, Romania: In 2025, the sector with the greatest growth potential in Romania is undoubtedly technology and innovation, driven by advancements in artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and digitalization. This industry continues to be the primary engine of our economic expansion. Romania benefits from a highly skilled workforce in critical fields such as Big Data, communication networks, and cloud computing, an IT sector that accounts for over 20% of exports, and a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem backed by significant foreign investment.

The growing demand for cutting-edge solutions such as 5G infrastructure, edge computing, and blockchain-based financial services further solidifies this trend. Geopolitical shifts and supply chain relocations also present opportunities for Romania to become a hub for local tech production and development, especially in collaboration with European partners.

While renewable energy plays a crucial complementary role, with untapped potential in solar and wind power, alignment with EU decarbonization goals and funding programs will accelerate its growth. However, technology remains the core driver due to its capacity to generate quick returns and address vulnerabilities like energy imports or inflationary pressures. Strategic investments in AI, cybersecurity, and digital transformation will not only boost GDP but also enhance Romania's economic resilience and global competitiveness.

Ion Nestor, Nestor Nestor Diculescu Kingston Petersen, Romania: The progress made in Romania's energy sector in recent years is already visible in the increase in investment volumes and the launch of many large projects.

Romania continues to make strong progress in transitioning to renewable energy, the country remaining attractive to investors, and new photovoltaic parks are expected to become operational this year. However, this rapid growth highlights a major challenge: insufficient energy storage capacity, a key issue for the national energy system.

In the natural gas sector, there are ongoing projects to increase the injection, storage, and extraction capacity of natural gas storage facilities. When these projects are completed, Romania will significantly increase its energy security, becoming one of the safest countries in the EU in terms of gas supply security to end consumers. In addition, Romania continues to implement major projects, such as the exploitation of gas from Neptun Deep, the development of the Romanian civil nuclear program, and the construction of photovoltaic panels and battery production plants.

Dino Gliha, MGG Law, Croatia: From my perspective, the most promising growth sector for 2025 in Croatia is artificial intelligence. Since late 2022, the democratization of AI has transformed market dynamics, shifting from early excitement to widespread, practical application. As businesses increasingly integrate AI to drive innovation and efficiency, they face new challenges that extend beyond traditional operational concerns.

In response, regulatory bodies have enacted significant measures – within the EU, most notably the EU *AI Act*, which imposes risk-based rules on AI developers and deployers. This evolving regulatory landscape highlights emerging AI-related issues, such as transparency, harmful practices, and data processing. In parallel, distinct intellectual property challenges – such as issues surrounding the training of AI models and rights over AI-generated outputs – are emerging independently of this regulatory framework.

Increased legislative activities raised awareness among stakeholders of the perils and responsibilities organizations dealing with AI might have. Industry leaders are proactively addressing these legal complexities, yet many organizations are still in the early stages of understanding their obligations. As AI matures, aligning robust legal frameworks with technological advancements is essential for fostering sustainable growth and complying with legal and ethical obligations.

Ondrej Peterka, Peterka & Partners, Poland: In 2025, the Polish aviation industry is experiencing dynamic growth in three key sectors: passenger traffic, aviation infrastructure, and cargo transport.

Passenger traffic has recovered post-pandemic, with 59.5 million passengers passing through Polish airports in 2024, and projections show further growth in the coming years. The growth is driven by new routes, increased flight frequencies, and rising demand for leisure and business travel. Improved connectivity and the expansion of air travel options are further fuelling this increase. Aviation infrastructure is undergoing major changes, particularly with the Central Communications Port (CPK) project. The CPK project aims to create a major international airport and integrated transport hub near Warsaw. Construction is due to start in 2026, with the first phase opening in 2032, initially serving 34 million passengers a year, with room for expansion as demand grows. Cargo traffic is also increasing thanks to improved infrastructure and the planned development of CPK. The number of freighters and cargo on passenger planes will grow. Poland is set to become a key logistics hub in Central and Eastern Europe, boosting economic growth and improving transport efficiency. These advancements indicate a promising future for the Polish aviation industry in 2025 and beyond.

Kostadin Sirleshtov, CMS, Bulgaria: 2025 will be the year of electricity storage in Bulgaria. This comes because of several factors: i) Free money from the EU: under the *Recovery and Resilience Plan* both the photovoltaic and battery energy storage systems (BESS) – so-called co-located BESS (estimated 1.6 gigawatts) and stand-alone BESS (estimated 3 gigawatts); both these co-located and stand-alone BESS projects will enjoy up-to 50% grants from the EU; ii) Feasibility of BESS projects – even those projects and investments that are not eligible or were not ranked among the winning projects under the *Recovery and Resilience Plan* are likely to consider and invest into battery storage, as the price of these systems dropped dramatically as a result of the increased volumes and demand; iii) Push by the financial institutions – many financial institutions adopted the view that new generation projects can't be eligible for financing if lacking BESS. This is yet another factor for the expected boom.

Goran Cvetkovic, Adria Legal Group, Serbia: In Serbia in 2025, despite local, regional, and global challenges, we believe that the energy sector, and within it, the renewable energy sector, has the potential for growth. The balance between traditional and renewable (clean) energy sources in Serbia is still largely in favor of traditional sources compared to the average. In this regard, we expect the pendulum to shift toward renewable sources.

Regarding the construction process, regulatory improvements have been made to enhance the efficiency of issuing all necessary documents and permits for construction. This applies not only at the national level but also at the level of local governments. Additionally, progress has been made in grid connection, with the third round of feasibility studies and contract finalization currently underway at Elektromreze Srbije.

We believe that progress must be made regarding prosumers, as the current limitations are not incentivizing and are more aligned with self-consumption, which distances us from the true prosumer concept.

An additional challenge is project financing, given the low price of PPA contracts, which automatically requires higher equity for project financing. Nevertheless, we remain optimistic and look forward to further growth.

Olexiy Soshenko, Redcliffe Partners, Ukraine: Given the ongoing attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure, including the capture of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant and the destruction or damage of hydroelectric facilities, it is evident that the Ukrainian energy system is in a dire state. This situation necessitates a multifaceted approach not only to develop alternative energy sources but also to implement non-traditional methods to ensure the safety and reliability of these new power sources.

The initial wave of investment in alternative energy occurred prior to the full-scale invasion in 2022; however, many wind and solar farms in the southern and southeastern regions are currently under occupation. In light of this situation, the Government of Ukraine actively encourages investment in renewable energy projects, including wind, solar, and biogas.

We are witnessing a growing number of renewable energy projects being developed in the western part of Ukraine, which is situated far from the war zone. Furthermore, the innovative solutions being explored, such as integrating alternative energy sources with batteries and employing various techniques to enhance the viability and resilience of these projects against wartime and economic risks are worth noting.

Zoltan Faludi, Wolf Theiss, Hungary: For 2025, both the green energy and automotive industries are showing significant promise for growth in Hungary. These sectors are poised to benefit from key investments, government policies, and Hungary's strategic position within Europe.

As Hungary further aligns with EU sustainability goals, the green energy sector will continue to experience considerable growth. The government is actively supporting renewable energy initiatives, including solar, wind, and energy storage solutions. This growth is not only environmentally beneficial but also economically promising, as it leads to new job opportunities and infrastructure development.

Hungary's automotive sector is also on track for robust expansion, driven by major investments in new production facilities, such as BMW, BYD, and CATL, which are anticipated to commence production soon. As global automotive manufacturers shift toward electric vehicles (EVs) and new mobility solutions, Hungary is emerging as an important hub for automotive production in CEE. New production sites, along with the expansion of existing plants, will create a surge in manufacturing activity and technology advancements, particularly in EV and battery production.

Together, these sectors are not only vital for Hungary's economic diversification but are also interconnected, with green energy supporting the electrification of transportation and automotive companies playing a crucial role in sustainable development.

Ivana Ruzicic, PR Legal, Serbia: In 2025, the food and beverages industry in Serbia holds strong potential for growth, driven by shifting consumer preferences and market innovation. Consumers are becoming increasingly focused on health-conscious choices, product origin, and environmental impact, expecting brands to offer high-quality, sustainable, and transparent solutions.

The demand for plant-based products, functional foods, and eco-friendly packaging continues to rise, alongside the growing importance of online sales and digital services. These trends are reshaping the market, creating opportunities for businesses that can deliver products aligned with new consumer expectations.

To succeed in this environment, companies need to invest in product quality, technological advancements, and sustainability practices while ensuring compliance with increasingly complex regulatory requirements.

Balazs Dominek, Andersen Legal, Hungary: If I had to pick one, I expect the residential property market to boom this year. Regarding existing properties and properties under construction, a significant rise in both prices and the number of transactions has already been registered early this year. Further price increases are expected due to the limitation of the supply side triggered by the low number of new constructions in recent years, accumulated savings from state bonds to be released, and government measures to facilitate financing.

The booming of residential property prices in itself might have little relevance for legal practices. However, respective actions of the government to mitigate the effects of booming prices and to relaunch new constructions – such as subsidies available to real estate funds – will trigger demand for respective legal work. Such advisory and real estate law work has been missing from the market for a while.

Pavel Hristov, Hristov & Partners, Bulgaria: In my view, there is not one sector or industry but a blend of two industries: energy and technology. Bulgaria has strong traditions, academic and practical expertise, and thriving businesses in both areas. We currently have a special generation of entrepreneurs interested in and invested in different forms and combinations of technologies and energy sources, consumption, and storage. Solar, wind, geothermal, hydrogen, biomass, batteries, charging stations, hardware and software solutions, and related services, e.g., engineering, design, and construction of solar plants globally.

Tech and energy businesses collaborate and combine increasingly and will, beyond doubt, create significant growth and investment opportunities in the near future.

Borislav Boyanov, Boyanov & Co., Bulgaria: Recent trends in Bulgaria's energy sector are focused on: the growth of renewable energy, including renewable hydrogen and the installation of storage batteries; the construction of nuclear power capacities (units 7 and 8 of Kozloduy NPP) and plans for exploring modular reactors; enhancement of energy infrastructure, particularly through increased investments in electricity transmission, distribution grids and development of smart grids; diversification of energy sources, such as geothermal energy. Efforts are also being made to achieve full liberalization of the electricity retail market, including the introduction of new legal frameworks related to the compensation mechanisms for electricity suppliers in the retail market.

Bulgaria is actively reducing its dependence on Russian energy imports by leveraging LNG terminals in Greece and Turkiye. Examples of projects aimed at guaranteeing the security of the energy supply include the Carmen electrical interconnector with Romania, increasing the capacity of the gas corridor between Greece, Bulgaria, and Romania, rehabilitating the Chaira hydro-power plant, and increasing the capacity of the Chiren gas storage facility. Additionally, Bulgaria is working on strengthening its energy connectivity and aims to become one of the largest balanced capacities in Europe by building new pump-storage hydropower plants at Dospat and Batak, along with battery installations.

Jakub Celinski, Dentons, Poland: We are witnessing a growing appetite for investments in sustainability, energy transition, decarbonization, and energy efficiency. This translates into a significant demand for infrastructure development across the energy (heating), transportation, and social infrastructure sectors. The infrastructure sector is expected to experience substantial growth, fueled in part by the absorption schedule of EU funds allocated to Poland.

Key investment areas will focus on transportation – particularly low-carbon transport – and energy, with flagship projects including the Solidarity Transport Hub, which encompasses airport construction and high-speed railway, as well as offshore wind developments. On a regional scale, the reconstruction of Ukraine will also require extensive investments, further shaping the infrastructure landscape. Additionally, we are observing a rising trend in defense-related investments across the CEE region.

Pal Jalsovszky, Jalsovszky, Hungary: Hungarian economic prospects are rather gloomy this year for various reasons. Neither developments in the world's economic or political situation are favorable for Hungary, nor our domestic tendencies are promising. There seems to be no such specific industry or sector that would make a clear exception to this trend.

I believe, though, that there will be individual success stories. As our world is still IT-driven, many of these stories will be connected to technology. Further, as both the maintenance of our life standards and the rapid growth of AI are dependent on extensive energy consumption, players in this sector will also be among the winners.

Christoph Mager, DLA Piper, Austria: When it comes to sector focus, I would definitely see technology in the lead in 2025. Austria's technology sector, particularly in AI, cybersecurity, digitalization, industrial innovation, and data analytics, is poised for significant growth. The tech industry has experienced a significant growth rate since 2023, with companies actively seeking professionals skilled in these areas. The Austrian economy needs to adjust supply chains, supporting domestic manufacturing, robotics, and high-tech production. This requirement aligns with Austria's strategic focus on advanced industry and technology. Companies focus on integrating AI-driven automation to enhance efficiency.

The tech sector creates transforming industries, and with MiCAR, it is strengthening Austria's position as a fintech hub.

The fast development in the tech industry is supported by an increasing number of foreign direct investments, mainly from US global players. We see that they have an active eye on highly innovative Austrian-based start-ups, which made the US the second largest investor in the last years.

Overall, in Austria, we will see a prioritizing in technology-driven growth, making it an increasingly attractive market for investors and businesses in 2025.

Djura Mijatovic, Zivko Mijatovic & Partners, Bosnia and Herzegovina: In 2025, Bosnia and Herzegovina is witnessing strong growth across key industries, including IT, consumer goods, and food production. The IT sector stands out, driven by digital transformation efforts and increasing investments in technological infrastructure. With a growing base of skilled professionals, the country is solidifying its reputation as a regional hub for outsourcing and software development.

The consumer goods industry, particularly in food and cosmetics, is expanding as demand for high-quality, sustainable products rises. Local businesses are innovating to meet market expectations, strengthening their presence both domestically and in regional markets.

Additionally, the luxury goods and automotive sectors are gaining momentum. Rising disposable incomes are driving demand for premium products, while investments in automotive manufacturing and distribution continue to boost the industry's growth.

Borivoj Libal, Eversheds Sutherland, Czech Republic: In 2025, AI and automation will likely continue to attract investment, driving efficiency across industries, particularly in smart manufacturing and fintech. The country's strong IT talent pool and increasing adoption of AI-powered analytics, robotics, and process automation are reshaping business operations and boosting competitiveness.

Manufacturing remains one of the pillars of the economy, with innovation in industrial automation and sustainability boosting its resilience. The sector is adapting to supply chain shifts and increasing investments in high-tech production, including electric vehicles.

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Legal 500 2024

RECENT WORK IN THE CEE REGION

1. **Vodafone** on the sale of Vodafone Hungary
2. **Aviva plc** on the sale of its entire shareholding in Aviva Poland to Allianz for cash consideration of €2.5bn
3. **Cineworld** in connection with its financial restructuring, including the successful emergence of entities making up its US and UK and Irish businesses from their Chapter 11 cases and the pre-packed administration of Cineworld Group plc, as well as the refinancing of Cineworld Bulgaria, Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary
4. **Three Seas** in relation to the acquisition of a 30% interest in R.Power for €150m and the subsequent syndication of a €75m stake to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.
5. **Vitol** on the sale by its subsidiary, Arawak Energy Ukraine BV, of its 50% interest in the Geo-Alliance Group, one of the largest producers of gas and gas condensate in Ukraine, to its joint venture partner EastOne

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Retail is transforming through e-commerce growth and omnichannel strategies. Consumer demand for digitalization is reshaping the industry, alongside evolving regulatory requirements.

A major cross-sector shift is the adoption of NIS2, DORA, and other related regulations, which will significantly impact cybersecurity and operational resilience. Businesses must enhance compliance frameworks, particularly in finance and critical infrastructure, driving new investments in security solutions.

Nenad Popovic, JPM & Partners, Serbia: With a total investment in EXPO 2027 estimated at EUR 1.29 billion, EXPO 2027 in Belgrade will be the main driver for the growth of the construction sector in Serbia.

This infrastructure project includes the construction of the Aquatic Center, a residential complex with 1,500 apartments, the Zemun railway connection to Nikola Tesla Airport, the new EXPO 2027 venue, and a new wharf on the Sava River, which will inevitably boost Serbia's construction industry growth not only in 2025 but also in 2026.

Bernhard Hager, Eversheds Sutherland, Slovakia: We do not expect significant growth in any sector in Slovakia. The country's backbone of economic growth is the automotive sector, and this sector is under pressure because of Chinese producers, the erratic, unpredictable, and protective steps of the Trump administration, and a general slowdown of car sales. On the other hand, Slovakia has a significant defense industry, and for obvious geopolitical reasons, this sector is growing. Maybe the only one in 2025.

Lana Stojs, Gospic Plazina Stojs, Croatia: In 2025, the banking sector in Croatia is expected to grow, driven by a combination of regulatory reforms, technological advancements, and evolving customer preferences. Digital transformation and fintech integration are continuously influencing banking services, and it is highly likely that traditional banks will continue to enhance their digital offerings. With the *Instant Payments Regulation* coming into full effect and Croatia also moving toward a cashless society, banks are expected to adopt new technologies to accommodate digital-only transactions. On the other hand, sustainability and green finance continue to be in focus for the banks, as both regulatory frameworks and customer demand push for greater integration of ESG principles into banking operations. In 2025, Croatian banks will likely offer more green financial products, such as green bonds and credit lines that support sustainable projects, especially since in January 2025, the *European Green Bond Regulation* was implemented into the Croatian legal system, thus aligning the Croatian legal framework with the *European Green Bond Standard*.

Milos Vuckovic, Karanovic & Partners, Serbia: Serbia's food industry stands out as one of the country's most promising sectors for growth in 2025. With a rich agricultural tradition, over 5 million hectares of farmland, and favorable climate conditions, Serbia is a powerhouse in food production and export. The industry's total market size is projected to reach EUR 6.8 billion in 2025, with steady growth driven by strong international demand and modernization in food safety.

Fruit production remains a key sub-sector, with Serbia ranking as the top European apple exporter to Russia. The fresh fruits market alone is expected to reach approximately EUR 1.03 billion by 2030, growing at an annual rate of 6.41% between 2025 and 2030.

With Serbia's GDP forecasted to grow by 4.5% in 2025, the food industry is well-positioned to expand further. As demand rises across Europe, the Middle East, and North America, Serbia continues to maximize its agricultural strengths, blending tradition with innovation to enhance its place as a leader in food production and export.

Oleksiy Feliv, Integrites, Ukraine: Ukraine's energy sector has been defined by the government as a top priority sector for rebuilding both during and after the war. The development of the energy sector is driven by two factors – severe damages caused by the Russian strikes and ambitious energy transition goals (27.1% of energy use to come from renewable sources by 2030) set by the government.

As a result, energy projects are experiencing rapid development. To keep the grid stable and enable higher penetration of renewables, in 2024, the national transmission system operator auctioned 5-year ancillary services offtake agreements for battery storage and gas peaker projects for around 400 megawatts. Another 300 megawatts are to be auctioned in the I-II quarters of 2025. Some 700 megawatts of balancing capacities have been put up for auction with a 10-year support scheme.

Availability of financing from the IFIs and DFIs resulted in further development and construction of solar and wind power generating capacities. In 2022-2023, around 1,500 (MEU, SEAU) megawatts have been put into operation. More to come in 2025.

Additionally, projects related to green gases, namely biomethane, took off after the Parliament passed a law on access to the natural gas infrastructure (pipelines and storage) in 2022. In 2025, the first factory built in Ukraine during the war exported biomethane to the EU.

Finally, Ukraine's minerals deal with the US includes conventional energy sources such as gas and oil, so these sectors might soon experience a boost too.

Eren Kursun, Esin Attorney Partnership, Turkiye: The gaming industry in Turkiye continues to stand out as one of the most promising sectors for growth. The Turkish gaming ecosystem experienced a significant boost during the pandemic, driven by lockdowns, which resulted in the rise of unicorns like Peak Games and Dream Games. Post-pandemic, the industry faced a drop in valuations together with peers across the globe due to various reasons. However, the Turkish gaming ecosystem has shown remarkable resilience and a strong bounce back. Some examples are Good Job Games and Grand Games, both start-ups that recently secured significant Series A funding figures, marking those two as the largest Series A rounds in Turkiye's history.

Looking ahead, the growth prospects for 2025 are further bolstered by the emergence of new venture capital firms dedicated to the gaming sector in Turkiye. These firms have substantial dry powder ready to be deployed and have been showing substantial interest in the Turkish gaming sector.

Djura Mijatovic, Zivko Mijatovic & Partners, Serbia: In 2025, Serbia's economy is poised for growth, with the ICT sector at the forefront. A skilled workforce and supportive government policies have positioned Serbia as a regional tech hub, attracting global companies and driving digital innovation. The country's investment in digital infrastructure continues to strengthen its role in the ICT industry.

The automotive sector is also expanding, particularly in electric vehicle (EV) production. Serbia's manufacturing base, bolstered by foreign investment, is set to benefit from the launch of the electric Fiat Panda, produced in Kragujevac. As demand for EVs grows, Serbia is emerging as a key player in Europe's automotive supply chain. Additionally, financial services are evolving rapidly, with fintech and digital banking gaining traction. More banks are embracing digital transformation, offering mobile and online services to meet the needs of Serbia's young, tech-savvy population. With strong Internet penetration and favorable investment policies, Serbia's financial sector is on track for significant growth in the years ahead.

SIMILAR VOLUME, LOWER VALUES: A CMS CEE M&A REPORT

By Teona Gelashvili

CMS Partners Horea Popescu, Alexander Rakosi, and Ryszard Manteuffel discuss the ebb and flow of M&A deals in CEE, highlighting that the M&A landscape experienced a significant drop in overall deal values prompting strategic shifts amid ongoing geopolitical and financing challenges.

CEELM: Looking back at the past year, what were the most significant trends shaping M&A activity in CEE?

Popescu: I think it was a good year. We have seen an increase in transaction volume, but the last five years have averaged around 1,200 deals annually, indicating relative stability. While the number of deals stayed roughly the same, values dropped considerably – from around EUR 37 billion to EUR 25 billion – mainly due to fewer megadeals. In Poland and Romania, for example, there were no megadeals to impact the overall volume.

Regarding private equity, we saw exceptions, like the notable Pet Food deal, but in general large PE transactions were limited; it was mostly small- or mid-cap. Meanwhile, some larger exits seem to be on hold, waiting for better market conditions.

Rakosi: Horea's perspective also fits the Balkan markets. Values were down, but activity levels remained solid. Private equity exits slowed, yet there was a stronger focus on add-on deals – an exit-prep tactic we expect to translate into proper exits in the next 12 to 18 months. PE still has capital to deploy, so it should pick up pace again soon. Some PE players judged last year as not ideal for exits and pivoted to refining their platforms for future sales. We also saw a rise in joint venture transactions, with competitors partnering on new product avenues – something we believe will continue.

Manteuffel: Poland didn't record the same number of megadeals as before, but the volume of smaller deals was strong. Many investors remain cautious about the war's repercussions and the overall shaky economic conditions, even if inflation is trending down. Still, there's substantial potential waiting on the sidelines.

CEELM: How would you compare the current deal landscape to pre-war levels?

Popescu: In terms of the number of deals, we're pretty much the same. Last year was probably the second worst in terms of values after 2020, which in itself was rather poor. However, our report does not cover the same countries as it did before – for example, we no longer cover Russia, and activity in Ukraine is naturally lower now. However, when we see that there is the same level of activity with these two markets not being part of the report, this indicates higher activity levels in the Balkans and the rest of the markets, which is positive overall.

CEELM: Which industries have been the most active in M&A transactions, and do you expect this trend to continue?

Popescu: Energy has been the standout, particularly in Romania and across CEE. Three of the four largest regional deals last year were energy-related, with two large deals totaling EUR 7 billion led by Czech investors CEZ and EPH. Distribution companies have been targeted, and though the number of renewable deals has slightly declined, a 600+ megawatt transaction with PPC in Romania shows that big deals are still happening. Overall, energy remained the star.

Rakosi: Aside from energy, infrastructure, data centers, and logistics were – and remain – key, especially in the Balkans. Healthcare has also been (and will continue to be) active, with assets like clinics/outpatient services centers changing hands. Moreover, circular economy areas – packaging and recycling – are drawing high attention.

Manteuffel: In Poland, according to our report real estate and construction were prominent, somewhat surprisingly so. Telecommunications, IT, banking, finance, and insurance were all active, while renewables saw a notable spike. Storage is emerging as part of green energy efforts. We've also seen significant life sciences activity – healthcare company consolidations and biotech developments.

CEELM: Are there any emerging sectors that investors should be watching?

Popescu: The sectors haven't changed much overall, just year-to-year shifts – sometimes real estate spikes, sometimes ener-

Alexander Rakosi,
Partner,
CMS Vienna

Horea Popescu,
Managing Partner,
CMS Bucharest

Ryszard Manteuffel,
Partner,
CMS Warsaw

gy. Manufacturing has historically been strong, but with the West flirting with recession, demand has dipped. I'd bet on technology, especially AI, to rebound, though data centers may be less appealing given energy costs. I still see healthcare, private schools, and retail reviving from basic consumer needs.

Rakosi: In industrial and manufacturing, we're at a robotics crossover. While digitalization as a driver for M&A activity isn't new, there's a strong push to automate workflows and production processes and lessen workforce dependence.

Manteuffel: Poland's strong IT sector is pivoting to AI across many companies. Investors keep an eye on how these transformations evolve, likely aiming for exits once the technology proves itself.

CEELM: What about M&A trends across different CEE countries? Are there any surprising developments in specific markets?

Popescu: The lack of megadeals in Poland was surprising. In Romania, there were no billion-euro transactions like in 2023, but plenty above the hundred-million mark. Romania's catching up, and I expect other countries to follow.

Manteuffel: We just signed a PLN 1.2 billion deal and there are others in the pipeline, so I expect larger deals to make a comeback. I am an optimist. It does not seem too much use being anything else.

Rakosi: Balkan ticket sizes remain smaller compared to some other markets, but there's optimism. Croatia, for instance, might get bigger deals in healthcare and retail, so I'd say cautious positive sentiment is justified.

CEELM: With financing becoming more expensive, how has this impacted deal structuring and valuations? Do you expect this impact to carry into 2025?

Rakosi: Financing clearly matters for M&A. PE players recalibrated valuations due to higher costs and/or volatile conditions, but those are now more predictable and less prohibitive. Still, big-ticket deals haven't thrived, so many PE firms refocused on smaller or mid-market transactions. We also saw more regional PE houses stepping in, capturing deals that might've previously gone to larger international players. Ultimately, we feel that the market adapted to increased costs.

Manteuffel: I agree with Alexander, deals remain doable, despite higher financing costs. We've seen some structural tweaks – like minority investments and heavier reliance on earn-outs – but none of this significantly slowed M&A. Another trend is the rise of family offices, which rely less on external financing and thus have an edge over traditional PE.

CEELM: What are the biggest risks or uncertainties that could influence M&A activity in the region over the next year?

Popescu: Risks are mostly geopolitical, like US trade tariffs and the war in Ukraine. If the war ends, we still don't know under what conditions. Inflation is down, which gives some predictability, but export-reliant countries could suffer if Western demand falls. In Romania, political turmoil and rising public debt could trigger a credit rating downgrade, impacting M&A, but – I remain hopeful.

Manteuffel: For Poland, geopolitics remains the main factor, especially the war. Also, energy prices pose real risks, even with green transition targets. High inflation and interest rates hinder companies' growth, so that's another concern.

Rakosi: I agree with both, those are the key risk elements to consider. For the Balkans, risk also remains tied to political stability issues and specific setups that differ from country to country. Foreign investment regimes can complicate multi-jurisdictional deals, but overall, it's these geopolitical elements that are the real risks. Despite all that, however, I remain cautiously optimistic for the region still.

MARKET SPOTLIGHT: GREECE

ACTIVITY OVERVIEW: GREECE

The Firms with the most Deals covered by CEE Legal Matters in Greece, between January 1, 2024, and March 15, 2025.

1.	Bernitsas	30
2.	Koutalidis Law Firm	17
3.	Papapolitis & Papapolitis	15
4.	Kyriakides Georgopoulos	13
	Lambadarios Law Firm	13

The Partners with the most Deals covered by CEE Legal Matters in Greece, between January 1, 2024, and March 15, 2025.

1.	Athanasia Tsene	12
2.	Maria Nefeli Bernitsa	11
	Nikos Papachristopoulos	11
4.	Constantinos Lambadarios	9
5.	Ioannis Kaptanis	6
	Prokopis Dimitriadis	6
	Nikos Koritsas	6

GREECE'S REAL ESTATE: A MARKET WITH A VIEW

By Teona Gelashvili

After a decade of economic challenges, Greece's real estate market is thriving, fueled by a tourism boom and strong foreign investment. With property prices still below pre-crisis levels and a growing focus on sustainability, PPT Legal Partner Alexandra Mitsokali and Moussas & Partners Senior Partner Loukia Papachatzi explore the sector's revival.

Strong Momentum

"The real estate market is one of the most dynamic sectors of the Greek economy," Mitsokali says. "The dynamics of the domestic real estate market were hit hard by the reversal of economic activity during the 10-year financial crisis that started in 2010. However, in the past few years, serious conditions for the recovery of Greek real estate have emerged." The latest figures reflect this positive trend. "Indicatively, in 2024, according to official data, the total volume of transactions concerning real estate exceeded EUR 23 billion, which means the real estate market is starting to show strong momentum."

Papachatzi agrees that growth is continuing, though at a steadier pace. She highlights that property prices are steadily increasing, "although at a more moderate pace compared to previous years, amidst continuous increases in property demands. Residential property prices saw a 9.3% increase in the first nine months of 2024, reflecting sustained interest, especially in Athens (+8.8%) and Thessaloniki (+12.5%)."

Location, Location, Location – And Some Incentives

The Greek real estate market "presents a unique blend of cultural allure, strategic location, and investment potential that makes it an attractive option for savvy investors," Papachatzi notes, outlining key drivers of growth.

Both Papachatzi and Mitsokali emphasize that affordability remains a major factor. "Despite the nearly seven years of uninterrupted growth, Greek house prices remain relatively lower than most European countries – attracting many foreign investors into the country," Papachatzi notes. Property prices in Greece "have not fully recovered compared to the levels recorded before the financial crisis, making them of the lowest in the EU," Mitsokali agrees. "While in 2014-2017 property prices in the Eurozone were increasing, in Greece they continued to follow a downward trajectory, in parallel with the decline in demand and economic activity in the country. Thus, they are still at a lower level compared to the Eurozone, attracting investors."

Economic growth has also played a crucial role in driving real estate demand. Mitsokali highlights "the positive economic growth rate in Greece since 2018, which, over the last three years, has been significantly higher than the European average and is expected to continue to grow at a rate higher over the next two years." Papachatzi echoes this, noting that "with diverse offerings from island resorts to urban developments, it emerged as a prime Mediterranean investment destination, experiencing widespread growth. The Greek economy achieved a GDP growth of approximately 2.1% in 2024, with projections of 2.3% in 2025 and 2.2% in 2026, consistently exceeding its long-term growth potential."

Tourism has further fueled real estate activity. "The real estate market is developing due to tourist arrivals and income, which have reached historic highs in recent years," Mitsokali continues. At the same time, policy incentives have played a part as well. According to her, "the implementation of the Golden Visa program has provided incentives for third-country nationals to acquire real estate in Greece, significantly promoting Foreign Direct Investment in our country."

Looking ahead, sustainability is becoming an increasingly important factor in real estate investment. Papachatzi points out that "as global real estate trends shift toward sustainability, Greece is emerging as a leader in environmentally responsible construction. Key initiatives include the integration of renewable energy, water conservation systems, and the use of sustainable building materials. These efforts not only reduce environmental impact but also enhance the long-term value of investments."

Megaprojects

As for the major projects, Mitsokali and Papachatzi highlight the developments taking place in Athens, Thessaloniki, and the Greek islands. The most important of these projects, according to Mitsokali, is "the Hellinikon Project at the south

Alexandra Mitsokali,
Partner,
PPT Legal

Loukia Papachatzi,
Senior Partner,
Moussas & Partners

coast of Athens, which has been described as the largest ongoing development project in Europe. The project includes an ambitious residential project including homes, high-end hotels, large, luxury shopping centers, and the tallest 'green' skyscraper, the Riviera Tower." Papachatzi adds that "located on the site of the former Airport in Athens, this ambitious development project aims to transform the area into a vibrant urban hub."

Papachatzi also draws attention to two other projects in Athens. "Aenaon Metropolitan Park, scheduled to open in 2028 in the south area of Athens, is set to become a major recreational destination, and it is expected to welcome over four million visitors every year. The 570-acre park will feature coastal trails, sports facilities, a marina, open-air cinemas, and repurposed Olympic venues. Designed with environmental sustainability in mind, the park will include 4,000 trees." Another one, according to her, is "the redevelopment of Hilton hotel in Athens into a world-class luxury hospitality and residential destination demonstrates Greece's attractiveness to global investors."

Turning to Thessaloniki, Mitsokali highlights infrastructure projects "with the metro baseline being handed over." This, "in combination with the ongoing Flyover project, which is the elevated open regional boulevard project, will contribute to the upgrading of the Eastern Inner Regional Thessaloniki and is expected to strengthen the market even more," she notes. Finally, Mitsokali points to the significant impact of tourism on the Greek islands. "We should not forget the strong growth in tourism over the last two years that has led to major rearrangements on the Greek islands, which are also peak destinations. Cyclades, Dodecanese, and Crete are the focus of interest for French, German, and American tourists, many of which use properties in the abovementioned islands not only as an investment but also as a second home."

What Are Investors Looking At?

In terms of investments, "interest is mainly focused on commercial real estate, with capital mainly directed to the tourism sector (hotels, Airbnb, etc.), commercial warehouses close to the center and suburbs of Athens, and office space with modern bioclimatic features," Mitsokali says.

Investors' interest varies "from traditional homes and luxury villas to vacation properties and commercial developments," Papachatzi adds. "According to a recent report of the Bank of Greece, investment interest in commercial real estate remains strong, with capital in the first half of 2024 being directed mainly to the tourism sector, commercial warehouses, and office space with modern bioclimatic features. In the mid-term, the sectors with the highest growth potential remain residential properties, commercial warehouses near the center and suburbs of Athens, data centers, high-end tourist facilities, and offices with bioclimatic design."

The Other Side of the Boom

Despite the market's strong appeal, several challenges remain. Papachatzi says that "challenges stem from geopolitical instability, high energy and raw material costs, tourism trends, and climate change, which may lead to stricter regulations and higher compliance costs."

For Greek residents, taxation is a significant concern. "One of the most important problems of the Greek real estate market for Greek residents is the over-taxation that has existed in recent years," Mitsokali says. "This in no way helps individuals who are considering buying a home for personal use. Without a change in tax policy toward real estate, the recovery of the market will only be occasional and will be purely influenced by the direction of tourism." Papachatzi shares a similar view, saying that "the surge in short-term rentals (e.g., Airbnb) is driving up rental prices, especially in urban areas," and that "housing shortages and rising property prices might reduce accessibility for local buyers."

Beyond taxation and affordability, the availability of high-end properties presents another challenge. Mitsokali highlights that "the properties that are currently available are of a specification that does not satisfy foreign investors who often seek ultra-luxury properties with facilities not found in an average residential Greek home."

GREECE'S GOLDEN VISA: A DECADE OF EVOLUTION

By Andrija Djonovic

Since its initial launch in 2013, Greece's Golden Visa program has proven to be one of Europe's most enduring residency-by-investment initiatives. Over the years, it has continuously adapted to shifting economic conditions, investment landscapes, and EU-level scrutiny. Drakopoulos Senior Associate and Head of Immigration Angie Alevizou takes a closer look at its evolution, outcomes, potential future changes, legal challenges, and competitiveness going forward.

Origins and Impact

Greece initially established the Golden Visa as a property-focused scheme, but it has since broadened to include multiple avenues of investment and adjusted its thresholds to align with various regions in the country. This shift from a narrow property focus to a diversified investment approach set the stage for a broader impact on both the market and the nation's economic strategy.

"Greece's Golden Visa program, initially launched in 2013 exclusively for property owners, has undergone significant changes to adapt to the evolving economic and political landscape," Alevizou begins. "The program, which originally required a minimum threshold of EUR 250,000 to purchase a property, has proven to be very attractive to foreign investors; over the past decade, higher thresholds have been introduced in popular regions such as Attica and the islands of Mykonos and Santorini."

According to Alevizou, the program now features a dual zone system for real estate investments, with a threshold of EUR 800,000 in the areas of Attica, Thessaloniki, Mykonos, Santorini, and islands with a population exceeding 3,100, while a "lower threshold of EUR 400,000 applies to all other regions. In addition, the scope of the program has expanded beyond

real estate, now encompassing other forms of investment, such as capital contributions to Greek companies, banking products, government bonds, and the recently introduced innovative start-up investment option."

The wide-ranging expansions, especially in property investment, have led to significant economic gains for Greece, with real estate, construction, and other related sectors benefitting from billions in foreign capital inflows. All of this delivered measurable benefits to Greece's economy.

"The key outcomes of Greece's Golden Visa program have been noteworthy, particularly in terms of foreign investment, property development, and economic impact," Alevizou continues. "Since its launch, the program has drawn billions of euros in foreign capital investment, strengthening Greece's position as an attractive destination for global investors seeking European residency. This investment influx has contributed to the country's economic stability by strengthening the real estate and construction sectors, generating employment opportunities, and increasing tax revenues."

Adjustments and Challenges

European oversight on Golden Visa programs has been ramping up, prompting periodic revisions to Greece's own thresholds and eligibility criteria to ensure continued compliance and attract high-value investments. Amid tightening EU regulations, policymakers have been compelled to rethink and recalibrate the program's framework.

"In light of ongoing changes in European migration and investment policies, Greece's Golden Visa program may encounter further adjustments in the near future," Alevizou says. "The European Commission has increased scrutiny and compliance regarding Golden Visa schemes due to concerns over security risks, corruption, and tax evasion. While many countries, including Spain, have revised or even abolished Golden Visa schemes, Greece has proactively responded by increasing the investment thresholds in September 2024." However, Alevizou indicates that further reforms may be anticipated in the near future.

The popularity of the scheme has at times inflated real estate prices, raising concerns about affordability for locals. Greece has balanced these concerns by tweaking its program, and directing investors' capital into other instruments as well. Still, while these regulatory adjustments aim to enhance program integrity, they have also ignited concerns about the local housing market's affordability.

"The significant increase in foreign property purchases has led to notable price increases in the Greek property market, making housing less affordable for residents. In response to the distortions in the housing market and EU concerns regarding investment-based programs, Greece has increased investment thresholds for real estate and introduced new forms of investment, such as capital contributions to Greek companies, banking products, and government bonds, thereby redirecting investors towards other financial opportunities," Alevizou explains.

Maintaining Competitiveness in the Face of Global Changes

Even as many nations roll back their Golden Visa schemes, Greece continues to adapt rather than retreat in contrast to the trend of retrenchment. Indeed, the country's location and lifestyle advantages may reinforce the country's appeal to investors seeking a foothold in Europe.

"While other countries have tightened or abolished their respective Golden Visa programs, Greece has taken a different approach by making adjustments to its own program," Alevizou says in conclusion. "In addition to financial incentives, Greece's strategic location provides access to both European and global markets, and the high quality of life is expected to sustain the country's competitiveness as a Golden Visa destination."

MARKET SNAPSHOT: GREECE

Greece's Constitutional Clash: Court Ruling Alters Real Estate Landscape

By Helen Alexiou, Managing Partner, AKL Law Firm

On January 24, 2025, the Council of State, Greece's highest administrative court, issued four landmark judgments. These are *Decisions No 146*, *147*, *148*, and *149/2025* of the Council of State in Plenary Session, published on January 24, 2025, and made available to the public on February 5, 2025. The decisions are expected to significantly impact the country's real estate market.

The rulings pertain to provisions of the Greek Building Regulations (*Law 4067/2012*), which provide "incentives" for increasing building parameters, such as the building coefficient and the maximum height, in exchange for voluntary reductions in the coverage coefficient, the creation of communal green spaces and/or planted roofs, and the construction of energy-efficient buildings. The court ruled that provisions introducing these incentives contravene Article 24 of the Constitution, which mandates a "rational urban planning", i.e., a planning process that adopts spatial and urban planning criteria and takes into account the specific traits and needs of each area.

Now, while the Council of State is not a Constitutional court, in the sense that its rulings do not nullify laws outright, the impact of its rulings is nonetheless extremely significant. When the court finds a law unconstitutional, any administrative acts issued on the basis of the unconstitutional provision are susceptible to annulment (provided that they may still be validly contested). Further, the administration is entitled (if not obligated) to revoke all similar acts that were based on the said provision. In short, judgments of such content are a big deal.

In this instance, the court opted to limit the effects of its rulings by specifying that they would take effect after December 11, 2024, when the Court's Chairman announced the content of the decisions to be issued. Pursuant to a second announcement issued on January 24, 2025, the court weighed, on the one hand, the public interest and, on the other hand, the principles of legal certainty, predictability, and the trust of the citizens who have constructed buildings, relying on the legislative regime and the incentives established by *Law 4067/2012*, and have acquired property rights over these buildings, in good faith. As a result, the court ruled that the consequences of the unconstitutionality should not affect building permits for which implementation (construction work) has demonstrably begun by December 11, 2024.

To put this in perspective, it is estimated that approximately 14,000 building permits issued under the contested incentives, where construction has yet to begin, are directly affected by the court's ruling. The impact would obviously be far greater if it included permits where construction had already begun – or had even been completed. The judgments reflect the court's effort to strike a balance between conflicting interests, recognizing both the need to uphold sustainability principles and the importance of providing stability and legal certainty to the real estate market.

Nevertheless, following the above announcements, chaos ensued. Several municipalities, particularly in the Attica region, reacted by indefinitely postponing the approval and issuance of new building permits that utilize the incentives. The Greek government attempted to regulate the matter with temporary measures. For example, Article 41 of *Law 5167/2024*, dated December 20, 2024, was extended by a decision of the Minister for the Environment and Energy until February 24, 2025, enforcing a further postponement of permits making use of the incentives and, at the same time, "canceling" any administrative act revoking building permits issued after December 11, 2025.

The matter is far from resolved, and all stakeholders of the real estate market, along with citizens and environmental groups, are holding their breath to see what comes next. In a country whose economy heavily relies on tourism, the importance of real estate development is paramount. With significant investments already on the line, many developers are now uncertain about how to move forward. Whether these projects will be halted, revised, or reapproved is still up in the air, and the outcome will undoubtedly shape the future of urban development in Greece.

But from a macroscopic perspective, the judgments in question highlight the Council of State's evolving role in shaping the future of urban development.

A 2025 Outlook at the Greek Corporate Landscape

By Mika Lalaouni, Partner, and Mariliza Kyparissi, Of Counsel, Drakopoulous

As we near the conclusion of the first quarter of 2025, it is clear that the Greek corporate landscape and M&A market are undergoing significant changes influenced by a variety of economic, regulatory, and social factors. While the M&A sector experienced steady activity over the past two years, its overall momentum was relatively muted, primarily due to geopolitical tensions, social dynamics, and inflationary pressures. However, a much-anticipated increase in traction appears to be on the horizon, making a comprehensive understanding of the current trends and challenges within the market crucial to effectively navigate and track this evolving environment.

In terms of economic recovery and growth prospects, Greece is actively emerging from years of economic turbulence, supported by a revival in tourism and an increase in foreign investments. Projections for 2025 suggest that Greece's GDP growth is expected to stabilize between 3-4%, bolstered by ongoing reforms, EU funding, and a more favorable investment landscape. Businesses, on their end, are increasingly emphasizing digital transformation, with a strong focus on ESG initiatives and sustainability to enhance their competitive advantage.

It is now clear that ESG considerations are playing an increasingly significant role in shaping corporate strategies and M&A decisions in Greece, with the majority of transactions being assessed through an ESG lens. Companies prioritizing sustainability and social responsibility are likely to attract greater interest from investors, and those with robust ESG profiles can achieve higher valuations in the market. Stakeholders are placing a stronger emphasis on sustainable practices, and businesses are acknowledging the necessity of incorporating ESG criteria into their operating models – a transformation that is driven by both evolving consumer demands and regulatory requirements. The tourism sector, a crucial part of the Greek economy, has seen strong recovery following the pandemic – a resurgence that benefits not only the hospitality industry but also stimulates related sectors such as real estate and local services. This positive outlook is attracting both domestic and foreign investors who are eager to capitalize on growth opportunities in these sectors.

Another notable trend in the Greek M&A market is the growing interest in technology and innovation. The government's efforts to promote a digital economy, along with EU funding initiatives, have spurred investments in tech start-ups and digital transformation across various industries. Sectors such as fintech, e-commerce, and renewable energy are experiencing particularly robust growth, making them appealing targets for M&A activity. Recently, the Greek market has seen established companies either increasingly acquiring tech start-ups or merging with one another to integrate innovative solutions, enrich their offerings, and strengthen their market position, mirroring thus a broader global movement that acknowledges the critical need of staying competitive in an ever-evolving digital landscape. Regarding foreign direct investment (FDI), Greece is experiencing an increase in cross-border M&A activities as the economy continues to stabilize. Investors from nations such as the United States, China, and various Gulf countries are particularly active, seeking to acquire stakes in promising Greek companies. The energy sector, particularly renewable energy initiatives, has emerged as a key area for international investment, fueled by the EU's green agenda and Greece's commitment to reducing its carbon footprint.

Despite the positive developments, the Greek corporate and M&A market faces several challenges primarily attributed to regulatory complexities and bureaucratic obstacles. Although the government has made efforts to streamline business operations and draw in investment, persistent issues such as a patchwork of fragmented legislation – encompassing competition, labor, tax, and corporate governance regulations – through which companies must navigate to effectively carry out transactions continue to hinder progress. In light of recent legislative developments, the Greek Parliament has passed *Law 5162/2024* in an effort to bolster economic resilience through the provision of enhanced tax incentives, particularly for legal entities and corporate transformations. This law includes provisions aimed at enhancing existing tax incentives and introducing new ones for Research and Development (R&D), promoting innovation, and supporting start-up businesses, as well as reforming the regulations governing business transformations.

As the country experiences economic recovery alongside a surge in foreign investment and an increasing emphasis on technology and sustainability, the corporate market emerges in 2025 as a dynamic landscape filled with both significant opportunities and substantial challenges, in which companies find themselves presented with a multitude of avenues for growth that could reshape the industry. However, to truly capitalize on these promising opportunities, stakeholders must skillfully navigate the intricate regulatory complexities that characterize the market and effectively address any skills shortages that threaten to hinder progress.

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Bonding Against the Storm: Navigating Natural Disaster Risks in Greek Banking

By George Zohios, Partner, and Amalia Vardakoulia, Associate, AKL Law Firm

The increasing frequency and severity of natural disasters pose significant risks to financial markets worldwide. In Greece, a country prone to wildfires, earthquakes, and floods, these challenges are particularly pressing. The performance of Greek banks and financial institutions is often negatively impacted by natural disasters. As a result, they are increasingly focusing on integrating natural disaster risk management into their bond loan structures to enhance financial stability and ensure market resilience.

Natural Disaster Risks in Greece

Greece faces a broad spectrum of natural disasters, including wildfires during the dry summer months, frequent earthquakes due to its position on a tectonic fault line, and floods in coastal and low-lying regions. The impact of these events on financial markets is reflected in higher probabilities of default, increased non-performing asset ratios, higher foreclosure ratios, lower returns on assets, reduced collateral values, and diminished equity ratios for affected businesses. Historical examples – such as the 2018 wildfires in Mati, Attica, and the 2019 floods that affected multiple European countries, including Greece – have illustrated the economic disruption that disasters pose to the European Union and its member states. This disruption highlights the need for banks to reassess their risk exposure in bond issuance and lending practices in general.

Strategies for Mitigating Natural Disaster Risk in Bond Loans

1. Risk Assessment and Mapping: Greek banks are increasingly incorporating environmental risk assessments into their bond issuance processes. Advanced modeling tools and geographic information systems (GIS) help quantify disaster-related risks, while historical data and predictive models are leveraged to further strengthen risk analysis. Additionally, the rapid advancements in data analytics enable banks to prevent losses and minimize the economic effects of natural catastrophes.

2. Covenant Structure and Contingency Planning: To mitigate the financial impact of extreme weather events, Greek banks are embedding disaster-related covenants into bond loans. These include *force majeure* and material adverse effect provisions, which allow adjustments to repayment schedules and grace periods in the event of a major disaster. Such flexibility ultimately enhances investor confidence while ensuring financial stability during periods of crisis. However, *force majeure* remains a legally ambiguous concept, often requiring interpretation by courts on a case-by-case basis, guided by legal precedent. The lack of a universal definition can create challenges in enforcing such clauses. Consequently, issuers and investors should carefully structure agreements to reflect specific disaster contingencies.

3. Insurance and Derivatives Products: Insurance and reinsurance mechanisms play a vital role in hedging against natural disaster risks. Typically, insurers offer financial protection against specific losses in exchange for regular premium payments. The hazards covered, the extent of compensation, and the cost of premiums are agreed upon in advance between the insurer and the bond issuer. Greek banks are also exploring catastrophe bonds as a means of transferring risk to global capital markets. These instruments enable bond issuers to shift financial exposure to investors willing to assume disaster-related risks.

4. Reserve Funds: Establishing disaster recovery funds has become a priority for both Greek financial institutions and municipalities. These funds provide immediate liquidity following a disaster, ensuring that financial obligations are met. The Greek government plays a central role in supporting affected bond issuers by providing emergency funding, tax relief measures, and state-backed loans. Through post-disaster relief programs, the government ensures the financial stability of both the banking system and key economic sectors, facilitating rapid recovery for affected institutions and businesses.

The Future of Disaster Risk Management in Greek Banking

As climate change intensifies the frequency of natural disasters, Greek banks are evolving their risk management practices. The *EU Green Deal* and other sustainable finance initiatives are driving innovation in financial products designed to mitigate natural disaster risks, allowing institutions to hedge against losses triggered by extreme weather events. Furthermore, green bonds and resilience bonds are emerging as viable instruments for funding climate adaptation projects, offering financial security while supporting environmental sustainability.

Conclusion

Greek banks are actively adapting to the growing threat of natural disasters by integrating robust risk management strategies into bond loan structures. Best practices, including risk assessments, structured bond covenants, and insurance mechanisms, contribute to a more resilient financial system. As climate risks evolve and natural disasters become more foreseeable, banks may need to respond more proactively than ever before. Ultimately, continuous adaptation and ongoing collaboration with European institutions, national governments, and investors will be crucial in ensuring the resilience of financial markets and the stability of Greece's banking sector in the years following a natural disaster.

INSIDE INSIGHT: KONSTANTINOS ARGYROPOULOS OF SPACE HELLAS

By Teona Gelashvili

With nearly three decades of experience in the legal and technology sectors, Space Hellas General Counsel Konstantinos Argyropoulos reflects on his journey as an international lawyer, from studying law in Athens, Paris II, and Harvard to leading the legal team of a multinational tech company.

CEELM: Tell us a bit about yourself and the career path you took leading up to your current role.

Argyropoulos: I've spent nearly 30 years working in and around law and technology, which might seem unexpected for a lawyer. When I started my postgraduate studies at Paris II in the mid-90s, the internet was still in its infancy. By the time I continued my postgraduate studies at Harvard Law School in the late 90s, the digital revolution was well underway, and I focused my research on how technology was reshaping the legal world.

When I returned to Greece, I started engaging with tech companies and exploring their legal needs. After just a few interviews, a major player, Space Hellas, offered me a role as their first in-house lawyer. At the time, IT companies were only starting to realize how important it was to have an in-house legal team capable of understanding technology. I built the company's legal department from the ground up, setting up policies and collaborating with other professionals. Since then, the industry has evolved dramatically. Today, Space Hellas is publicly listed on the Athens Stock Exchange and has grown into an international IT group with around 800 employees. As the Group General Counsel and Chief Legal and Compliance Officer, I now lead a team of 10 colleagues – quite a solid team by Greek standards.

CEELM: What was the primary motivation for staying in-house for such a long period of time?

Argyropoulos: One of the biggest factors for staying in-house for such a long time was the strong, trust-based relationships with shareholders, the board of directors, and the management team. Their consistent support and confidence in the work being done created a stable and rewarding environment.

Additionally, a deep passion for law and technology on a domestic and international level played a significant role, as working within the tech group allowed for continuous engagement with cutting-edge innovations that evolved over time. Another

key factor was the opportunity to collaborate with young, talented individuals who brought fresh ideas and perspectives to the table. This exchange of ideas was not only fascinating but also kept the work dynamic and intellectually stimulating, making it a fulfilling place to stay for many years.

CEELM: How large is your in-house team currently, and how is it structured?

Argyropoulos: As Group General Counsel, Chief Legal and Compliance Officer, I oversee the legal team, also responsible for the compliance unit, which is part of the legal department. Basically, our team is of a diverse profile – technology-oriented and focused on separate cases between public and private sectors (including corporate governance, capital markets, ESG, and compliance) having specialized colleagues dedicated accordingly, while also having colleagues to support our subsidiaries, including a big software house, and our international presence in Malta, Serbia, Cyprus, the Netherlands, and Jordan. Our two experienced assistants give us a strong advantage.

For complex cases outside our expertise, we collaborate with external law firms in Greece and abroad.

CEELM: What has been keeping you and your in-house team busy over the last 12 months? What about the upcoming 12 months?

Argyropoulos: As an IT group, we're deeply involved in AI, cybersecurity, and emerging technologies. Over the last years, we've been expanding our interest in digital transformation and cybersecurity, and over the last year, we have been taking initiatives to integrate more fresh and safe IT solutions to cover the ecosystem's needs and our working environment. AI is a hot topic, but from a legal standpoint, we need to look beyond the hype and focus on the real challenges – data quality, security, ethics, and compliance. Not all AI-driven solutions are reliable, especially with Agentic AI, and we need to evaluate which ones are worth adopting.

Looking ahead, AI will continue to transform how we work. Up until now, technology has had clear limits – we've used only a part of it for processing environments, emails, mobile & Wi-Fi communication, social media, streaming and gaming technologies, and basic automation. But we're now at a turning point where AI can improve efficiency in ways we never imagined, from basic customized AI tools to AI agents, as machine learning tools expand dynamically, in various fields, like contract drafting, interactive legal search engines, filling, automated on-line communication, text to voice applications, real-time translations, legal management, predictive tools, real-time participation in various meetings or forums etc. This is an exciting time to implement these tools strategically while ensuring that legal and ethical safeguards are in place.

Cybersecurity is another major focus. We need to refine our response protocols for cyberattacks, which – unfortunately – tend to happen at the worst possible times, usually on a Friday evening. Legal teams should be very well educated and have experience, as in-house lawyers will be second in line after the security team when responding to these incidents. Having clear guidelines and a well-prepared team is essential, and we're continuously improving our approach.

CEELM: How do you decide whether to outsource a project or handle it in-house?

Argyropoulos: It depends on the complexity of the case. If it's a major investment, a merger, or an acquisition, we typically bring in external counsel to ensure we have the right expertise and an objective perspective. These cases require specialized knowledge, and outside counsel can add an extra layer of security for both our legal team and the management.

For day-to-day legal matters, we handle most of the work internally. However, for high-stakes matters, especially those involving multiple jurisdictions, having external legal opinions helps us navigate risks more effectively.

CEELM: When picking external counsel, what criteria do you use?

Argyropoulos: Experience is the most important factor. Large law firms may have broad expertise, but we prioritize finding individual lawyers within those firms who have deep knowledge of our specific areas of need. It's also essential to meet the entire team, not just the lead partner, to make sure their working style aligns with ours.

As a publicly listed company on the Athens Stock Exchange, we also have additional related responsibilities when picking an external counsel, for example, to ESG and diversity criteria, which influence our approach to governance and compliance.

CEELM: What do you foresee as the main challenges for GCs in Greece in the near/mid future?

Argyropoulos: The biggest challenge will be integrating and working with the AI tools effectively into legal departments. This isn't just about using new technology – it's about changing company policies, training staff, and shifting mindsets. Lawyers need to embrace AI rather than fear it. Every time I give a speech in a legal forum, I see packed rooms full of lawyers eager to understand how AI can help them. The key is not just recognizing the value of these tools but implementing them in a way that enhances our work safely rather than replacing critical thinking.

Overall, I have a positive outlook on AI. We can't ignore the changes happening around us. We live in a new era, and resisting technology will only hold us back. Instead, we need to find ways to use AI responsibly while keeping the human aspects of our profession intact. Face-to-face communication will always be essential, but AI can streamline processes and make us more efficient.

Just recently, mobile companies announced new AI-driven phones. We also use new AI desktops or laptops and new AI versions of software. I believe this is just the beginning of a wave of innovations. The legal profession must keep up. For me, the challenge is not just understanding technology but making it work for us. My vision is to build a legal department that's fully equipped with cutting-edge technology, allowing us to work smarter and safer, adapt faster, and continue providing high-level legal support to our organization. Let's think about AI – technology-oriented in-house ecosystems in corporate environments!

KNOW YOUR LAWYER: JOHN KYRIAKIDES OF KYRIAKIDES GEORGOPOULOS

Career:

- Kyriakides Georgopoulos Law Firm; Managing Partner; 2019-present
- Kyriakides Georgopoulos Law Firm; Partner; 2005-2019
- Kyriakides Georgopoulos Law Firm; Senior Associate; 2004-2005
- Kyriakides Georgopoulos Law Firm; Associate; 2001-2004
- Kyriakides Georgopoulos Law Firm; Trainee; 1999-2001

Education:

- University College London; LL.M.; 1999
- University of Westminster; LL.B.; 1998

Favorites:

- Out-of-office activity: I am a sports enthusiast – I love playing tennis and practicing competitive water skiing (slalom).
- Quote: "Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts." – Winston Churchill
- Book: *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee
- Movie: *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994)

Top 5 Projects:

- Acting for Bombardier Inc. in a cross-border civil and criminal litigation linked to an off-sets agreement emanating from the sale of firefighting airplanes to the Hellenic Republic
- Acting for Vodafone Plc. in one of the largest claims ever filed in Greece for damages (in excess of EUR 1.2 billion) for alleged wrongful termination of an exclusive agency agreement
- Acting for various legal entities of the Siemens Group of companies in relation to claims emanating from the sale of rolling stock (trains) to the Hellenic Republic
- Advising UBS AG in relation to a cross-border dispute involving securities held by the Swiss Bank who acted as a custodian of "Folli Follie SA" and the Swiss company "Dufry AG"
- Acting for a Greek prominent high net worth individual, Maris Embiricos in relation to a civil (and corporate) dispute with respect to the ownership of shares in the entity that owns and controls the famous Petalioi islands

CEELM: What would you say was the most challenging project you ever worked on and why?

Kyriakides: One of the most challenging and rewarding projects was representing Bombardier Inc. in the above-mentioned dispute. This was a high-stakes litigation case involving complex legal, technical, and financial issues. The expectations of the client were high and the handling of the issues at stake required long hours of research, coordinated teamwork, working with experts, and strategic thinking to navigate unexpected obstacles. The challenge was not just the technical aspects but also managing my client's expectations while maintaining composure under stress. Ultimately, the success reinforced the importance of resilience, trust in yourself, and diligent preparation.

CEELM: What was your main takeaway from it?

Kyriakides: My main takeaway was the importance of adaptability and thorough preparation. No matter how well you plan, challenges will arise, and being flexible in your approach is key to overcoming them. It reinforced the value of clear communication with clients, managing expectations, and staying calm under pressure. The experience taught me that resilience and continuous learning are essential for navigating complex situations and that success often comes from the ability to pivot when needed without compromising on quality or integrity.

CEELM: What is one thing clients likely don't know about you?

Kyriakides: One thing clients likely don't know about me is the unwavering commitment I have to ethics and integrity. I believe in doing what's right, even when it's not the easiest path. My goal is to always act in the best interest of my clients, with transparency and honesty. I strive to create long-lasting, trust-based relationships, knowing that ethical practices are the foundation for achieving sustainable success and maintaining mutual respect.

CEELM: Name one mentor who played a big role in your career and how they impacted you.

Kyriakides: Without hesitation, that is my late father, Constantine Kyriakides, to whom I owe a lot. Growing up, he taught me the importance of hard work, perseverance, fairness, humility, and integrity. He was a man of wisdom and action, always leading by example. His guidance shaped my character in both personal and professional challenges.

He emphasized the value of listening and learning from others, while also standing firm in my beliefs. Whether it was his meticulous approach to problem-dealing or his dedication to his family, my father instilled in me the confidence to pursue my goals with passion.

Though he is no longer with me, our discussions and his guidance continue to guide me every day, reminding me to remain humble, set goals, and make an impact. His personality will always remain profound in me.

CEELM: What is the one piece of advice you'd give yourself fresh out of law school?

Kyriakides: I would tell myself to prioritize time with my family, especially my daughters. Early in my career, I was very focused on professional success, but I now realize the importance of being present in their lives. Work will always be there, but those precious moments with family are irreplaceable.

MARKET SPOTLIGHT: AUSTRIA

ACTIVITY OVERVIEW: AUSTRIA

The Firms with the most Deals covered by CEE Legal Matters in Austria, between January 1, 2024, and March 15, 2025.

1.	Schoenherr	53
2.	Eisenberger & Herzog	25
3.	Wolf Theiss	24
4.	CMS	22
5.	Binder Groesswang	18

The Partners with the most Deals covered by CEE Legal Matters in Austria, between January 1, 2024, and March 15, 2025.

1.	Dieter Zandler	11
2.	Claus Schneider	10
	Judith Feldner	10
	Teresa Waidmann	10
	Thomas Kulnigg	10

A WAVE OF MAJOR INSOLVENCIES IN AUSTRIA

By Andrija Djonovic

Austria continues to experience a wave of significant insolvencies, stretching court resources and prompting comparisons to past recessions. Recent legal frameworks have introduced new possibilities for restructuring, though so far with limited uptake. Taylor Wessing Counsel & Head of Insolvency Andreas Howadt examines both the immediate pressures – rising liabilities, high-profile failures, and logistical strains – and the evolving legal environment looking ahead to 2025.

Surging Insolvencies and Historical Parallels

Austria's courts are facing considerable stress due to a large uptick in major insolvencies, many with significantly high liabilities. A trend that, according to Howadt, began in 2023 and continued in 2024. "Since the end of 2023, which came to a dramatic conclusion with the Signa insolvency, Austria has been struggling with a wave of major insolvencies with ever-increasing liabilities. A look at the insolvency statistics makes this clear – compared to 2022, the total number of insolvencies in 2024 rose by around 38%, while the (estimated) amount of liabilities of insolvent companies increased by more than 750%," he reports. "The trend toward ever-higher peak liabilities in insolvency proceedings increased dramatically again in 2024, especially as the sixth-largest insolvency in terms of liabilities in 2023 would only have made it to 20th place in 2024."

These large-scale insolvencies present the Austrian insolvency courts with logistical challenges if anything "simply due to the number of creditors participating in those proceedings. As a consequence, specific rules have been set up for proceedings – e.g., separate case numbers just for claims filed by creditors, 'reminding' creditors of the limited room at the courthouse, or asking only one person per creditor to participate in the court hearings," Howadt explains.

Furthermore, a glance back at the 2006 recession suggests that traditional solutions may not suffice for today's structural cost pressures. "The current wave of insolvencies is largely driven by structural issues such as rising energy and commodity prices and higher personnel costs," Howadt reasons. "So far, no answer seems to have been found to this and isolated measures, which offered solutions during the crisis after 2006, will not lead to any lasting easing of the current situation. Overall, the situation now appears to be much more difficult, especially as the effects of major insolvencies along the supply chain will pose enormous challenges for entrepreneurs in addition to the generally difficult situation in the near future."

Recent proceedings, particularly those involving the Signa Group, hint at a more proactive stance by the Austrian state, according to Howadt. "The insolvency of the Signa Group, which was heralded at the end of 2023, and particularly the failure of the restructuring plan for the most important Signa companies, was certainly the most drastic development in 2024. Considering that this failure was essentially due to an appeal by the Republic of Austria – which no longer had any claims against those Signa entities at the time – it appears that the Austrian state will intervene more forcefully than in the past in sensitive insolvency proceedings if it deems it necessary," he posits.

Legal Framework and the Road Ahead

Although Austria's insolvency regime is long-established, new "pre-insolvency" restructuring procedures have yet to make a strong impact. "The Austrian regime for insolvency proceedings has long been robust and well thought out," Howadt explains. "Probably the biggest change in recent years was the introduction of 'pre-insolvency' restructuring proceedings in 2021. So far, however, the 'European restructuring proceedings' in particular, do not seem to have met with much enthusiasm. Since the introduction of this type of procedure, only one procedure has been opened." So far, then, the system remains dominated by the traditional insolvency process, while the newer framework stands underutilized.

As Austria faces both high liabilities and a spread of major insolvencies, the outlook remains uncertain. "For 2025 at least, the signs are clear that the high insolvency pressure will continue, although it is to be hoped that the number of particularly large insolvency proceedings – if only due to the structure of the Austrian economy – will at least not increase any further," Howadt says in conclusion. Though regulators and courts have adapted to administrative measures, the underlying macroeconomic and structural pressures persist. Whether these will moderate – or continue unabated – is likely to define Austria's insolvency landscape in the year ahead. ●

MARKET SNAPSHOT: AUSTRIA

Austria's Evolving Crypto and Banking Landscape: A 2025 Perspective

By Roman Hager, Partner, Act Legal

Austria's financial sector is experiencing significant regulatory shifts. These changes are reshaping the landscape for both domestic and foreign entities operating in the Austrian market.

Crypto-Assets

The implementation of the *EU's Markets in Crypto-Assets* (MiCAR) regulation, effective since December 30, 2024, has ushered in a new era for crypto-asset service providers (CASPs) in Austria. The Financial Market Authority (FMA) now oversees this sector, providing a clear regulatory framework that enhances Austria's attractiveness for crypto businesses.

Under MiCAR, all CASPs must obtain FMA authorization to operate legally. This requirement brings crypto services under stringent regulatory scrutiny, aligning with broader EU efforts to harmonize crypto regulations. The FMA's comprehensive guidance on MiCAR's application offers transparency, reducing regulatory uncertainty for market entrants. The regulation also intensifies actions against unauthorized providers and crypto-related fraud. Enhanced transparency and stricter enforcement measures aim to deter investment fraud, money laundering, and other dubious practices. Unauthorized entities operating without requisite approvals will face severe sanctions, supported by ongoing collaboration between Austrian and international supervisory authorities.

Since fall 2024, the FMA has already received several applications from foreign CASPs who see Austria as a potential entry point ino the EU market.

Digital Operational Resilience

In tandem with MiCAR, the *Digital Operational Resilience Act* (DORA) came into effect on January 17, 2025. This regulation enhances IT security and operational resilience for financial market participants, including CASPs. Under DORA, providers must implement advanced technical security measures, conduct regular stress tests, and maintain contingency plans to safeguard operations against cyber threats and system disruptions. Together, MiCAR and DORA aim to deliver not only greater transparency and confidence in the Austrian crypto market but also a technologically secure and resilient environment.

Capital Requirements for Third-Country Branches

Transitioning to the banking sector, Austria is preparing for the implementation of the *Capital Requirements Directive VI* (CRD VI), expected to be transposed into Austrian law by the fourth quarter of 2025. This directive will significantly impact how third-country companies provide core banking services in the EU and how third-country branches (TCBs) are supervised.

Foreign banks operating through branches in Austria will face stringent regulations aimed at aligning with EU prudential standards, including demonstrating effective internal controls, risk management procedures, and compliance frameworks. Any business with Austrian clients must be either unsolicited or accompanied by proper licensing, with even minor interactions potentially triggering licensing obligations.

Consumer Protection

In the realm of consumer protection, Austria is set to implement the new *EU Consumer Credit Directive* by November 2025. This will introduce significant changes to harmonize consumer protection across member states in credit transactions. The directive's expanded scope reflects a response to modern market practices, including the rise of "buy now, pay later" schemes.

Conclusion

As we progress into 2025, these regulatory developments bring both challenges and opportunities for financial institutions and crypto businesses in Austria. The country's strong regulatory framework, combined with its strategic position within the EU, continues to make it an increasingly attractive destination for foreign entities aiming to establish or expand their presence in the European financial market. Political changes in key markets worldwide are likely to influence financial market regulations, which must be carefully factored into the planning of business models and investment strategies.

For lawyers and financial professionals, keeping up with these changes is essential. The evolving regulatory landscape requires a deep understanding of both crypto and traditional banking regulations, as the boundaries between these sectors continue to blur with advancing technology and increasing regulatory alignment.

Austrian Drones – What Will the Neighbors Say?

By Jasna Zwitter-Tehovnik, Partner, DLA Piper

Drones, or unmanned aerial vehicles are becoming increasingly popular worldwide, including in Austria, with the drone global market to exceed USD 55 billion by 2030, reflecting their global importance. Drones can serve both as recreational gadgets and as professional tools for photographers, farmers, emergency responders, and other professionals. As with any new technology the benefits must be weighed against the risks.

This technology is increasingly used to enhance performance and reduce efforts in various professional settings. For example, farmers can deploy drones to locate injured animals or detect fawns in tall grass before mowing, preventing potential harm. Emergency services rely on drones to respond faster and more effectively to crises. Additionally, cartographers use drones for mapping and surveying difficult terrains.

Globally, drones assist firefighters, provide internet access in remote areas, and support scientific research on mosquito-borne diseases like malaria. In China, the emerging low-altitude economy envisions ambitious ideas like flying taxis and drone deliveries to remote locations. Their use is also increasing amongst hobbyists who continue to embrace drones for personal exploration and recreation.

Despite their advantages, drones also pose significant risks. On September 17, 2024, a near-drone accident occurred, where a private drone nearly collided with the Austrian Armed Forces helicopter by a hair's width. This near miss happened in a flooded area in Lower Austria, where the helicopter was used during a disaster operation. The incident led to the Austrian Armed Forces urging people operating private drones to steer clear of disaster areas.

More recently a private drone collided with a firefighting plane in California, which has massively hindered the fight against the devastating wildfires and resulted in considerable damage to the aircraft. These are just two examples of such instances with dozens more occurring in the last years.

Taking this into account, Austria adopted certain regulations in the already existing *Aviation Act*, under *European Regulation 2019/947*, which among others regulates commercial drone activities. The rules ensure safe and compliant operations of drones while taking into account the public interest as well as the rights of private individuals.

Historically, property rights were described as extending from "Heaven to Hell." With technological progress, societies started to impose limitations on these rights. Generally speaking, the *Austrian Civil Code* enables owners to control the airspace above their land, however only to the extent that they can influence airspace. Beyond this point, the airspace becomes a public good and everyone can use it. Taking this into account, drones can disrupt property owners' privacy and enjoyment of property. Nonetheless flying a drone over someone else's property is generally allowed in Austria, with restrictions applying to takeoff or landing.

This can infringe on privacy rights as many drones have cameras that capture images or recordings. Individual rights come into play since privacy is a recognized human right and biometric information that can be captured on a video is heavily protected by national and EU legislation. Capturing images or recordings is assessed under data protection laws and can either present an unlawful invasion of privacy or, in the case of publishing videos of photos obtained from a drone, this can substitute a copyright infringement as it can infringe on the right to one's image. Using a drone for prolonged surveillance could also constitute a criminal offense under the *Austrian Criminal Code*.

Further to this, under Austrian law, property owners are protected from nuisances that go beyond what is normal in their area and disrupt the usual enjoyment of their property. This includes disturbances from noise, vibrations, and other emissions. For example, if drones fly over someone's garden, producing noise that is much louder than what is typically expected in the neighborhood, this could be considered as an excessive nuisance, regardless of whether such unduly disturbance occurs during the day or during what is considered rest periods. If these excessive disturbances occur, property owners have the right to file a complaint with the relevant authorities, potentially leading to administrative penalties for the drone operator.

As drones continue to evolve, they offer exciting new possibilities for many areas of our lives. With ongoing development and learning from mistakes, drones can bring real benefits to society. However, their increasing presence necessitates strong legal frameworks that keep up with these changes and ensure everyone's safety, protect privacy, and uphold property rights. Future discussions will likely focus on enhancing regulations, covering any legal gaps, and creating a balance between innovation and individual rights.

Consider it. Done.

English Language Courts in Austria

By Anne-Karin Grill, Founder and Principal, and Stefani Funke Rodriguez and Ljubica Mitic, Paralegals, AKG Advisory

European Commercial Courts are positioning themselves as alternatives to other national courts as they remain closely tied to domestic court systems.

Recognizing that English is the dominant language for cross-border contracts, several European jurisdictions now recognize English as an official language in court. By offering legal frameworks aligned with the linguistic and procedural needs of international businesses, these jurisdictions have enhanced their competitiveness and positioned themselves as key players in cross-border litigation.

English-Language Commercial Courts in Europe

France was one of the first countries to recognize the need for English-friendly commercial courts, launching the International Chamber of the Paris Commercial Court and the International Chamber of the Paris Court of Appeal (CICAP) in 2018. These courts handle complex international disputes, allowing document submissions and witness testimony in English and sworn translations for final judgments issued in French. Following France's lead, the Netherlands established the Netherlands Commercial Court (NCC) in 2019. Unlike the French model, the NCC conducts entire proceedings in English, including filings, hearings, and judgments. However, participation requires both parties' explicit written agreement, and court fees are significantly higher than those in standard Dutch courts, raising concerns about accessibility.

Germany has lately followed the trend with the 2024 *Justizstandort-Staerkungsgesetz*, a law allowing the German Federal States to introduce English language court proceedings as of January 2025. Newly- established specialized courts will operate within higher regional and select regional courts, addressing concerns over procedural inefficiencies, inconsistent rulings, and rigid contractual interpretations, even offering confidential proceedings to safeguard business interests.

Enforcement

One of arbitration's key advantages over litigation is the quasi-universal enforceability of awards under the *New York Convention*, making it a preferred option for international businesses. In contrast, European courts rely on the *Recast Brussels Regulation* for enforcement within the EU, the *Lugano* and *Hague Conventions* for additional jurisdictions, and reciprocity agreements in all other cross-border constellations. The *Hague Judgments Convention*, as it gains broader adoption, may help bridge the enforcement gap by facilitating the recognition of foreign court judgments worldwide – with language playing a facilitative role.

English-Language Courts in Austria

Austria's judicial system currently requires all procedural documents to be in German. This not only increases costs but also introduces potential issues in legal interpretation, as judges rely on translations rather than assessing contract wording and party intent directly.

Introducing English as an official language in court would enhance efficiency, eliminate interpretation biases, and strengthen the principle of immediacy in judicial proceedings. Beyond translation challenges, the current schedule of court fees impacts international commercial litigation. With first-instance court fees amounting to a baseline of 1.2% of any amount in dispute exceeding EUR 350,000, Austria is less competitive than jurisdictions with lower procedural costs. Additionally, the rather unorthodox statutory requirement under Austrian law to pay levies on settlements makes negotiated/mediated solutions more expensive and thus less attractive. Recognizing these challenges, the President of the Commercial Court of Vienna and other prominent advocates have proposed the introduction of English as an official language in court. A draft law submitted to the Austrian Ministry of Justice outlines a phased implementation, starting with a pilot project before expanding to all three instances of Austria's judicial system. The pilot project envisions establishing three English-language departments at the Commercial Court of Vienna, maintaining the same high standards of independence, efficiency, and judicial competence.

The initiative signifies a pivotal step toward modernizing Austria's judiciary by eliminating costly translation requirements. The Commercial Court of Vienna has both the legal and human resources to implement English-language departments, making it the ideal starting point. Conducting proceedings in English would further enhance Austria's position as a neutral, efficient, and globally accessible dispute resolution forum, enhancing its appeal also for international litigation. Furthermore, Austria has a strategic opportunity to compete with other European jurisdictions that have already introduced English as an official language in court. Countries like France, the Netherlands, and Germany have recognized the benefits of accommodating English-speaking litigants, increasing their appeal as global litigation hubs. As these courts offer attractive frameworks for challenging and enforcing English-language arbitral awards, without a similar reform, Austria risks falling behind, losing potential cases to neighboring countries with more accommodating judicial systems.

To position itself as a prime location for international commercial litigation with evident synergies benefitting its already prominent stance as an arbitration venue, Austria must implement key reforms. Very encouragingly, the draft working program of the incoming Austrian government specifically lists as a judicial policy goal "*the strengthening of commercial litigation by international comparison, inter alia via the assessment of the use of the English language in court proceedings*."

INSIDE INSIGHT: SIMONE QUANTSCHNIGG OF VAMED CARE

By Andrija Djnovic

Overseeing legal matters for a complex healthcare organization demands both technical prowess and pragmatic decision-making – something Simone Quantschnigg has grown quite familiar with. Stepping in as General Counsel of Vamed Care group following a carve-out last year, Quantschnigg talks about her path from private practice to in-house leadership, the biggest adjustments in adopting an internal counsel role, and the forward-looking strategies she envisions for her evolving legal department.

CEELM: Tell us a bit about yourself and your career path leading up to your current role.

Quantschnigg: I studied law at the University of Vienna, did my master's and doctoral degrees there, and later completed a master's at the London School of Economics. Studying abroad gave me invaluable international community experience. Eventually, I returned to Vienna, finished my legal clerkship, and joined Freshfields for nearly five years in the dispute department. We handled complex litigation cases, often collaborating with different practice groups, which was very interesting and enriching.

After a while, I opted to go in-house at Vamed, then a global healthcare provider. That change required adjusting to clients and colleagues who aren't always legally focused and balancing time constraints. Still, it's been an extremely interesting journey. I initially worked on international projects as far away as the Kingdom of Tonga. Then, when Fresenius divested part of Vamed's rehabilitation business and PAI Partners acquired a 70% stake, my team and I handled a wide range of legal aspects tied to that transaction. Those experiences gave me deeper insights into both healthcare facility operations and high-stakes M&A in healthcare.

Following the carve-out last year, I became the General Counsel of the Vamed Care group. Now, the organization is in transformation mode, focusing more on Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, and Switzerland. My priority is to establish a modern, efficient legal organization that adds tangible value for our healthcare group, patients, and shareholders.

CEELM: What was the biggest shock when transitioning to the in-house world? On the flip side, what was the most pleasant surprise?

Quantschnigg: The biggest challenge was realizing there isn't the time or resources to examine every legal detail perfectly. You need enough confidence and pragmatism to accept decisions without having 100% legal certainty. Also, adapting to colleagues who don't share a legal background – and may view the legal department as a hurdle – was a critical adjustment.

On the pleasant side, closely collaborating with business teams and providing solution-oriented advice has been very rewarding compared to a more traditional law firm environment.

CEELM: How large is your in-house team currently and how is it structured?

Quantschnigg: Our legal function includes around 20 professionals handling legal, compliance, insurance, and data protection. We have a central group responsible for overarching issues and then country-specific teams.

Since last year's carve-out, when Fresenius divested part of the Vamed rehabilitation business and PAI Partners came on board, we've been restructuring to enhance efficiency and strengthen our legal operations. We want a cohesive setup that can support each local business arm while aligning with the group's goals.

CEELM: How do you decide if you are outsourcing a project or using internal resources?

Quantschnigg: It depends on factors like complexity, the required expertise, and our internal capacity. If a specific matter demands highly specialized legal knowledge or goes beyond our in-house capabilities, we involve external counsel. Otherwise, we prefer to keep work in-house, where we can remain closely aligned with business needs.

CEELM: When picking external counsel, what criteria do you use?

Quantschnigg: Key selection criteria include expertise in the relevant legal field, a practical, business-friendly approach, cost efficiency, and an understanding of our industry and compa-

ny-specific context.

Flexibility in fee arrangements is also helpful. Ideally, we want counsel who can collaborate closely, keep lines of communication open, and propose solutions that fit our risk tolerance.

CEELM: What has been keeping you and your in-house team busy over the last 12 months? What about the upcoming 12 months? What are you keeping on your radar that you think will impact your workload the most?

Quantschnigg: Over the past year, transaction-related work took center stage. We delved into the entire organization, addressing details that used to be handled elsewhere, like data protection or insurance matters. In parallel, we're pursuing digitalization and efficiency.

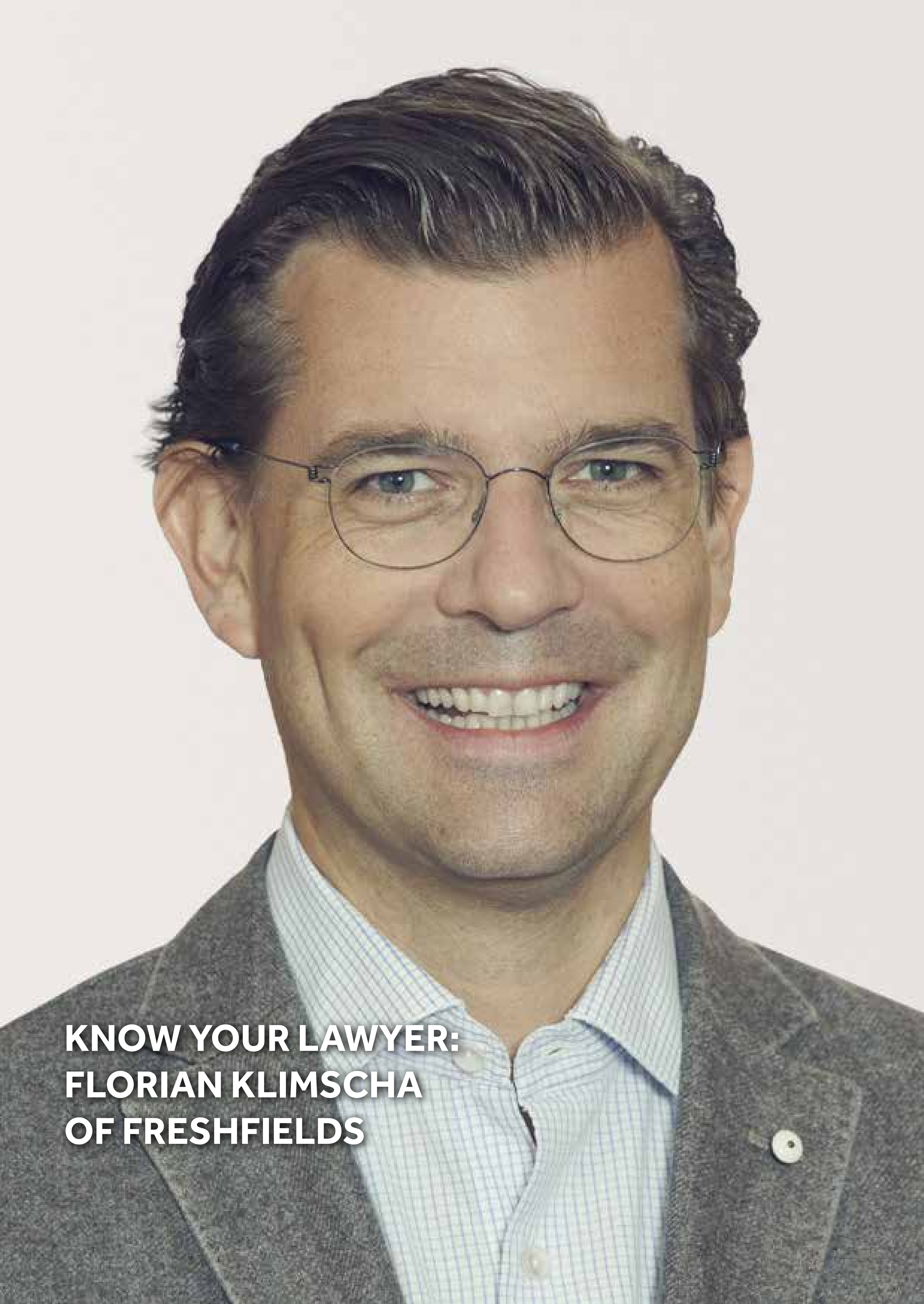
For the next 12 months, we plan to finalize our new governance framework, streamline processes, and push for standardization. This includes exploring new methods, AI tools, and digital solutions to enhance our everyday work experience and operational excellence.

Meanwhile, we must also be mindful of growing regulatory impacts – data protection, ESG, and supply chain requirements, for instance – to ensure we're prepared for ongoing and future developments.

CEELM: What do you foresee to be the main challenges for GCs across all sectors in Austria in the near and mid-term future?

Quantschnigg: GCs will need to navigate an increasingly complex regulatory landscape and maintain compliance across multiple jurisdictions. Coupled with persistent cost pressures, there's a need to balance high-quality legal support with tighter budgets.

Embracing digital transformation and integrating AI or automation into legal workflows is another challenge. Additionally, corporate governance is evolving, especially around ESG concerns and supply-chain legislation. Managing these dynamic legal risks requires agility, strategic thinking, and close collaboration with other business stakeholders. It's certainly exciting, but GCs must be ready to adapt quickly.



KNOW YOUR LAWYER: FLORIAN KLIMSCHA OF FRESHFIELDS

Career:

- Freshfields LLP; Partner; 2013-present
- Freshfields LLP; Principal Associate; 2010-2013
- Freshfields LLP; Associate; 2004-2010

Education:

- The London School of Economics and Political Science; Banking and Finance Law; 2004
- University of Vienna; Doctoral in Law; 2004
- University of Vienna; Diploma in Law; 2001

Favorites:

- Out-of-office activity: Spending time with my family and friends, playing tennis, skiing, traveling
- Book: *Woodcutters* by Thomas Bernhard, *Middlesex* by Jeffrey Eugenides
- Movie: *As Good as It Gets* (1997)

Top 5 Projects:

- Advising Pepco Group Services Limited – a pan-European retailer – on its withdrawal from the Austrian market via in-court insolvency proceedings over its Austrian subsidiary
- Advising global AVL group on a EUR 250 million revolving financing with a consortium of Austrian and German credit institutions
- Advising Julius Meinl – a leading international supplier of coffee and tea – on the structuring and implementation of two major financing projects with a total volume of up to EUR 120 million
- Advising Western Union on the financial regulatory aspects of the sale of the global Western Union Business Solutions (WUBS) business for USD 910 million to a private equity consortium consisting of Goldfinch Partners and Baupost Group (new brand: Convera)
- Advising Porsche Bank on the securitization of EUR 540.8 million

CEELM: What would you say was the most challenging project you ever worked on and why?

Klimscha: The restructuring of one of the largest construction groups in Austria – Alpine Bau – presented a challenge due to its sheer scale. Coordinating numerous lenders within a compressed timeframe demanded swift coordination within an extremely tight timeframe. The group's volatile cash flow complicated financial projections and stability. The substantial size of Alpine Bau amplified the complexity of the restructuring process. Furthermore, the challenging situation of the shareholders created an additional layer of significant difficulty for the restructuring.

CEELM: What was your main takeaway from it?

Klimscha: To be prepared to support quick decisions but not at the expense of thinking it through adequately to make it robust or think about alternatives.

CEELM: What is one thing clients likely don't know about you?

Klimscha: Clients might be surprised to learn that I enjoy reading glossy magazines like *Hello!*, *Gala*, and the like. It's a way to unwind, a small personal pleasure to be enjoyed on a plane or elsewhere.

CEELM: Name one mentor who played a big role in your career and how they impacted you.

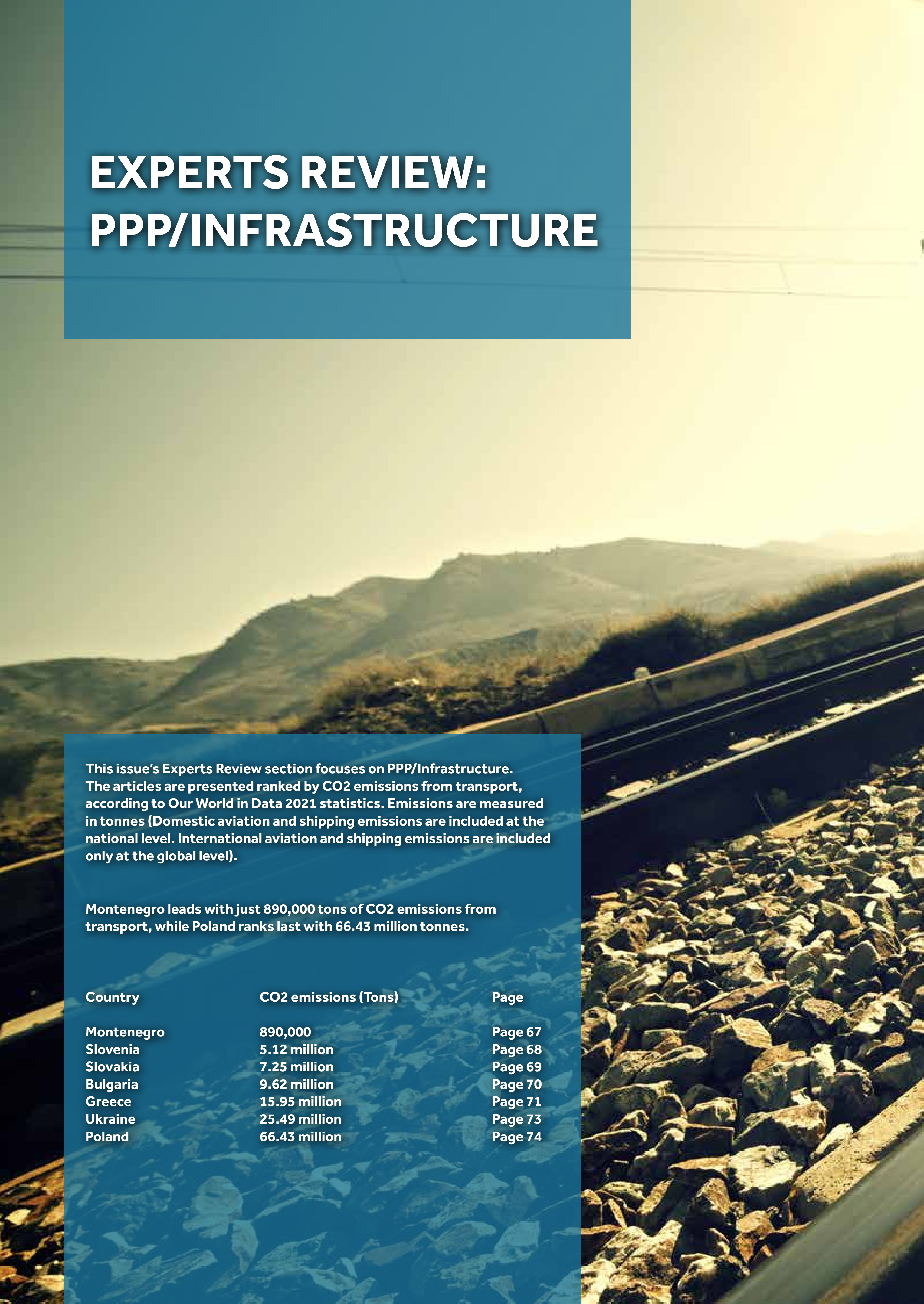
Klimscha: Maria Th. Pfluegl – the Partner I started to work with at Freshfields more than 20 years ago and who had a great feel for what clients need.

CEELM: Name one mentee (with your current firm or not), you are particularly proud of.

Klimscha: There are many, due to the fact that I had the privilege to work with a lot of incredibly talented and kind people over the last few years.

CEELM: What is the one piece of advice you'd give yourself fresh out of law school?

Klimscha: Take some time and plan a trip you will not be able to do for a while – you will remember it for a long time!



EXPERTS REVIEW: PPP/INFRASTRUCTURE

This issue's Experts Review section focuses on PPP/Infrastructure. The articles are presented ranked by CO2 emissions from transport, according to Our World in Data 2021 statistics. Emissions are measured in tonnes (Domestic aviation and shipping emissions are included at the national level. International aviation and shipping emissions are included only at the global level).

Montenegro leads with just 890,000 tons of CO2 emissions from transport, while Poland ranks last with 66.43 million tonnes.

Montenegro: PPPs – Legal Framework, Challenges, and Examples

By Nemanja Radovic, Partner, and Dijana Dedic, Senior Associate, Komnenic & Partners

PPPs represent a long-term collaboration between the public and private sectors, enabling more efficient construction, maintenance, and management of infrastructure, with an optimal distribution of risks and financial obligations.

The regulatory framework for PPPs in Montenegro is defined by the *Law on Public-Private Partnerships* (*Official Gazette of Montenegro, No. 073/19, dated 27.12.2019*), which came into force on July 7, 2020. Prior to this, the area was governed by the *Law on private sector participation in the provision of public services*. (*Official Gazette of the Republic of Montenegro, No. 30/02*). A related model – that of concessions – which refers to granting the private sector the right to manage certain resources or services, with the obligation to invest and pay a fee to the state – is regulated by the *Law on Concessions*. (*Official Gazette of Montenegro, No. 008/09, dated 04.02.2009, 073/19, dated 27.12.2019, 125/23, dated 31.12.2023, 082/24, dated 23.08.2024*)

To date, the concession model has been dominant in Montenegro, particularly in the energy and transport sectors, while PPPs have yet to be fully developed. One of the first successful PPP projects in Montenegro was the private student dormitory opened in 2013 in Podgorica, implemented by our client, Kroling DOO. This project stands as a positive example of a PPP, as it enabled construction without burdening the state budget, with the private partner assuming investment risks and ensuring efficient resource management. It shows that the PPP model can speed up construction, as the private sector often has superior technical resources and expertise for faster project implementation. In October of last year, a tender was published for the selection of a private partner within the framework of a public-private partnership aimed at the design, financing, construction, and management of the Lokanda hotel in Cetinje. The project includes the construction of a two-story underground garage and the landscaping of the Artist Square. The total value of the project is EUR 13.78 million. After the feasibility analysis of the PPP was completed and the private partner was selected at the end of 2024, the project is expected to begin. This is the first public call for awarding a PPP contract in Montenegro conducted in accordance with the new PPP Law.

PPPs have rarely been used in practice in Montenegro, and their full implementation has been limited, with only a few projects carried out under this model, mostly due to inadequate legal provisions, uncertainties in their application, complex procedures, administrative obstacles, and a lack of transparency. Fully realizing the benefits of this collaboration model will require a simplified and improved legal framework, stronger institutional capacity, and streamlined administrative procedures. By addressing these challenges, Montenegro can stimulate infrastructure development and establish successful, long-term PPPs.

Infrastructure

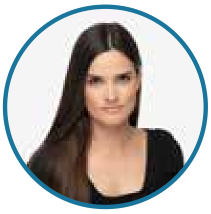
Montenegro's current underdeveloped infrastructure network is a growing concern, making its improvement a top priority in the coming period. One of the largest infrastructure projects in Montenegro in the post-communist period is the construction of the first section of the Bar–Boljare highway, despite numerous shortcomings and budget overruns. While the first section of this highway has been completed, plans for its continuation, along with other key infrastructure projects, such as the development of the Adriatic-Ionian motorway corridor and the construction of fast roads and bypasses for coastal cities, are currently under consideration. As part of this, a particular challenge is finding an appropriate solution for the route through the Bay of Kotor, where the construction of the Verige Bridge is being considered as a potential infrastructure project. The bridge would connect the two shores at the narrowest point of the bay, enhancing the region's transportation network. However, concerns about its impact on UNESCO-protected Kotor, as well as ecological, urban, and financial feasibility issues, present challenges. Alternative solutions, such as an underwater tunnel or a route across the Lustica Peninsula, are also being considered. The process of granting a concession for Montenegrin airports began in 2019, aiming to improve efficiency and infrastructure and attract private capital. However, this process has been stalled for nearly six years. In late 2024, bids for a long-term airport concession were reopened, but the lack of investment in recent years has partly resulted from uncertainties surrounding the concession process.

The most significant challenge to successfully realizing infrastructure projects in Montenegro is the complex public procurement process, which is essential for ensuring timely and efficient project delivery. Despite some digitalization, procurement procedures continue to be burdened by administrative complexity, long processes, and legal uncertainties, leading to delays in capital investment. Additionally, a lack of transparency, irregularities, and inconsistencies further hinder efficiency.

The process remains overly formalized, often excluding bidders over minor technical errors. Simplifying and expanding the digitalization of procurement procedures, alongside strengthening institutional capacity, would improve efficiency, accelerate project realization, speed up decision-making, and increase private sector interest in infrastructure projects.

Slovenia: Navigating Ljubljana's Office Real Estate Landscape

By Masa Kramar, Partner, Senica & Partners



Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia, is currently witnessing a substantial increase in the development of Class A office spaces. Over the next three years, the city is set to introduce more than 100,000 square meters of new Class A office spaces. These developments are characterized by modern designs and a strong emphasis on sustainability, aiming to achieve energy certifications that are crucial for ESG compliance.

The influx of new, sustainable office spaces is likely to prompt tenants to relocate from older, less efficient buildings to modern facilities that offer better energy performance and align with ESG criteria. This shift could result in increased vacancies in outdated office properties, compelling owners to invest in significant renovations to remain competitive.

This will be a significant challenge for many property owners for several reasons. First, they will need to find an architect capable of handling such a project – one who can design the renovation appropriately and obtain the necessary consents and building permits if required. In other countries, numerous specialized companies focus on assessing the energy efficiency of individual buildings, using precise measurements to help owners optimize operations and achieve substantial cost savings. Some of them are trying to enter the Slovenian market as well but are not very well known yet. Additionally, skilled construction professionals will be essential to implement the necessary energy solutions. Given the well-documented shortage of qualified construction workers and the unique challenges that renovations pose compared to new builds, this will be no small feat.

The entire project will, of course, also have to be financially viable for the investor. The process of renovating old buildings will naturally involve the municipality and, above all, the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage. Especially in areas where the institute's approval is required for modifications to buildings, it will be more difficult for investors to carry out modern renovations. For such renovations, property owners will also need appropriate financing from banks that currently largely support green renovations, as they need enough green financing for their own ESG reporting.

However, like it or not, owners will have no choice but to invest in such upgrades; otherwise, they risk having an unoccupied property or being forced to lease it at significantly reduced rates. In light of ongoing discussions about new property or real estate taxes – some of which, according to experts, should also apply to commercial spaces – owning such a property could quickly become more of a financial burden than an asset.

Another opportunity for owners of such properties is to seek a change in the intended use of the property or in spatial plans from commercial to residential use. Ljubljana faces a severe housing shortage and even under the most optimistic forecasts for new residential developments over the next three years, the supply of housing is unlikely to meet demand or stabilize prices.

Such changes will also require a great deal of flexibility from both the municipality and the state, and above all, a readiness to complete all necessary procedures for amending the spatial plan within a short time frame, which will enable changes in the building's purpose in the foreseeable future. It will also be interesting to see the municipality's vision for such changes – whether it will allow more extreme alterations in the city center, such as increasing the height of existing buildings, or whether it will aim to maintain the current building dimensions. In connection with the modernization of old buildings, it will also be interesting to see what the municipality will do further in terms of sustainability, particularly with improvements to public transport and greening the city, which could lower temperatures during increasingly hotter summers.

The question remains how green development initiatives will improve the quality of life in Ljubljana. Most new office buildings are making significant efforts to meet sustainability standards and be both environmentally and socially responsible. However, we are still very far away from having modern 15-minute cities and very far away from a crucial aspect of ESG compliance which is the amount of carbon dioxide emissions generated by users commuting to and from the workplace. Without an efficient public transport system, individuals will continue to rely on personal vehicles, further increasing carbon consumption.

The future of Ljubljana's infrastructure will surely be reshaped with more sustainable office spaces. However, successful integration with the green transition will require thoughtful modernization efforts and improvements in public transport to ensure the city's long-term sustainability.

Slovakia: New Construction Legislation (Again), EIA, and Strategic Investments

By Annamaria Tothova, Partner, Eversheds Sutherland

Permitting of any projects is a long-standing problem in the Slovak Republic. It seemed that this problem would largely be solved by the new construction legislation that was approved in 2022 and was supposed to enter into force fully on April 1, 2024.

However, *Act No. 201/2022 on Construction* will never enter into force, as it was abolished by a completely new *Construction Act* approved by the Slovak Parliament on February 2, 2025, which is to enter into force on April 1, 2025. Along with the new Construction Act, changes to many other laws related to building permits have also been approved (e.g., regulations on mining, municipal establishment, agricultural land, Slovak land fund, architects, etc.).

The main changes in the new law are summarized below:

It includes a simplification of the process of construction preparation by abandoning the current two-stage decision-making and introducing only one procedure – the construction plan procedure – by which the building authority expresses its consent to the proposed construction activity.

It introduces the obligation for the builder or project engineer to discuss the construction plan with the municipality, the authorities concerned, and the parties to the proceedings in the preparatory phase before the proceedings are initiated at the building authority. With the new act, construction permitting regimes are determined according to the complexity of the permitting, and the scope of the permitting processes is adjusted accordingly. At the same time, the scope of constructions for which notification is sufficient, or those that do not need to be assessed by the building authority, is expanded. The act leaves the building authority's agenda to the municipality, whereby municipalities can establish building districts similar to the current joint municipal authorities. At the same time, it tightens up the training requirements of staff working in construction offices. The act introduces an additional procedure for unauthorized constructions built before this *Construction Act* comes into force, with such constructions either to be retrospectively authorized or removed within a certain period of time. Lastly, the act maintains decision-making in the environmental impact assessment (EIA) process as a separate process.

As already mentioned, the new construction legislation does not integrate the EIA process into the construction permitting process. However, for many infrastructure projects, an EIA is necessary and very important in terms of time and funds. Therefore, an amendment to the *EIA Act*, effective from January 1, 2025, streamlines the process.

The screening procedure is exempted from the scope of the *Administrative Procedure Code*, which in particular limits public access to this procedure. The procedure will not result in a decision but only in a binding opinion (different remedies regime). The EIA procedure will start with the information on the proposed activity, which has a simpler structure and limited content and is the basis for the competent authority to determine the scope of the assessment. A new overall time limit for the procedure is introduced, instead of partial deadlines for individual steps. In practice, undelivered opinions and opinions after the deadline have prolonged proceedings. The amendment introduces the notion that if a written opinion is not delivered, it is deemed to be in agreement. Opinions received after the deadline are not taken into account or may not be taken into account (depending on the particular stage of the procedure). These are opinions of the individual authorities concerned, municipalities, and the public.

As the problems with protracted proceedings also affect state and strategic investments, the *Act on Extraordinary Measures for Strategic Investments and for the Construction of the Trans-European Transport Network* was adopted in 2024. Its aim is to improve the conditions for the preparation, implementation, and completion of investment projects identified by the government as strategic and in the public interest.

Strategic investments are projects in the fields of transport, economy, health, energy, defense, and security. The law introduces three main measures for strategic investments: (1) providing property rights for land and buildings necessary for the construction of strategic projects, (2) speeding up permitting processes for strategic projects, and (3) facilitating public procurement related to strategic projects.

The Government of the Slovak Republic, by resolution, decides on the designation of a submitted investment project as a strategic investment. Such investments include the construction of roads, railways, and inland waterways, with many strategic investments already having been approved (e.g., the R4 Lipniky-Kapusany expressway).

Bulgaria: Energy Storage Infrastructure on the Rise in Bulgaria

By Dimitar Kairakov, Head of PPP/Infrastructure, Schoenherr

In recent years, Bulgaria has increasingly prioritized the development of energy storage infrastructure as part of its broader transition to a more sustainable and resilient energy system. With growing renewable energy capacity, particularly from solar and wind sources, the need for efficient storage solutions has become critical to balancing supply and demand. Government initiatives, European Union funding, and private sector investments have driven advancements in battery storage, pumped hydro, and other innovative technologies. These efforts aim to enhance grid stability, reduce reliance on fossil fuels, and support Bulgaria's long-term energy security and decarbonization goals.

One of the key projects, launched by the Bulgarian Ministry of Energy in March 2024 under the *National Recovery and Resilience Plan*, aims to support the development of renewable energy generation co-located with electricity storage facilities. The Ministry issued a tender to provide investment aid for developing the storage component of the combined project.

The tender was split into two streams of applications so that both small and large-scale projects may benefit from the funding. The tender for smaller projects was applicable for storage facilities with installed power between 200 kilowatts and 2 megawatts and aimed to support at least 200 megawatts of renewable energy capacity alongside 100 megawatts of energy storage. The other tender was directed at larger projects exceeding 200 kilowatts, with targets to support at least 940 megawatts of new renewable energy capacity along with 200 megawatts of energy storage. The total budget of the tenders was approximately EUR 270 million and grants could cover up to 50% of the eligible costs.

The results from the two tenders look promising. Under the tender for smaller projects, 200 proposals were selected for funding with a total value of approximately EUR 54 million. The projects should bring 435 megawatts of renewable energy capacity and 176 megawatts (352 megawatt-hours) of storage capacity to the grid. As for large-scale projects, 49 proposals were selected for funding with a total value of approximately EUR 214 million. The projects should bring 2.66 gigawatts of renewable energy capacity and 1 gigawatt (2 gigawatt-hours) of storage capacity to the electricity system. Currently, funding contracts are being executed under which investors will be obliged to commission their projects by the end of March 2026.

In August 2024, the Ministry of Energy issued a new tender, funded under the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility, exclusively focused on standalone electricity storage facilities. The tender aims to support the construction of at least 3 gigawatt-hours of storage capacity. It represents a crucial step in modernizing Bulgaria's energy infrastructure and improving grid stability.

The total grant funding available for this procedure amounts to EUR 590 million. To qualify, projects must have a minimum capacity of 10 megawatts (AC) and be able to store energy for at least two hours. Each applicant can receive up to EUR 76 million, covering a maximum of 50% of the eligible costs under the procedure. Interest in this tender was significant, with over 150 applications submitted. The proposals are currently under evaluation and the awarded projects will be announced shortly.

The rise in storage infrastructure projects is driven not only by available grant funding programs but also by legislative changes in the past two years that have enabled the development of electricity storage facilities. The connection of standalone facilities to the electricity grid is subject to a grid bond of BGN 50,000 per megawatt of connected capacity.

Aside from new projects for the development of storage infrastructure, the Bulgarian government has also invested in repairing key state-owned storage infrastructure – notably the Chaira hydropower plant. The rehabilitation project is being carried out under a tender procedure launched by the National Electric Company, through which several private companies were awarded contracts to restore the plant's operational capacity. In addition, Bulgartransgaz, the state-owned transmission system operator of natural gas networks in Bulgaria, has recently issued a new tender related to the expansion of the Chiren natural gas storage facility. The subject of the new tender is the engineering, supply of materials, and performance of three exploitation wells. The estimated value of the public procurement is EUR 56 million and at the time of writing, proposals are expected by February 25, 2024.

Greece: Key Differences and Selection Criteria in Concession Agreements vs Public-Private Partnerships

By Prokopis Linardos, Partner, Your Legal Partners

Governments increasingly involve the private sector in infrastructure projects through concession agreements or public-private partnerships (PPPs). While both models attract private investment, they differ significantly in financial structures, risk allocation, and regulatory framework. Choosing the appropriate model depends on project objectives, revenue generation potential, and public sector involvement in funding and oversight.

Project Selection Process

The selection between a concession agreement and a PPP is based on the financial feasibility and the level of risk the public sector is looking to transfer. Concession agreements are ideal for projects where private operators generate revenue from end users and the exploitation of the infrastructure such as roads, airports, and marinas. PPPs, on the other hand, are chosen when state funding plays a crucial role while leveraging private sector expertise. Public bodies submit PPP proposals to the PPP Unit of the Ministry of Economy and Finance, which evaluates them and forwards them to the Inter-Ministerial Committee for approval under *Law 3389/2005*. This model is often applied to essential public services where user-generated revenue alone is insufficient to sustain the project as well as to social infrastructure like schools, where revenue generation is not feasible.

Remuneration and Risk Allocation

In concession agreements, private operators assume the financial risk and recover their investment through user fees and the exploitation of the infrastructure. On the other hand, although availability payments and exploitation of the infrastructure can be combined in PPPs, in Greece, the prevailing approach is that PPPs rely exclusively on availability payments from the state. This ensures a steady revenue stream for private investors, reducing their exposure to market fluctuations.

Contractual and Regulatory Framework

Concession agreements often require parliamentary ratification, reinforcing legal certainty and investor confidence, though this process can slow down implementation. PPPs, in contrast, benefit from a more streamlined approval process under *Law 3389/2005*. This legal framework enables efficient dispute resolution through arbitration and ensures contracts remain lender-friendly without requiring parliamentary endorsement.

State Oversight

In concession agreements, monitoring is fragmented among multiple public authorities, which can lead to administrative inefficiencies. The private operator must navigate interactions with various regulatory bodies throughout the contract's duration.

PPPs benefit from a centralized monitoring system under the PPP Unit. This entity ensures streamlined project oversight, simplifying compliance procedures and reducing bureaucratic complexity. A well-defined governance framework enhances efficiency and transparency in project execution.

Financing Considerations

Both models rely on a mix of private capital and institutional funding, with banks and investors typically covering 70-80% of project costs. In concession agreements, financial viability depends on demand forecasting. European resources, such as EIB funds, have been utilized in significant concession projects in Greece, including the Rion-Antirion Bridge and Athens International Airport. PPPs provide greater financial stability as cash flows are secured through state-backed payments. This makes them more attractive to investors as revenue certainty reduces financial risks. European Structural Funds and JESSICA initiatives have been leveraged to support PPPs, particularly in urban infrastructure and public service projects.

Application in Major Greek Infrastructure Projects

The concession of 14 regional airports involved the long-term lease and management of airports in various locations across Greece. Under such concession agreements, the private operator recovers its investment through revenues from airport users, while the state does not provide direct financial contributions, in a revenue-generating infrastructure model. Similarly, the Alimos Marina concession was structured to enable private sector investment in the redevelopment and management of one of the largest marinas in Athens, Greece. The concessionaire generates revenue from docking fees, retail spaces, and tourism-related services, without relying on public funds.

Conversely, the Thessaloniki Flyover PPP was developed as a PPP for the design, construction, financing, operation, and maintenance of a critical urban motorway project. The state structured the agreement with availability payments, ensuring stable, predictable cash flows for the private operator.

The 17 schools in Central Macedonia PPP followed a similar approach, as a private partner was selected to build, finance, and maintain the schools, receiving availability payments over the contract period to ensure high-quality infrastructure while minimizing the financial burden on the public sector in the short term, spreading costs over the long duration of the agreement. This approach is consistent with previous PPP projects, including the 14 Schools of Attica PPP and 10 Schools of Attica PPP, which were structured as social infrastructure projects that do not generate revenue, requiring thus availability payments from the state.

Ukraine: Public-Private Partnership Legislative Transformation for Post-War Reconstruction in 2025

By Roman Stepanenko, Partner, Asters

The year 2025 is poised to mark a significant legislative update in Ukraine's public-private partnership (PPP) framework, representing a critical strategic approach to the country's comprehensive post-war reconstruction efforts. The government, Parliament, and key stakeholders are actively preparing for an extensive rebuilding effort focused on infrastructure damaged during military hostilities. This process will rely on support from the European Union, the United States, international financial institutions, and other major donors.

Among both Ukrainian government officials and international partners, there is a prevailing consensus that PPP will serve as a key instrument for reconstruction. The ambitious target is to ensure that approximately 20% of reconstruction projects will be implemented through PPP mechanisms. Such ambitious plans necessitate substantial improvements in the regulatory framework to create favorable conditions for attracting private investments in this complex and large-scale reconstruction process. *Draft Law No. 7508*, currently prepared for its second parliamentary reading, aims to implement a profound reform and qualitatively enhance PPP procedures.

The main changes and innovations of the draft law are as follows:

1. Expansion of Financing Sources

The post-war reconstruction of Ukraine anticipates active financial engagement from international partners and donors. Governments of numerous leading European states and the management of international financial organizations (IFIs) have already declared their intention to participate in Ukraine's reconstruction processes. Consequently, to simplify international financing and guarantee potential private partners' rights, Ukraine's legislation will introduce the term "donor" – defined as a project financing party, which could be the EU, a foreign state, or an international financial organization. Crucially, the proposed law will allow private partners to receive funds directly from donors, bypassing public sector intermediaries. This measure is expected to simplify funding procedures and enhance the efficiency of investment flows.

2. New Areas of PPPs

Given the government's strategy to extensively apply PPPs in reconstruction, the legislative changes will broaden the sectors eligible for these partnerships. New areas will include residential construction, social housing development, and housing for military personnel. In alignment with Ukraine's European integration goals and commitment to sustainable development, the updated framework will also establish energy-efficient technologies as a distinct PPP category. This move is expected to attract investment in green infrastructure projects, reinforcing Ukraine's transition toward environmentally sustainable reconstruction.

3. Enhancing State Support for PPPs

The reform package includes plans to expand state support mechanisms for PPP initiatives. One of the key proposals is introducing a minimum income guarantee, a standard feature in international PPP practices. This measure aims to mitigate investor risks, providing greater financial predictability and encouraging private sector participation in large-scale projects.

4. Streamlining and Accelerating Procedures

A highly anticipated reform element is the introduction of the concept of a "small PPP project," which will feature a streamlined preparation procedure. Projects valued at less than EUR 5,382,000 will qualify for this simplified approach, involving the elimination of certain tender documentation requirements and reduced partner selection timeframes (potentially compressed to several months). This procedural simplification will primarily benefit the reconstruction of destroyed housing, hospitals, schools, and critical infrastructure, ensuring that vital services are restored swiftly.

5. Availability Payment Mechanism

A major legislative innovation involves refining the availability payment PPP model, which has yet to be effectively implemented in Ukraine due to regulatory constraints. The revised framework is expected to establish this mechanism as the primary form of government and donor payments in PPP projects. By introducing a clear legal basis for availability payments, Ukraine will enhance project viability and attract greater private sector engagement.

6. New Public Partners

Currently, state-owned companies' participation in PPP projects is practically impossible. Recognizing that state companies remain dominant in many economic sectors, allowing their PPP project participation could unlock new investment opportunities and encourage international private partners to invest in Ukraine.

Conclusion

The proposed legislative changes create favorable conditions for effectively utilizing PPP mechanisms during Ukraine's post-war reconstruction. Streamlined private partner engagement procedures and innovative collaboration forms signal PPPs' potential as a powerful investment attraction tool for war-damaged infrastructure restoration. Expectations are high that the Parliament will finalize *Draft Law No. 7508* in the first quarter of 2025, thereby initiating a massive investment attraction process. Through transparent, efficient, and investor-friendly conditions, Ukraine is not only rebuilding its infrastructure but also reinforcing its commitment to European integration, economic modernization, and international cooperation.

Poland: How to Win Public Infrastructure Contracts

By Tomasz Korczynski, Local Partner, and Katarzyna Stochnialek, Senior Associate, Greenberg Traurig

Implementing a public investment is an essential part of the business strategy of many private-sector companies. Why is this? Although such projects are typically low-margin, they do guarantee a stable income. Therefore, even though preparing a bid requires time and resources, many private-sector companies are keen to win a contract. Compared to 2023, the number of appeals filed with the National Appeal Chamber (the appeal body in public procurement) has increased by more than 27%. This shows that public investments in the Polish market are very attractive. If a private-sector company wants to operate in this sector, it must learn to swim with the sharks. Here are some rules that can help you take first prize.

Rule No. 1: be flexible. The public investment sector in Poland offers a wide range of opportunities to develop extensive cooperation between the public and private sectors. However, it is not only public procurement that can be a sound investment for a business portfolio. Private-sector companies wishing to enter the infrastructure sector may consider engaging in public-private partnerships (PPP) or works or service concession contracts.

A PPP is a form of cooperation in which the private-sector company provides financing, then carries out a project and remains involved in management or maintenance. The company must therefore be prepared for a long-term relationship that requires a high level of organizational commitment. Combining construction and management/maintenance often means finding a partner willing to join forces to deliver a project. However, the benefits are significant: a secure return on investment over many years (often up to 20). The attractiveness of this formula is demonstrated by the 19 new PPP contracts signed last year. Although the number may not seem high, given the realities of the Polish PPP market, it is rather impressive.

A works or service concession is, in simple terms, a PPP project in which most of the project's economic risk is borne by the private-sector company. The company is paid directly out of end-user fees. Concession contracts offer private-sector companies the possibility of a higher return but at the price of bearing a slightly higher risk.

Rule No. 2: stay active. Sometimes a public entity needs support in structuring a project. Of course, the dialogue with such entities has different rules from those in B2B. The principles of fair competition and transparency must be respected and the public procurement law itself creates mechanisms to facilitate such dialogue. One such mechanism is preliminary market consultation. For a private-sector company interested in such a project, it is worth taking the time to provide insights, presenting them as favorably as possible. The public entity may later return the favor by signing a contract on more favorable terms than it originally assumed.

If a procedure is conducted in a form that allows direct negotiations (such as competitive dialogue) private-sector companies should seize the opportunity. When sitting at the same table with a public entity, be well-prepared, know the ins and outs of the project, and have a list of objectives. Trying to understand the motivations and constraints of the other party is key. Public investment goes hand in hand with the rules on public expenditure, policies, and local community perception. Sometimes, you need a broader outlook than in a B2B relationship in order to find consensus in P2B negotiations.

Rule No. 3: be diligent. The number of appeals mentioned earlier in this article speaks for itself. Private-sector companies have to fight to win contracts. Lack of time and attention in preparing a bid can be a painful mistake. Any omission in the documentation will be spotted by competitors, every statement will be scrutinized and challenged. This also works the other way – the company should examine competitors' offers to make sure that the principles of equal treatment have been respected.

The infrastructure sector in Poland is full of challenges. The number of public investments is increasing, but with that comes greater competition and challenges in winning a contract. In the coming years, it is expected that alternative public procurement (PPPs, concession contracts, and EPCs) will be implemented in a greater number of projects. Private-sector companies should keep an open mind and be ready to adapt to the market.

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