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Guest Editorial: **Lawyering in CEE – Shaped by Change, Ready for What's Next** ■ **Across the Wire: Deals And Cases**

New Homes and Friends: On the Move ■ **The Buzz** ■ **The Debrief: December 2025**

Looking In: Interview with Valerio Scollo and Andreas Heinzmann of GSK Stockmann

Intellectual Property – Demand and Digitalization in Serbia ■ **The Corner Office: The Brilliant Move** ■ **Market Spotlight: Ukraine**

Rebuilding Ukraine: A Clear(er) Path for Reconstruction ■ **Defense City: Ukraine's Blueprint for Industry Acceleration** ■ **Market Snapshot: Ukraine**

Know Your Lawyer: Yuriy Terentyev of Redcliffe Partners ■ **Market Spotlight: Croatia** ■ **Croatia's Property Tax: One Year In** ■ **Market Snapshot: Croatia**

Know Your Lawyer: Miroslav Plascar of Kinstellar ■ **Experts Review: Life Sciences**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

3	Guest Editorial: Lawyering in CEE – Shaped by Change, Ready for What’s Next
6	Across the Wire: Deals And Cases
15	New Homes and Friends: On the Move
16	The Buzz
16	A Healthy Pipeline in North Macedonia: A Buzz Interview with Dragan Dameski of DDK
17	Reimbursing Medicines in Romania: A Buzz Interview with Alina Lacatus of DLA Piper Romania
18	Montenegro’s EU Momentum: A Buzz Interview with Sasa Vujacic of Vujacic Law Office
19	Turkiye’s Solid Quarter: A Buzz Interview with Deniz Tuncel of Herguner
20	Kosovo’s Political Deadlock: A Buzz Interview with Festa Stavileci of PRI Legal & Partners
21	Moving Targets in Hungary: A Buzz Interview with Szabolcs Mestyan of Lakatos, Kovacs and Partners
22	Austria’s Surge in Restructurings: A Buzz Interview with Horst Ebhardt of Kinstellar
23	Scrambling Fintechs in Lithuania: A Buzz Interview with Laurynas Narvydas of Walless
24	Bringing Buildings Up to Code in Serbia: A Buzz Interview with Djordje Djokic of Djokic + Partners
25	Bulgaria’s Euro Adoption: A Buzz Interview with Antoniya Markova of Gugushev & Partners
26	Poland’s REIT Potential Delayed: A Buzz Interview with Janusz Dziaochowski of Addleshaw Goddard
27	Ukraine Holds Breath for Day One: A Buzz Interview with Lina Nemchenko of Baker McKenzie
28	The Debrief: December 2025
35	Looking In: Interview with Valerio Scollo and Andreas Heinzmann of GSK Stockmann
36	Intellectual Property – Demand and Digitalization in Serbia
38	The Corner Office: The Brilliant Move
42	Market Spotlight: Ukraine
44	Rebuilding Ukraine: A Clear(er) Path for Reconstruction
46	Defense City: Ukraine’s Blueprint for Industry Acceleration
48	Market Snapshot: Ukraine
48	Ukraine’s New PPP Law Signals a More Predictable Investment Environment
50	Know Your Lawyer: Yuriy Terentyev of Redcliffe Partners
52	Market Spotlight: Croatia
54	Croatia’s Property Tax: One Year In
57	Market Snapshot: Croatia
57	Mind the Gap: Upcoming Changes to Employment Act in Croatia
58	Croatia Is Bracing for a Wave of Spatial Planning and Construction Law Updates
59	Using Media Content in AI Model Training: A Croatian Perspective on United Kingdom and German Cases
60	Know Your Lawyer: Miroslav Plascar of Kinstellar
62	Experts Review: Life Sciences
64	Serbia: Biosimilars – Regulatory Alignment, Market Pressures, and Legal Risks
65	Slovenia: Systemic Payback Mechanism: Legal Challenges in Managing Rising Medicine Costs
66	Slovakia: Exceptional Reimbursement of Innovative Medicines – Another Attempt at Squaring the Circle
67	Bulgaria: The 2026 NHIF Budget Bill and the Ongoing Debate on Reimbursement Mechanisms
68	Poland: Dietary Supplements Advertising – Challenges, Risks, and Regulatory Response

THE CORNER OFFICE: THE BRILLIANT MOVE

In **The Corner Office**, we ask Managing Partners at law firms across Central and Eastern Europe about their backgrounds, strategies, and responsibilities. With 2025 almost behind us, it's a good time to reflect on what truly made a difference this year. This time around, we asked: **If you had to pick one, what was the 2024 decision that moved your firm forward the most in 2025?**



Milos Velimirovic, SOG in cooperation with Kinstellar, Serbia:

If I had to choose one 2024 decision that propelled our firm the most in 2025, it would be this: running the firm with the same strategic discipline we apply to our clients' work. As a Serbia-based firm active across the Western Balkans, working closely with international law firms and foreign investors, we decided that internal organization would carry even more weight than external visibility. We introduced a structured planning cycle and careful budgeting, linking every euro for conferences, travel, and marketing to concrete internal goals: better workflows, clearer responsibility lines, and smarter use of technology. In parallel, we invested heavily in people – creating space for lawyers and staff to express their interests in new sectors, jurisdictions, and skills. This fed directly into a more focused business development effort: our lawyers now pursue opportunities that match both market demand and their personal strengths. So far, the result has been stronger cooperation with international firms, greater trust from clients, and a firm that feels more aligned and efficient.



Roman Hager, Act Legal, Austria:

For Act Legal Austria, the most influential decision of 2024 – and the one propelling us most strongly into 2025 – was the strategic consolidation of our brand within the international Act Legal alliance while firmly maintaining our local identity and business approach. This balance proved decisive: an international brand that opens doors across the CEE region and beyond, combined with the hands-on, partner-driven service of a well-established Austrian firm. The Austrian legal market has become increasingly competitive, with mid-market companies, SMEs, and now also larger corporates reassessing what they truly need from external counsel. In 2024, we saw a clear shift: corporates recognized that they do not need a big-law firm for 80% of their legal work. What they value most are trusted, solid advisors who provide technical excellence paired with commercial pragmatism. Strengthening our positioning enabled us to expand our private equity, finance, and restructuring practices and to collaborate even more seamlessly within the Act Legal network. As a result, we gained stronger market visibility,

were considered for larger mandates, and saw growing referral flows. Our renewed nomination for Juve Law Firm of the Year Austria 2025 underscores the momentum generated by this pivotal strategic decision.



Josip Marohnic, Marohnic, Tomek & Gjoic, Croatia:

In 2024, the most impactful decision we made was to realign the firm around the reality of the Pareto principle that had long been visible in our performance data. Roughly a third of our team consistently generated close to 80% of our results. By recognizing and embracing that dynamic, we focused on empowering our strongest performers and creating an environment where their impact could scale even further. This deliberate optimization made us leaner, faster, and more client-focused. Delivering in 2025 with a smaller but exceptionally capable team has given us clarity of purpose and a strong foundation for sustainable growth.



Ondrej Peterka, Peterka & Partners, Czech Republic:

In 2024, we made a single, game-changing decision: we opened a new office in Slovenia. By establishing a local presence there, we were able to deliver tailored, high-quality legal counsel to a rapidly growing client base in Central Europe, building a reputation for reliability and depth of expertise. The success of the Slovenian office proved that our model of localized, sector-focused practice could scale efficiently, and it gave us the confidence (and the operational blueprint) to launch a second office in Rzeszow, Poland, in early 2025. That expansion unlocked a wave of new aviation-focused law engagements, allowing us to serve airlines, manufacturers, and regulators across the CEE region.



Christoph Mager, DLA Piper, Austria:

The most impactful decision in 2024 was the strategic expansion of our real estate practice in Austria. In October 2024, Birgit Kraml joined us as Partner and Head of Real Estate at our Vienna office. Birgit is highly respected and well-known in the Austrian market with over 25 years of experience, bringing deep knowledge and leadership to our team. This move marked a significant milestone: our real estate practice, previously part of the broader Finance group, became a standalone unit. The dedicated team now focuses exclusively on real estate law, enabling us to deliver specialized, high-quality advice to clients in a dynamic sector. By investing in top talent and creating a focused practice, we have positioned ourselves for growth and strengthened our ability



Without hesitation, the most transformative decision we made in 2024 was the complete overhaul of our IT infrastructure. This wasn't merely an upgrade – it was a fundamental reimagining of how technology serves our firm.

to serve clients with complex real estate needs. This decision has already accelerated our progress in 2025 and underscores our commitment to building a globally connected real estate practice.



Kostadin Sirleshtov, CMS, Bulgaria:

As I am managing the CMS Sofia office, I think that the 2024 decision that moved our office forward the most in 2025 was my deliberate decision to step back from the full fee-earning role and focus more on the development of the office. This led to bringing in some extremely talented lawyers, an unprecedented number of new internal promotions, renting out additional space, new client areas, and increased turnover and profitability. This move led to several new client wins, which would not have happened if no decision had been made back in 2024.



Istvan Szatmary, Oppenheim, Hungary:

As managing partner, I'm often asked to reflect on pivotal moments that shape our firm's trajectory. Without hesitation, the most transformative decision we made in 2024 was the complete overhaul of our IT infrastructure. This wasn't merely an upgrade – it was a fundamental reimagining of how technology serves our firm. We recognized that our legacy systems were holding us back, preventing us from leveraging cutting-edge tools, particularly artificial intelligence, that are revolutionizing legal services. The transition required significant investment, both financially and in terms of managerial time, as well as staff training. However, we are convinced that the impact in 2025 has been extraordinary. Our systems became prepared for the installation of new technology (such as AI). This will allow us to streamline document review, enhancing legal research efficiency and improving client service delivery. Our lawyers can now focus on high-value strategic work. As part of the transformation of our IT systems, we have put in place a cross-practice group desk dealing exclusively with legal tech issues, and this decision positioned us as forward-thinking leaders in an increasingly competitive market. Clients continue to view us as innovators who embrace technology to deliver superior outcomes.



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Borivoj Libal, Eversheds Sutherland, Czech Republic:

The 2024 decision that moved our firm forward the most in 2025 was the merger with the well-known boutique law firm Kropacek Legal, completed in August this year. This step allowed Eversheds Sutherland in Prague to advance and strengthen its position on the local market. Thanks to this integration, we can provide more comprehensive legal services across key areas and be an even stronger partner for our clients. We are a firm that offers individuals and teams opportunities for collaboration and growth both locally and globally. Our ambition remains further expansion in the future. The Kropacek Legal team brought top-tier know-how in real estate law, litigation, and residential development, along with deep knowledge of permitting and planning processes. These capabilities perfectly complement our existing portfolio. As a result, we now have a team of over 40 lawyers forming strong practices in M&A, real estate, employment law, dispute resolution, and digital technologies, including cybersecurity.



Pal Jalsovszky, Jalsovszky, Hungary:

It was more of an administrative than a legal professional decision that had the most significant effect on our lives. We decided to document our processes and to put our internal rules into writing. While at the outset it could be considered a boring and useless exercise, it created real value. We thought through many of our business operation procedures, we streamlined some of them, we established new policies effective within our entire firm, and we laid down the basis for the digitalization of our operations. It required a huge amount of management tasks: we spent hours in brainstorming sessions, but, eventually, we ended up with documentation and diagrams that are priceless for a law firm, having a total staff of over 50.



Panagiotis Drakopoulos, Drakopoulos, Greece:

A strategic decision that certainly moved our firm forward in 2025 and is affecting the future of our firm in general was to expand our Athens office, by both acquiring a boutique tech law firm and bringing its founders in the equity, together with a senior corporate partner via a separate lateral hire. Offering a bigger platform to seasoned professionals with great experience and market presence resulted in a vibrant organization producing immediate positive results and great potential; strengthening our tech practice in particular, together with our ongoing digital transformation, positions our firm at a safer place towards the challenges of the future.



Alexandra Doytchinova, Schoenherr, Bulgaria:

If we need to single out, the most impactful strategic decision we made at Schoenherr Sofia in 2024 was launching a targeted hiring wave of junior associates with little or no prior experience, to strengthen our specialist sub-teams across practices such as corporate M&A, employment, IP, and real estate. This move has proven transformative for several reasons. On the one hand, it immediately expanded our capacity to take on more work in 2025 by freeing senior lawyers to focus on complex, sophisticated matters whilst juniors handle foundational, well-structured workstreams. Just as importantly, it deepened senior engagement. By giving team leads clear authority and professional as well as financial accountability for training, supervising, and developing their junior team members, we sharpened ownership, cohesion, and quality across the board. Most importantly, this reflects our long-term vision. Organic growth has consistently been the most reliable engine of excellence at Schoenherr Sofia, and indeed for Schoenherr as a whole. Our strongest performers today are those we hired as professional beginners and trained in-house. Investing early, coaching intensively, and promoting on merit is an investment in sustainable excellence that will drive our success well beyond 2025.



George Alexandris, Bahas, Gramatidis & Partners, Greece:

In 2024, we made a straightforward yet impactful decision: to approach our key industry mandates as integrated, sector-focused projects rather than as isolated assignments handed to separate practice groups. Leveraging our existing strengths



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in corporate, finance, disputes, and regulatory work, we began actively grouping more substantial matters within core sectors such as energy, infrastructure, hospitality, real estate, and technology. These blended teams, led by partners who coordinate across practices, have allowed us to bring the full breadth of our firm's expertise from the outset. By 2025, this shift will have really altered both the nature of the work we undertake and the way we deliver it. Clients now benefit from a unified team that understands better the challenges of their sector, their capital structure, and their unique risk profile, rather than encountering a series of disconnected advisers. Within the firm, this model has fostered stronger collaboration, sharpened our focus, and enabled younger lawyers to gain meaningful exposure to the entire lifecycle of complex mandates. This, in turn, has deepened our collective understanding and enhanced the service we provide, ensuring clients receive both strategic insight and practical solutions tailored to their needs.



Tatiana Brichtova, Brichta & Partners, Slovakia:

If I had to pick one decision from 2024 that moved our firm forward the most in 2025, it would be our commitment to redefining who we are – both visually and strategically. Our rebranding, launched alongside the celebration of 35 years of Brichta & Partners, was much more than a design update. It was a conscious decision to articulate our identity in a way that reflects the firm we have become: modern, confident, and deeply rooted in innovation, technology, and intellectual property. The new brand gave us clarity, visibility, and a refreshed sense of purpose – and it resonated not only internally, but also with clients, partners, and the broader business community. That same strategic decision enabled our next major step: launching the first IP-focused conference of its kind in Slovakia – *Protect and Grow 2025*. Creating a platform where Slovak businesses can access global perspectives on brands, innovation, and technology is something we have envisioned for years. In 2025, it became a reality. Together, these decisions positioned our firm not only as legal advisors but as thought leaders helping shape the future of IP in Slovakia. They set the tone for our growth, our ambitions, and the way we engage with the next generation of innovators.



Sabina Lalaj, Lalaj & Partners, Albania: If I had to pick one 2024 decision that moved Lalaj & Partners forward the most in 2025, it was establishing the firm in June 2024 with a clear focus and operating model from day one. Instead of growing opportunistically, we

built around the type of work where clients value precision, speed, and judgment in regulated industries, complex transactions, and cross-border mandates, while putting strong internal standards in place early: consistent drafting quality, clear workflows, rigorous review, and a clear partnership structure and decision-making process. We also made a deliberate effort to reach out to our regional network of colleagues to strengthen cooperation and support seamless cross-border execution. That foundation accelerated our progress in 2025. It enabled us to take on sophisticated assignments immediately, deliver consistently, and, importantly, strengthen relationships with longstanding clients who trusted us with key matters during a period of transition. For a new firm, the most important decision is not just to launch, but to launch with structure, and that is what has made 2025 a year of consolidation and measurable momentum.



Armen Khachatryan, Asters, Ukraine:

The best decision we have made was to enhance the firm's long-term bonds with the team, clients, and partner network in Ukraine and worldwide. Strong relationships create trust, and when people feel supported and valued, especially at hard times such as the current war in Ukraine, they appreciate it through loyalty and commitment. The firm's strategy was to focus on maintaining stability, enabling professional growth, and understanding individual needs proactively. This approach worked well historically, but proved to be even more effective during wartime. Over 30 years, we have built a highly experienced team of more than 180 professionals, with 23% working at Asters for over 15 years and almost 20% for more than 10 years. These are exceptional results in Ukraine's highly competitive legal market. Many of our partners and counsels started as junior associates and advanced within the firm. We apply the same long-term mindset to our clients. We build partnerships in which clients confidently entrust us with the full range of their legal matters, knowing we understand their businesses and expectations. At the same time, we have established enduring collaborations with leading international law firms across more than 120 jurisdictions, ensuring effective knowledge transfer and reliable support for clients requiring legal expertise abroad. ●