

# PETERKA PARTNERS

THE CEE LAW FIRM



## DOROTA PŁOSKOWICZ & AGNIESZKA SIWIŃSKA: A CZECH BRAND ON THE POLISH MARKET

**Dorota Płaskowicz** and **Agnieszka Siwińska**, Partners at **PETERKA & PARTNERS**, jointly managing the firm's office in Warsaw, discuss the operations of a Czech law firm in Poland with Rynek Prawniczy.

**Rynek Prawniczy:** **PETERKA & PARTNERS**, founded in the Czech Republic, has been operating for ten years in Poland as the only Czech law firm in the country. Was it a period of growth on the Polish market, and if so, how can we characterize and summarize it? Have financial results improved?

**Dorota Płaskowicz:** The decision to enter the Polish market was part of the process of building a regional law firm throughout Central and Eastern Europe. It was decided that such a firm could not exist without an office in Poland, one of the largest markets in the entire region. The law firm in Poland was established as the seventh office in the region, following the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, and Romania. Today, we also have offices in Hungary and Belarus.

The success of our law firm on the Polish market was possible only because we had already created an exceptional product of integrated and regional legal services. Ten years ago, we launched our operations in Poland with two lawyers; today our team in Warsaw consists of 20 attorneys-at-law (*adwokatów i radców prawnych*), and we have been growing continuously. Our clients include international corporations, global industry leaders, and enterprises from Central and Eastern Europe – mainly from Poland and the Czech Republic. Along with the increase in employment numbers, our revenue has also increased; however, we're particularly proud of our ever-higher position in international legal guides. Recently, the PETERKA & PARTNERS' Warsaw office was ranked by IFLR1000 as a Tier-5 firm in the category "M&A"; we achieved the same position in The Legal 500's ranking in the category "Corporate and M&A." The latter ranking also listed us as a Tier-3 firm in the category "Restructuring & Insolvency." Taking into account the fact that we have been operating on a very competitive market, we perceive these recommendations, and the firm's continuous growth, as significant successes.

**Rynek Prawniczy:** Does the Central European network of PETERKA & PARTNERS law firms make its mode of operation mimic that of Western law firms, which are different only in that their reach is wider?

**Dorota Płaskowicz:** PETERKA & PARTNERS is not a network of law firms but an integrated law firm whose operations are managed by one global management, using the principle of one chain of command.

Western law firms operating in CEE markets follow an asymmetric model, which is mainly based on coordination by their Western-European head offices, which sends potential clients to their offices in Central and Eastern Europe. This means that the head office supervises client relations as well as work performed for clients, while the reverse happens very rarely. On the contrary, PETERKA & PARTNERS is characterized by a symmetric model of operation. From the point of view of client relations and managing work performed for clients, this means that all of the offices of PETERKA & PARTNERS are equal; work distribution is multidirectional (among all branches) while the client portfolio is the result of

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the work performed by the entire group, and the clients belong to the entire PETERKA & PARTNERS group, not to a single office or individual lawyers.

Relationships between individual branches of PETERKA & PARTNERS are based on complete transparency and a lack of unhealthy rivalry. We believe that such a cooperative model is necessary for survival in the 21st century; furthermore, it makes our firm stand out from traditional Western law firms. This model is also appreciated by women, who constitute the majority of the firm's lawyers, partners, and directors of local offices.

Moreover, the one firm model enables us to offer integrated regional legal services in Polish directly from Warsaw both to leading Polish corporations expanding to Central and Eastern Europe, and to global leaders with regional offices or shared service centres in Poland.

***Rynek Prawniczy:*** Recently, the movement of Central European law firms has been gaining ground in post-communist Europe, originating in, e.g., Austria but also involving alliances with Polish law firms. Does the concept of a Central European law firm make sense? How can we define it?

***Dorota Płoskowicz:*** We are convinced that law firms directly originating from Central and Eastern Europe have a much better knowledge of the region than law firms originating from Western Europe, including Austria.

Clients in Central and Eastern Europe expect – similarly to the case of services in other sectors – a regional supplier of legal services with a homogeneous management structure which provides services of identical quality in all jurisdictions. Centralized management enables us to coordinate work throughout the region efficiently, treated as a whole from the point of view of the service recipient, and guarantees a seamless exchange of information among the offices.

***Rynek Prawniczy:*** Is the PETERKA & PARTNERS head office in Prague? What is its influence on the Polish office? Does it operate relatively independently or according to guidelines from Prague? What is the firm's organizational structure?

***Agnieszka Siwińska:*** At the moment, the PETERKA & PARTNERS group includes nine fully-integrated and equal offices located in Prague, Bratislava, Warsaw, Moscow, Kiev, Minsk, Budapest, Bucharest, and Sofia.

Not only is Prague the seat of the largest office, but also the seat of the firm's global management, which is however independent from the Prague branch. The global management is responsible for managing the firm at the global level and determining the direction of its further development.

Furthermore, individual offices have local management boards which manage the operations of a given office, are responsible for the firm's further development on the local market, and report to the global management.

***Rynek Prawniczy:*** Who owns the firm? Is it a Czech business? What is the Polish office's place in this business?

***Agnieszka Siwińska:*** The majority of PETERKA & PARTNERS shares are owned by Ondřej Peterka, the firm's founder and managing partner. Other equity partners include Czech attorneys-at-law with whom Ondřej Peterka founded the firm 20 years ago.

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Individual local offices of PETERKA & PARTNERS were established as a result of direct financial investments made by equity partners; thus, it is justified to call it a Czech business.

The Polish office is one of the key ones in the firm's structure, which stems – to a certain extent – from the position of the Polish economy in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as from foreign investors' interest in the Polish market. This influences, for instance, the number and size of the M&A transactions we handle.

## ***Rynek Prawniczy: What is the position of the PETERKA & PARTNERS Polish office on the Polish market of legal services?***

**Dorota Płoskowicz:** At the current stage, it is justified to state that our position on the market is well-established. As already mentioned, we have been increasingly more often noticed and ranked by international legal rankings in our key fields of operation, i.e., "Corporate and M&A" and "Restructuring and Insolvency." In addition to handling transactions and litigation services, we provide comprehensive legal services for business clients. Our lawyers are specialized in labour law, intellectual property rights, personal data protection, protection of competition, and property law advisory.

Our last year was particularly fruitful with respect to the number and value of M&A projects. In order to meet the needs of clients who often expect comprehensive legal and tax services, we expanded our range of services with tax consultancy.

## ***Rynek Prawniczy: Do you provide services primarily to Polish companies or to Czech investors in Poland? Or have you perhaps gained the trust of Western companies in Poland and compete for them with Western and Polish law firms?***

**Agnieszka Siwińska:** The majority of PETERKA & PARTNERS clients are Western companies operating in CEE countries who seek coordinated legal services in this region. This fact is reflected in the Warsaw office's client portfolio, of which 70 percent are international corporations; many of them are global industry leaders to whom we provide services throughout the region or in several of the countries in which we have offices. The remaining clients are groups originating from our region, mainly from the Czech Republic and Poland. Naturally, in the case of local work, we compete with both Polish and international law firms in Poland. On the other hand, when we offer regional services, we compete on the regional market, not just on the local one.

For many clients we provide our services on a one-stop shop basis, i.e., we dedicate one lawyer who is responsible for coordinating work for the client throughout the region or in several countries in which we have offices, in the language selected by the client.

## ***Rynek Prawniczy: Is there anything that makes PETERKA & PARTNERS stand out from the competition in Poland? I'm thinking here of, e.g., specialization or something like know-how. Do you compete using, e.g., prices similar to Czech ones? Or perhaps state-of-the-art legal services, since the technological race has already begun?***

**Agnieszka Siwińska:** It is definitely our unique model of a regional and fully-integrated law firm with one efficient decision-making centre, applying unified standards for the provision of legal services throughout the region, supported by a high degree of digitization. This model allows us to offer services based on the aforementioned one-stop shop model and be competitive in comparison to both, international and large Polish law firms.

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This service provision model attracts both Polish companies entering new markets and international corporations with their headquarters in Poland who operate in Central and Eastern Europe. We are also often approached by Polish and foreign law firms requiring legal consultation or specific legal services related to several jurisdictions in which we are present.

In addition to this, we have naturally seen the growing trend of specialization in legal professions and we have been adapting to it. In the global structure of PETERKA & PARTNERS, there are specialized practice and sector groups composed of our lawyers from all of the nine countries we have our offices in, based on their specializations. These regional practice and sector groups are platforms for exchanging know-how and best practices; they expand our perspective on a given issue and enable us to execute complex projects at the international level, e.g., cross-border disputes, international transaction structuring, and creating international corporate structures. As an example, we can mention the cooperation between our lawyers from the Data Protection practice group, thanks to which we have been able to develop a model for a unified approach to GDPR implementation projects in various European countries, which was particularly important for those of our clients who process personal data at the international level.

**Rynek Prawniczy: The situation on the legal services market is good and one should take advantage of it. What are the law firm's plans concerning its operations in Poland?**

**Dorota Płoskowicz:** The PETERKA & PARTNERS group's business strategy involves continuing the firm's long-term and sustainable development in Central and Eastern Europe and these plans also pertain to our office in Poland.

Recently, we have noticed the great interest of Polish businesses in Eastern European markets, and the Polish groups entering or planning to enter these markets are interested in our Polish-language services offered by the Warsaw office. We want to take advantage of our law firm's long-term presence in these countries and support Polish companies from the Warsaw office on the Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian markets.

On the other hand, we can also see a trend among international companies who are selecting Poland as the headquarters for their operations in Central and Eastern Europe. Our response to this trend was the creation of the Polish Desk at PETERKA & PARTNERS, which is responsible for coordinating the provision of legal services to Polish customers abroad in the language of the client's choice.

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*This interview was conducted by Ireneusz Walencik*