

An internal fight over clients? Absolutely no risk of that at PETERKA PARTNERS, says Ondřej Peterka, Founder and Managing Partner

"We operate on the principle of absolute cooperation across countries," says Ondřej Peterka, Founder and Managing Partner of PETERKA PARTNERS, which is celebrating 25 years on the market and is preparing to open yet another European office after the recent ones in Ljubljana, Slovenia, and Rzeszów, Poland.

After Croatia, PETERKA PARTNERS recently opened another branch in the Balkans, namely in Slovenia. Why did you choose this market?

Our Croatian office is very successful and we have confirmed that clients often request services in Croatia and Slovenia together. In recent years we have also sent the largest number of referrals there. On the economic level, the area of the former Yugoslavia still exists; it is increasingly important, and from this area only Croatia and Slovenia are in the European Union. So, it all made sense to us; it was also a natural next step to finalise our expansion in the CEE region. It's not something artificial, we are going where the business is. And we already work for a number of Czech and European corporations there.

Do your clients communicate directly with Slovenian attorneys or is it through your Czech office?

This is done on a case-by-case basis, both options, and a combination of both, are possible. It always depends on the client's preference. The individual branches do not compete with each other "politically" and our infrastructure is so flexible that it adapts to the client's needs and how they want to structure our cooperation and communication.

Due to our internal structure, we do not have to force a certain form of cooperation on the client. PETERKA PARTNERS owns 100 percent of all its branches; the company is built on the principles of absolute transparency and cooperation among branches. Thus, the client is not negatively affected by any competition among them, because there is virtually no competition.

So the Czech and Slovenian branches of PETERKA PARTNERS won't fight over to which of them a particular client belongs?

Exactly, this is the key thing that sets us apart from some other law firms. And it stems from the fact that our firm is run as one and we as owners do not want any such negative competition. Something like that can also lead to clients being forced into solutions that are not profitable or interesting for them.

To put it even more generally, the Czech branch of PETERKA PARTNERS is on a par with all the others in terms of "political" relations. And there is a group management over the branches that makes the decisions. We always adapt to what the clients want. And they work with us precisely because we operate across the region.

This year you celebrate 25 years on the market. Did you know from the beginning that PETERKA PARTNERS would be based on "absolute cooperation" across countries, or did you come to this conclusion only over time?

In the beginning we embarked on a massive expansion, opening one branch per year. And we didn't really have time to think philosophically about how we should direct the company. That only happened later, when we had the branches and started to consolidate them. We had to say goodbye to some people at that time because they wanted that internal competition and internal fight for clients.

But as owners we did not agree to such a thing. Not just for ourselves, but especially for our clients. It's not really in their interests, on the contrary, they perceive it negatively. They want to negotiate economic and other conditions with one person from the company for all its branches. This is our added value compared to various networks that do not work this way.

How will you celebrate 25 years on the market?

With a continuous campaign commemorating the important milestones in our history. In September we are organizing a teambuilding event in Bulgaria; all of our colleagues will get together, which means about 200 people. And we will probably organize a corresponding social event.

What are your clients like in general?

Our clients today are world and European leaders and many major Czech corporations. We are not dependent on one country, one type of client, or one type of work.

Last year you celebrated another anniversary, 15 years in Poland. Now you have added a branch in Rzeszów to go along with Warsaw. For what reason?

Because we are successful on the Polish market. We work there for multinational and Czech groups. But we also advise Polish corporations in the CEE region. For example, Warsaw is not an easy market in terms of human resources, so it made sense for us to relocate some of our activities outside the capital.

We also went to Rzeszów because we see it as the centre of southeastern Poland, and because it has a large logistical presence linked to the situation in Ukraine. There are hardly any major law firms there, so it is an opportunity to develop business in the region.

How is your office in Kyiv doing?

We have been there continuously since 2005, this year marks 20 years. We have gone through all of the last revolutions and have maintained continuity and our team despite the war. We currently have ten lawyers there and have never shown a loss during the war.

Now we will be expanding the team even further. From all indications, the situation is definitely coming to some solution and our clients are waiting in the starting blocks for the moment when they can start working there, if they are not already

there in some form. At the same time, we are trying to support the future reconstruction of Ukraine and have close relations with the Ukrainian Embassy.

PETERKA PARTNERS also worked in Russia. What is the current situation?

We closed our office there as a result of the EU sanctions policy. We are not there at the moment and as far as the future is concerned, we will see; we are not ruling anything out. The European sanctions still prohibit it, so that question is not on the table.

You said you were recruiting more people in Ukraine. What is the situation elsewhere in Europe?

We're recruiting people in general. But we are not doing it artificially, we are linking it to the increasing amount of work. We are constantly trying to strengthen the younger generation, and this is a continuous process in all countries.

Back to your Slovenian office, are there any other countries in the former Yugoslavia that interest you?

Yes. Serbia. But in terms of the regulations in place there, this is not yet possible; foreign law firms cannot operate there. But that's about it from Southeastern Europe.

And elsewhere in Europe?

We are interested in all of the countries in our region. So, for example, the Baltic countries, Austria, and Scandinavia; these are markets that we will gradually enter. Our clients are already there and are asking us to go there as well. For us it is then a question of human resources and being able to manage such an expansion. In principle, however, we want to continue our expansion. Our economic independence is important; we don't have to ask the banks for anything. We finance all of our development from our profits. This gives us peace of mind and absolute freedom to decide on our future development.

Will you announce another country on the PETERKA PARTNERS map this year?

Yes, we expect to do so this autumn.