

Breakaway firm opens in Vienna

Douglas Thomson • Monday, 18 January 2016 *(Just now)*

The leaders of the international arbitration practice at Wolf Theiss' Vienna office are among several lawyers who have left to set up their own firm, with six partners already in place and a treaty case on its books.



Florian Haugeneder, Patrizia Netal and Emmanuel Kaufman

Wolf Theiss' head of international arbitration **Florian Haugeneder** and partner **Bettina Knötzl** announced the creation of the new firm, Knoetzl, on 7 January. The name is Bettina's surname, rendered without the umlaut to make it easier for international parties to use.

Joining them is **Emmanuel Kaufman**, who was a senior associate in Haugeneder's team at Wolf Theiss and will be one of six partners at the new firm.

Knoetzl has also recruited **Patrizia Netal**, formerly a partner at Platte Rechtsanwälte and one-time head of arbitration at Siemer Siegl Füreder & Partners. She is well known to the international arbitration community as one of three directors of the Willem C Vis moot.

With managing partner Knötzl, Haugeneder, Kaufman and Netal will provide the disputes capability. They say the firm will be an "international dispute resolution powerhouse" with international arbitration as one of its core practices and the right place to go "when a company or a sovereign state need support in an arbitration in which everything is at stake."

The practice will also include counsel **Natascha Tunkel** and associate **Selma Tiric**. Partners **Katrin Hanschitz** and **Axel Thoss**, and senior associate **Judith Schacherreiter** will also work on arbitration matters on a case-by-case basis. All are former Wolf Theiss attorneys.

Altogether the firm has 18 lawyers, and is reported to be preparing two more hires. It will also offer services in litigation, white-collar crime, compliance and crisis management.

One of the first cases on the firm's books is an investment treaty claim brought against Argentina by Casinos Austria, which Haugeneder and Kaufman have taken with them from Wolf Theiss. The case was filed at the

end of 2015 and is being heard by a tribunal chaired by Hans van Houtte of Belgium, with Germany's Stephan Schill and Spain's Santiago Torres Bernárdez as co-arbitrators.

Haugeneder joined Wolf Theiss in 2005 from Vienna boutique Andreas Reiner & Partners, having previously been a lawyer for Amnesty International. He made partner at Wolf Theiss in 2011 and in 2014 became the firm's head of international arbitration after his predecessor, Christoph Liebscher, left to found his own firm.

Kaufman joined Wolf Theiss as an associate in 2007, and was promoted to senior associate just last year. Originally from Argentina, he worked as a legal counsel at the country's senate before joining the firm.

Following Haugeneder's departure his position as head of international arbitration is being filled by the firm's head of dispute resolution Clemens Trauttenberg, ahead of a reorganisation of the firm's arbitration practice.

"We have the opportunity to redesign our arbitration practice, which is still very much active, especially in construction work," Trauttenberg says. "We are going to build up and strengthen our team, but do so in a new way as a regional firm, and build a firm-wide arbitration competence centre for central and eastern Europe with its main hub here in Vienna. We want to compile the best quality practice in Vienna together with a strong and intense collaboration with the experienced arbitration experts in our other offices."

Wolf Theiss has recently hired Turkish arbitration practitioner Ceyda Akbal Schwimann from fellow Viennese firm Specht & Partner as a consultant in the Vienna office. She previously worked at White & Case as an associate in Istanbul. Her recent work includes insolvent Austrian company Nabucco's ICSID claim against Turkey, which was discontinued in November.

The Vienna office also has partner Andrea Gritsch, as well as four other partners practising arbitration in Budapest, Warsaw, Zagreb and Kiev.

Knoetzl's breakaway follows a recent trend for spin off boutiques formed from the international arbitration practices of larger Viennese firms. Another example is zeiler.partners, which was created by Schönherr's former head of international arbitration Gerold Zeiler and his team in 2014.

Zeiler says it is "good to see" Knoetzl choosing a similar structure and business model.

"I believe this is a great development for the Austrian market. The focus of smaller and more specialised firms in dispute resolution services will make Austria an even more attractive venue for arbitration and litigation," he says.

There has also been a trend of lawyers forming small, specialist firms to

handle disputes in France, Germany and elsewhere in Europe.

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