

Miller Canfield Establishes Affiliation In Ukraine

By Emma Cueto

Law360 (September 16, 2022, 12:13 PM EDT) -- Michigan-based Miller Canfield Paddock & Stone PLC has formed an affiliation with a Ukrainian real estate and construction law firm at a time when the country's legal community is welcoming additional international connections and turning its attention to potential reconstruction and post-war efforts.

Miller Canfield, which has three offices in Poland and affiliations with firms in Mexico and Canada, among other countries, said that its affiliation with Dictio Law in Kyiv will better position the firm to assist clients involved in humanitarian and construction projects in Ukraine.

The Sept. 7 announcement comes amid reports of military successes in Ukraine's war against Russia and an international focus among Ukrainian lawyers.

"We jokingly say, 'Every big law firm should have a Ukrainian lawyer,'" Ukrainian Bar Association CEO Inna Liniova told Law360 Pulse, saying that having greater connections with international law firms is seen as a benefit to the legal community as a whole.

In the immediate aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February, both the UBA and the international legal community focused on **providing** pro bono services to Ukrainian refugees, **fundraising** to help people affected by the war, and working on ways to properly document war crimes. Much of this involved collaborative efforts between Ukrainian lawyers and international organizations such as a task force established by the New York State Bar Association.

Today, however, Liniova and Serhiy Hoshovsky, a New York-based attorney and member of the task force, say that some of the attention has shifted to potential reconstruction efforts and other legal issues that are likely to arise in the aftermath of the violence.

"Now the efforts [to assist refugees] continue but the legal community is ready to brainstorm on more complex issues, like recovery of damages," Liniova said.

Richard A. Walawender of Miller Canfield said that his firm and Dictio Law are also anticipating a huge reconstruction effort and the legal needs that will go along with it. Walawender said he sees many parallels between the current moment for Ukraine and work that happened after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, when he was involved in opening the firm's first office in Poland.

"A lot of this is stuff that I saw going on in the early 1990s with respect to Eastern Europe and Poland specifically," he said, noting that several international organizations do seem interested in working on a potential recovery.

Miller Canfield has been helping raise funds for Ukraine in Michigan, and attorneys in its three Polish offices have been providing assistance to organizations working with refugees there, according to the firm.

Walawender said that its connection with Dictio Law originated when a Polish Miller Canfield attorney met Dictio Law Managing Partner Olena Shtohryn, who fled to Poland when the war started, when the two were dropping their daughters off at kindergarten. Miller Canfield later offered to let her work out of its office space.

After the two firms got to know each other, the affiliation made sense for both, Walawender said, adding it will help both firms better respond to legal needs arising out of the reconstruction effort.

Government-backed rebuilding efforts have already begun, he said, but the total effort required is likely to be massive, and encompass everything from roads and rail lines to hospitals and residential buildings. Those projects often take months to finance and plan, meaning the time to act is likely now, he said.

Liniova said that so far there has not been a huge influx of law firms opening offices in Ukraine, but that many international attorneys have established ties with the country.

This includes becoming members of the Ukrainian Bar Association itself, Hoshovsky said. After membership in the association dropped following the invasion, the UBA opened its doors to attorneys in other countries, he said, and international attorneys were also able to sponsor Ukrainian lawyers by paying their dues.

International connections such as this are something the UBA hopes to encourage, especially as Ukrainian leaders push for the establishment of an international tribunal to prosecute Russian war crimes.

"When we speak about the establishment of a tribunal ... which the UBA supports as one of the country's priorities, it is important that message comes from lawyers from various countries," Liniova said. "We just would like to see as many lawyers join and support as possible."

--Editing by Alyssa Miller.