

Pro Bono in Europe and Russia, CIS and the Caucasus

As our Firm has grown, so have our community engagement efforts. In 2017, Dentons' professionals in offices across six continents applied their legal and business skills, passionate commitment and boundless energy to helping others. With more people in more locations than any other law firm in the world, we showed that our ability to support and contribute to communities around the globe is also unmatched.

Czech Republic

Providing ongoing support to Doctors Without Borders

Doctors Without Borders provides humanitarian relief in various countries around the world, recently including South Sudan, Iraq, Yemen and Madagascar. Its Prague branch approached our Prague office with a request for ongoing legal assistance in support of its main mission. Since then, Dentons has advised on board members' scope of managerial duties, the terms of the main office lease agreement, employment contracts with staff, data protection issues (especially in relation to the EU General Data Protection Regulation) and more.

France

Promoting women's empowerment through entrepreneurship

Our Paris office provides a wide range of pro bono legal services to Empow'Her, a nonprofit founded in 2011 to promote the political, social and economic empowerment of women through entrepreneurship. Based in Paris, the organization takes a three-pronged approach to developing women's entrepreneurial potential: creating communities through talks, movie-screenings, mentoring programs, co-working spaces and other resources); fostering equality by identifying success stories and training role models in awareness-raising; and building capacity by providing training in business management and leadership skills. Committed to helping women around the world, Empow'Her has programs in the Ivory Coast, Senegal, Niger, Peru and Myanmar. We're proud to have assisted Empow'Her in establishing itself as a nonprofit, including advising it on tax, corporate governance, employment law and trademark matters. Our Paris team, led by Jessie Gaston and Julie Ragueneau, was nominated for Trust Law's "Lawyer of the Year Award" for our collaboration with Empow'Her.

Helping company share training app for learning-disabled employees

Vertuose, a food service company in the social and solidarity economy,

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favors local production and the hiring of workers with disabilities or handicaps. To help its 70 handicapped workers succeed, Vertuose developed a software that enables them to build upon their achievements and competencies through individualized learning pathways. Our Paris team helped Vertuose introduce this tool to a broader audience via a software-as-a-service (SaaS) delivery model by agreements to lease the end-user application to professional reintegration entities.

Germany

Providing refugees with pro bono legal assistance on the Greek island of Lesbos

Lawyers in our Frankfurt, Berlin, Munich and Brussels offices are advising European Lawyers in Lesbos (ELIL), a joint initiative of the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) and the German Bar Association (DAV). ELIL's mission is to dispatch European lawyers to the Greek island of Lesbos to support that country's lawyers in assisting migrants requiring international protection. To that end, ELIL has established a legal advice center to serve refugees fleeing persecution in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Algeria, Eritrea and elsewhere. ELIL is the only legal aid organization servicing refugees in the preparation for their first instance interview stage at Moria Refugee Camp in Lesbos, Greece. One of Dentons' associates volunteered in the summer of 2017 to assist asylum seekers as part of the ELIL project in Lesbos.

As the project became continuously successful, DAV and CCBE envisaged to implement a legal structure for ELIL. Therefore, Dentons has, in nine different European jurisdictions, advised on the legal structure and its implementation, which has been completed by the incorporation of a German charitable limited liability company (gemeinnützige Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung) with its company name "European Lawyers in Lesbos gGmbH" and its corporate seat in Berlin. A Dentons team comprised of lawyers from the Dentons Frankfurt and Munich offices and led by partners Dr. Peter Braun and Thomas Strassner has advised DAV and CCBE comprehensively within the context of setting up ELIL and on further matters relating to general corporate and business law.

Hungary

Providing legal support for woman disfigured in acid attack

Our Budapest office is supporting the legal representation of a victim of domestic violence in connection with criminal proceedings against the alleged perpetrator, her former boyfriend. The victim was at home when her ex, a doctor, beat her up, subdued her by injection and doused her with lye and acid, causing third-degree burns. The Budapest team is

collecting precedent from around Europe to support a motion to reclassify the case as attempted homicide. Lawyers in our Amsterdam, Brussels, Frankfurt, London, Milan, Paris, Prague and Warsaw offices pitched in, conducting research on how their respective criminal codes and case law have treated acid attacks. Our contribution was very highly valued by the victim's lawyer, who was also working the case pro bono.

Luxembourg

Promoting mutual understanding through cultural exchange

Lawyers in our Luxembourg office assisted the International Association of Chinese Story Telling and Story Singing Art (IASA) with incorporation in Luxembourg under a framework between China and Luxembourg to promote cultural exchanges. The main objective of IASA is the international promotion of Chinese ballads (i.e., literary works set to music) and serving as a platform for composers and performers dedicated to this music to get in touch. A partner in our Luxembourg office whose practice focuses on assisting Chinese companies investing into Luxembourg and European companies expanding into China is acting as honorary legal counsel and will be working closely with Jiang Kun, a comedian in China.

The Netherlands

Working at the intersection of digital rights and human rights

Colleagues in our Amsterdam office assisted the Digital Freedom Fund, which was established to safeguard human rights on the Internet in Europe and the EU by partnering with other organizations to advance digital rights through strategic litigation. Personal data is being collected or retained, content is being regulated and Internet activity is being monitored by governments and corporations, posing a threat to such basic human rights as freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and privacy. DFF provides financial support for important court cases and facilitates collaboration between digital rights activists. Our Dutch colleagues assisted the organization with the registration process. This involved working closely with lawyers in Dentons' Berlin office, as DFF will operate out of Germany. In addition, a lawyer in Dentons' Frankfurt office provided DFF with labor law advice.

Poland

Freedom of speech versus respect for national symbols

Lawyers in our Warsaw office are representing poet and activist Jan Kapela, who is facing a charge of disrespecting the Polish national

anthem. Kapela modified the anthem's lyrics to make a statement about the country's refusal to take its share of refugees under an EU solidarity plan designed to relieve pressure on frontline states Greece and Italy. Kapela's lyrics reference Poland's longstanding tradition of hospitality and voice support for Syrian refugees. While the court presiding over his case admitted that the message itself was not disrespectful, it fined Kapela simply for tampering with the anthem. The case, which is on appeal, is being widely covered in the media, as it deals with an issue many countries are grappling with: freedom of expression versus deference to national anthems, flags and other symbols.

Protecting bloggers from government retribution

Our Warsaw lawyers represented blogger Paweł Zięba in a landmark freedom-of-speech case we took on in cooperation with the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, which acted as *amicus curiae* in the proceedings. After Mr. Zięba published a number of blog posts criticizing the local government's operations, the authorities retaliated by claiming that a blog is a "periodical publication" and charging him with the petty offense of not registering the blog in the official Polish media register. The matter was tried in district court. We argued that the blog cannot be considered a newspaper or a magazine because his publications are not regular and the existing press laws cannot be applied to online publications. The court acquitted Mr. Zięba and a regional court upheld the lower court's decision.

The Warsaw office also acted for another Polish blogger in a similar case. Andrzej Radke was charged by Polish authorities with a similar petty offense for posting a video that proved embarrassing to local authorities. We obtained a full acquittal for Mr. Radke.

Promoting youth engagement in social action

"Social action projects" are initiatives, often youth-led, carried out by individuals or groups working together not for profit but for the good of others. The Internet has proved to be a great tool for increasing social justice awareness. Social Wolves, a Polish startup, has created a unique, go-to platform, "Zwolnieni z teorii" (Exempt From Theory), to help those interested in setting up a social action project develop the skills necessary to plan and implement one. Lawyers in our Warsaw office have prepared legal memorandums and opinions, drafted contracts and provided regulatory compliance advice to Social Wolves in connection with this venture, which also provides another social benefit: skills training for young people just entering the job market. Project participants receive an international business certificate at the project's completion. In its first two years, approximately 18,000 young people have participated in the program and their activities have reached five million beneficiaries.

Providing a stable environment for homeless horses

Two years ago, Fundacja Tara, a horse rescue and shelter organization in Piskorzyna (Lower Silesia), sustained extensive damage to the roofs of two of its stables during very strong storms. Over time, the situation got so bad that over 50 horses had literally no place to live, which posed a particular problem during the winter months, when Poland can be very chilly. (Another aspect of this is that the shelter is a registered monument.) When a decision was made to do something about the situation, a real estate partner in our Warsaw office provided full legal support to the foundation regarding all aspects of the repairs—including drafting and negotiating all the construction agreements and assisting the foundation in obtaining the permits required for the job—as well as with various legal issues relating to fundraising. Regarding the latter, the partner, in collaboration with a senior associate in the office's Corporate group, helped the foundation regain its status as a public help organization (organizacja pożytku publicznego), including preparing the documents necessary to register as a foundation, through which Fundacja Tara regained the special status.

Russia

Mainstreaming disabled and special needs children

The Naked Heart Foundation (NHF), a nonprofit based in Russia, is committed to building a society where the disabled are fully integrated, respected and understood, and ultimately where they lead happier and more productive lives. NHF's focus has been on disabled and special needs children, specifically lower-income children. Its hope is that by tackling the stigma and providing the support— from introducing new teaching techniques to building more accessible playgrounds—parents of such children will feel less pressure to give them up to an orphanage or children's home. Our Moscow team has advised NHF on both litigation and commercial matters, most recently relating to intellectual property.

Turkey

Handicraft workshops, language classes for Syrian refugee women

Lawyers in our Istanbul office have provided legal assistance to the Olive Tree Community Center, an initiative of Small Projects Istanbul (SPI), a grassroots NGO that supports those displaced by conflict in the Middle East and North Africa regions. About three-quarters of Syrian refugees are women and children and Olive Tree is helping them rebuild their lives by offering skills development training, including handicraft workshops, small-business management courses, and supporting the learning of new languages. Among other things, our legal team has advised SPI on corporate matters and helped some "graduates" of the program secure the "craftsman exemption certificates" they need to sell their handicrafts.

