

Kyiv hosts CIS lawyers forum

By ELENA PLEKHANOVA

Around 100 CIS and Western business lawyers gathered in Kyiv at the end of June to attend the first meeting of the CIS Local Counsel Forum, which organizers said was meant to create contacts between attorneys working in the former Soviet Union and beyond.

The forum is the first of its kind in the CIS, according to Iryna Paliashvili, one of the chairpersons of the forum's organizing committee and the president of the Russian-Ukrainian Legal Group, a law firm with offices in Ukraine and Washington D.C.

"In an economic sense, the CIS is considered a single region by global investors. And when they come, they want to see a legal community in the region. So the objective of the forum is to unite local CIS law firms into one legal community," said Paliashvili, an ethnic Georgian who studied international law in Kyiv.

Foreign investors in the CIS market need legal assistance, and the existence of a regional legal network known internationally greatly simplifies an investor's search for a qualified local lawyer, Paliashvili added.

Paliashvili said law firms throughout the world are organized into networks, and it is a commonly accepted practice to exchange clients within the network.

"Individual law firms are not so noticeable on the global map," she said.

The forum featured a mix of panels focusing on the legal and business climates of each CIS country, a separate panel showcasing Ukraine, and presentations by law firms and corporate counsels.

It didn't receive any Ukrainian state support, Paliashvili pointed out, but guests included a Ukrainian parliamentary deputy and Georgia's ambassador to Ukraine.

Paliashvili said the forum was funded completely from the registration fees of participating attorneys, each of whom paid \$750, not including travel and hotel costs.

"This is a non-profit and non-political event. Our firm is not making any money on this. We are making connections," she said.

Overall, the forum hosted lawyers from 30 countries, including all 15 for-



John Abramson, Regional Counsel for AIG Central Europe & CIS, and Tatiana Efremtseva, CIS Regional Counsel for Baker Hughes B.V., exchange business cards at the first CIS Local Counsel Forum, held in Kyiv last month. According to the forum's organizers, the forum was meant to stimulate networking and contacts among lawyers working in the CIS region and beyond. (Courtesy photo)

mer Soviet republics, except Turkmenistan, lawyers from which received invitations but decided not to take part.

Around 30 attending lawyers represented international law firms, and some were listed as corporate counselors for multinationals, like U.S.-based insurance giant AIG and British American Tobacco.

Attorneys from 10 Ukrainian law firms took part, including Kyiv-based Frishberg & Partners and Sergiy Koziakov & Partners.

"For our organization, it was important to take part in CIS Local Counsel Forum to exchange professional experience. We certainly met with many foreign colleagues, and in a while we'll see if they become our partners," said Sergiy Koziakov, managing partner at Sergiy Koziakov & Partners.

"This is the first event held in the CIS in the last 15 years on such a global scale, and it is more respectable than anything that has been held before," he added.

The forum's organizers plan to create an "Association of CIS Law Firms" as early as this year.

"Today we have all the necessary foundations for such a network in the CIS. However, it will take time and substantial organizational efforts," said Koziakov.

Organizational issues are apparently at the heart of bringing lawyers together in Ukraine.

"Our organization works on the CIS market. This is why we were interested in participation in this forum," said Oleg Riabokon, managing partner at Magister & Partners, whose firm wasn't able to take part because they applied too late.

And Paliashvili's group isn't the only organization trying to help Ukrainian lawyers make contacts.

"Similar events have already been held in Ukraine. For example, in February, 2006, The Ukrainian Bar Association organized a legal forum with the participation of CIS and international law firms," Riabokon said.

The All-Ukrainian Forum, entitled "The Development of Legal Services in Ukraine", was held on February 10 this year and also included some 100 attorneys from Ukraine, the CIS and farther abroad.

Like Riabokon, Natalya Denisenko, the events coordinator for the Ukrainian Bar Association, didn't take part in the forum organized by Paliashvili.

"They didn't invite us, but if we had had an opportunity, we would have participated," she said.

The Ukrainian Bar Association, which has been in operation since 2002, claims to represent 900 lawyers in Ukraine. Denisenko said the association is financed by member fees and charity.

In the meantime, Paliashvili's group intends to repeat their forum on an annual basis, with the second one possibly slated for Baku, Azerbaijan.

"When brought together, the lawyers from different regions understood how important the professional interaction was for them," said Paliashvili.