



SPOTLIGHT

# Client experience is key as Russia Country Practice opens

Russia Country Practice established to give continuity.





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IGOR OSTAPET, PARTNER

**W**hite & Case will continue to serve clients with Russia-related matters after the creation of a Russia Country Practice under the leadership of Partner Igor Ostapets.

The practice will be run in full compliance with international regulations and sanctions and will provide vital continuity for our clients while helping us retain members of our highly talented and experienced team.

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The Russia Country Practice will include around 18 lawyers based in Nur-Sultan, Tashkent, Dubai and London. In addition to Igor, partners Eric Michailov, Natalia Nikitina, Julia Zagonek, Darina Kogan- Bellamy and Dmitry Lapshin, all recognized leaders in their practice areas and long-term members of the White & Case family, will help guide the Russia Country Practice towards its goals.

Igor says: “The unprecedented volume of new regulations and sanctions introduced by the US, EU and the UK and the corresponding counter measures introduced by the Russian Federation pose a huge challenge to our clients who more than ever need our help to negotiate the legal challenges.

“This applies whether they need help managing their exit from the market or managing continued Russia-based investments while fully complying with constantly changing and often mutually conflicting legal regimes.”

### **Supporting our clients**

Igor continues: “We wanted to be there for our clients at this difficult time,” says Igor, “especially because we’ve gone through those challenges ourselves in recent months. The opening of the country practice means we can continue to meet our global and international clients’ needs while retaining the huge depth of talent and experience we have in the Russian market.”

The opening of the practice also shows the Firm’s determination not to turn its back on three decades of investment and talent development in Russia.

Igor explains: “Our lawyers have moved to countries such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan with quite similar legal systems. These and other former soviet union countries are undergoing economic and legal reforms so, in addition to being focused on Russia-related matters, we plan to support local governments, state-owned and and private clients progressing through these reforms using the unique experience we’ve had in Russia.”

All of this will be done in close cooperation and coordination with our strong existing legal team in Kazakhstan and our existing Uzbek practice.

Igor says: “We live in a rapidly changing world with very little ability to make reliable even short terms plans but the best we can do in such situations is stay with our clients and preserve our best talent.

“This is what we’re doing with the Russia Country Practice. What happens in the future will largely depend on the global geopolitical situation.



"We know that many of our clients prefer to continue to work with us in respect of their Russian needs rather than working directly with local counsel in Russia and that they don't want to lose our wealth of expertise in areas such as capital markets, finance, M&A, energy, disputes, tax and regulatory."

## End of an era

The Firm's decision to close its Moscow office earlier this year was taken with much regret following 30 years of success with market-leading teams across all practice areas and close team relationships.

Igor is currently still based in Moscow as he oversees the administrative closure of the office. The team continues to strive to make the closure of the office as orderly as possible while complying with regulations and taking a people-orientated approach.

He says: "The day we announced the decision to close the office was extremely hard for everyone – there were lots of tears and plenty of uncertainty."

"Even through we'd gone through several difficult periods during the past three decades, including the global financial crisis and Covid-19, the situation we faced was unprecedented."

"What we'd achieved in Moscow since we opened the office in 1991 was remarkable – not only by leading the market in so many practice areas, but in how we contributed to pro bono, legal education and development of legal profession in Russia."

"We had a family of incredible people, many of whom viewed it as a lifetime career, so the Firm was determined to look after them if they left or find them alternative positions in the Firm wherever possible."

"Everything happened so quickly and our lives outside of work had already changed dramatically, so the possibility of losing the stability of a career at White & Case was a huge blow."

**"We are grateful to the Firm for the continuing support and look forward to building together our new success as we did many times before."**

He says: "With a direction of the global leadership, regional section heads, business leads, members of the EMEA HR team and the Moscow office partners and managers had discussions with everyone from the legal side and Business Services with the outcome being that around half our people wanted to stay and either be redeployed to non-Russia-related positions elsewhere in the Firm or to join the Russia Country Practice when it opened."

"We're delighted that we've been able to retain so many great people and that those who chose to leave have been properly looked after."

"While the Russia Country Practice is completely new and this is a transitional period, I'm confident we are in a good position to continue providing a top-quality experience to our international clients during this unprecedented time. We are grateful to the Firm for the continuing support and look forward to building together our new success as we did many times before."