

Legal Affairs Committee Spotlight

Interviews and Profiles





Sara Biro

INTERNATIONAL LEGAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE CHAIR

I am a multilingual, international business lawyer who has extensive in-house experience in more than 25 countries and expertise in areas ranging from complex and general commercial matters and corporate transactions to finance and engineering and construction.

I am currently working in an interim role as a senior legal advisor at Royal Mail Group Limited. Royal Mail was founded in 1516 by Henry VIII (which is probably not something many in-house lawyers can say of their companies), and delivers letters and parcels in the UK and throughout the world. It was wholly-owned by the UK government until October 2013 and was partly owned by the UK government until October 2015.

I was previously senior European counsel at Fitch Ratings and was based in their London office. In this role, I advised on legal and commercial matters relating to the credit rating and information distribution businesses of the Fitch group of companies in Europe, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and the Far East. Before joining Fitch, I was senior counsel in Bechtel Corporation's civil global business unit. In this role, I led all aspects of the company's legal work on major rail, road, infrastructure, aviation, and telecommunications bids and projects worldwide.

Prior to joining Bechtel, I was a senior associate with Freshfields in its project finance practice in London and a senior associate with Mayer, Brown & Platt in its corporate, finance, and international practices in Chicago and London.

I received a Bachelor of Arts, summa cum laude, from Georgetown University and a Juris Doctor from The University of Chicago Law School.

What interested you in the in-house practice of law and how did you come to be an attorney at the Royal Mail Group Limited?

I have been working at Royal Mail in an interim role since the end of March 2014. Prior to going to Royal Mail, I had had no experience with national and international postal regulatory matters and little experience with international commercial transport and logistics. I enjoy learning about and understanding businesses and working with business people to make companies successful. I wanted to become an in-house lawyer in order to be more closely involved in the business which I was advising. As you soon learn when you move in-house from private practice, in-house lawyers never have the luxury of saying what external counsel sometimes say when advising on business transactions: "That's a business issue — the business people will need to deal with that." When you're a member of an in-house legal team, all the issues on the matters on which you're working are potentially your issues.

What is the single greatest challenge that your law department is facing today, and how are you dealing with it?

The single greatest challenge that Royal Mail Group's legal department currently faces is supporting and advising Royal Mail's business people during a time of significant structural change and transition in Royal Mail itself and in the letters and parcels delivery business sector.

As I mentioned in another of my responses, Royal Mail was wholly-owned by the UK government until October 2013 and was partly owned by the UK government until October 2015. Since October 2013, Royal Mail has been transforming itself from a government-owned entity into a publically-listed company that runs a commercial business in a competitive market. This transformation process

requires Royal Mail to manage the structural decline in letter volumes as communications increasingly move online while growing the parcels volumes Royal Mail delivers, launching a large range of new services to provide a greater choice of parcel delivery options and rising to the challenges that e-commerce and mobile commerce present to parcel delivery companies.

In October 2015, you were elected to the International Legal Affairs Committee. Tell me how you got involved initially.

I joined ACC in 2004 when I was at Bechtel; Bechtel had a corporate membership and encouraged members of the legal department to join ACC. Given the international focus of my legal activities, I (of course) joined the International Legal Affairs Committee when I joined ACC.

What are some of the ways that the International Legal Affairs Committee provides value to its members?

The International Legal Affairs Committee provides value to its members by helping them acquire the knowledge, skills, and professional networks that enable them to understand international legal issues and environments in order to help their companies succeed in the competitive global markets in which they operate.

What substantive practice issues does your committee address?

Our goal is to inform our members about a broad spectrum of international legal issues, which includes issues such as data protection in the European Union and Asia, managing foreign subsidiaries, negotiating civil law contracts, managing an international reduction in force, and developing a multijurisdictional strategy for protecting attorney-client privilege.

How has the International Legal Affairs Committee helped you in your career?

Participating in the International Legal Affairs Committee has increased both my knowledge of international law and international markets and my enjoyment of my legal practice. I have learned much and made many good friends around the world through my involvement in the International Legal Affairs Committee.



Staff

ACC