

# Interviews of Our Editors: “What Does Kluwer Arbitration Blog Mean to You?”

## Kluwer Arbitration Blog

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Esmé Shirlow (Associate Editor) (Australian National University), Fabian Bonke (Hogan Lovells), Zahra Rose Khawaja (Dentons & Co, Dubai), and Arie C. Eernisse (Assistant Editor for East and Central Asia) (Shin & Kim)

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In January 2009, Professor Roger Alford published the first post on the Kluwer Arbitration Blog (the Blog), launching what is now considered an indispensable tool for arbitration practitioners and academics alike. Today, the Blog offers daily perspectives on the latest developments in international arbitration, reflecting our “unique” and “fascinating” international arbitration community.

Our 31 editors, who include the General Editor and Editor, four Associate Editors and 25 Assistant Editors, work behind the scenes with the authors of the posts that are published on the Blog, develop strategies for a diverse and timely coverage of the hot topics in international arbitration, work around the clock to ensure the live coverage of the main arbitration conferences, collaborate with the affiliates and permanent contributors of the Blog and, from time to time, expose arbitration as a quite entertaining and enjoyable field of practice.

This series of the Interviews of our Editors was kindly suggested by one of the long-standing permanent contributors of the Blog as a way of showing readers the

“talented bunch there is behind the scenes”. We kick-off the series with four Editors: **Esmé Shirlow (Associate Editor, Investment Arbitration)**, **Fabian Bonke (Assistant Editor for Europe)**, **Zahra Rose Khawaja (Assistant Editor for the MENA Region)**, and **Arie C. Eernisse (Assistant Editor for East and Central Asia)**.

**Esmé Shirlow (Associate Editor, Investment Arbitration)**: While my work with the Blog has evolved over the years, it has consistently provided me with an important means for keeping in touch with arbitration developments and practitioners from around the world. I joined the Blog back in 2015, as a regional Assistant Editor for Australia and New Zealand. At the time, I was living in England, so the role provided me with an excellent means of keeping in touch with arbitration-related developments in my home region. It also helped me to keep in touch with key practitioners, academics, and officials from that region (as well as Australians and New Zealanders abroad), many of whom were regular contributors of posts to the Blog. A few years ago, my regional responsibilities expanded to incorporate developments in Pacific Island States. With this new regional focus, I gained greater familiarity with the important arbitration work occurring in the Pacific, and established contacts with a range of contributors working on topics associated with that region. Most recently, I have moved to a new position as Associate Editor covering investment arbitration. This focus reflects my professional activities and – now that I have moved back to Australia – also provides many of the same benefits as my initial role with the Blog: the chance to stay up-to-date with arbitration developments outside of my physical geographic region, and to keep in touch with the many practitioners and scholars working on these issues in both Australia and overseas.

Working with the Blog as it has developed over the years has greatly enriched my own work and experiences. One of the things I value most is the chance to work closely with authors contributing posts to the Blog on a diverse range of topics. I enjoy the editing process, because it gives me an opportunity to work with each author to assist them to achieve their vision for their post, including the chance to work with authors who I might otherwise never have had the opportunity to engage with. I also enjoy working on our more recent initiatives to collate series of posts on selected topics. This provides a fantastic opportunity to engage closely with significant arbitration developments, and to work with new and established

authors to draw out different perspectives on common themes.

Another key benefit I have derived from working with the Blog is the chance to collaborate with an exceptional editorial team. The team has expanded over the years, reflecting the growth in the Blog's readership and the number of posts we now publish. I have worked closely with so many motivated and talented editors from across the world – many of whom I correspond with on a weekly and even daily basis. This has taught me a lot about the possibilities for productive online collaboration (something even more important now that I am back in far-away Australia!), and the true power of a group of people working collegiately and constructively together in pursuit of a common vision. So, what the Blog means to me has evolved over the last five years. What has remained constant is the opportunities it has provided, including the chance to work with a global network of editors and contributors to stay abreast of, and publish thought-provoking posts on, the fascinating and ever-changing field of arbitration.

**Fabian Bonke (Assistant Editor for Europe):** When I was interviewed for the editorial position at the Blog, it was quite unclear to me what to expect. Although I had contributed to the Blog before, I found it difficult to imagine how it would be to step over the other side and take over the editor's work myself. Since then 2.5 years have passed, and I can still say with full conviction that taking this "side job" has been absolutely the right decision.

The most valuable experience during my time with the Blog is definitely the close work with the fantastic editorial team. The team is very diverse with people from all different geographical, educational and professional backgrounds. What we share, of course, is a particular focus and interest in international arbitration matters. What I find astonishing is the level of motivation that everyone in the team has regarding their work at the Blog, despite it being an extra activity and considering how busy everyone engaged in this project is with his or her regular job. Exchanging views and finding solutions in such a great team and environment is definitely one of the most interesting and enriching parts of the position and the Blog.

But of course, editors not only work with other editors but, first of all, with the Blog's many contributors. What I particularly enjoy about working with contributors

is the rewarding experience of being able to help enrich posts through constructive dialogue. I am always impressed by the novel ideas that the contributors bring in and the passion they feel for their particular topic or standpoint that they want to convey. It is thus often relatively easy for us as editors to offer advice on how to further develop the authors' particular approach or topic.

What I also enjoy about being an editor is that it allows me to follow a broad range of arbitration topics and to remain up-to-date on current developments. This particularly holds true as I have a strong focus on disputes arising from the energy & construction sector but as part of my editor's work I review contributions covering a broad range of topics outside of these areas as well. Thus, I can follow commercial arbitration topics from other sectors, e.g. corporate, telecommunication or competition, and deepen my knowledge on various regional developments in Europe.

To conclude, I really enjoy my editor's work, it gives me a fantastic opportunity to establish contact with many people who are deeply engaged and passionate about arbitration. The intense exchange with them about new ideas and the feedback from the contributors definitely pay-off for the workload that comes with this position. It is great to see how the Blog has evolved over the last years, including a broader coverage of topics and regions and more "live" coverage of arbitration events. I look forward to what is to come for the Blog and am very pleased to be a part of the great team behind it.

**Zahra Rose Khawaja (Assistant Editor for the MENA Region):** I joined the Blog editorial team in August 2018, just three months ahead of my relocation from London to the United Arab Emirates (UAE). For me, the timing coincided perfectly. At the time, I was embarking on a professional transition from my role as a private practice disputes lawyer in London to another international firm in Dubai, where I am practicing today.

During the first few months of my transition to the UAE, being a part of the Blog team meant that I was able to discover the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) arbitration world not only through my new practice location, but also through the eyes of our authors across the wider region. Through my role as one of the editors for the region, I was able to discover, absorb and participate in key arbitration

trends happening on the ground across MENA from the day I landed in my new home.

For me, the Blog is a means of being able to showcase to the wider arbitration community the genuine, exciting and ground breaking developments taking place across the MENA region. This region is going through a formative stage in its development as a globally renowned, active and international-standard hub for arbitration. My role as one of the MENA editors presents an exciting opportunity to provide coverage to the Blog readers across the globe, and highlight the key contributions to international arbitration practice coming out of the MENA region.

Along with my fellow MENA editorial team members, I am committed to providing a voice to authors and arbitral institutions who are at the forefront of developments that are shaping how arbitration is practiced on the ground, on a day-to-day basis, across the region. As part of the Blog's editorial team, I am privileged to have a platform to shape how events are covered and stories are told.

From my experience both in practice and having covered the region as part of the Blog's editorial team over the past 18 months, I can vouch for the fact that the MENA region is a truly energizing place to be an arbitration user or practitioner. Arbitration is changing access to justice across the region, and I am proud of the fact that the Blog is able to shine a spotlight on the latest trends and developments emerging from the region, which otherwise might go unnoticed by the global community.

**Arie C. Eernisse (Assistant Editor for East and Central Asia):** Based in Seoul since 2014, I find it vital to follow Asian arbitration developments and build professional relationships with other Asia-based arbitration practitioners. When I saw the announcement last summer welcoming applications for the role of Assistant Editor for East and Central Asia, I immediately jumped at the opportunity, sensing that (1) it would enable me – or, rather, force me – to develop a deeper understanding of the main arbitration issues facing different Asian jurisdictions and (2) it would allow me to establish meaningful connections with arbitration practitioners in those jurisdictions. Now, less than a year later, I am happy to report that the job has already exceeded my expectations in both regards.

In terms of developing a deeper understanding of Asian jurisdictions, each editing

assignment has provided me with a welcome opportunity to take a closer look at a particular jurisdiction and its arbitration experience. The Central and East Asian region for which our editorial team is responsible consists of 16 countries and territories, and so far I have had the pleasure of working on articles about jurisdictions I was not as familiar with, such as Armenia, Georgia and Uzbekistan. (I'm eager to add more to the list, so feel free to reach out to me!) In order to make any necessary substantive contributions and discharge my responsibilities effectively when working with a contributor, I first investigate the legal framework for arbitration in the contributor's jurisdiction and then consider how to accentuate the novelty and importance of the author's perspective on the legal issues he or she addresses. This often involves investigating the prevailing practices or legal standards in other jurisdictions from a comparative perspective. These steps are all taken to ensure that each article meets the Blog's high standards for quality, originality and substantive depth, but at the same time I am fortunate to be a chief beneficiary of the learning that is a by-product of the editorial process.

In terms of establishing meaningful connections, I am grateful that my editorial role has allowed me to engage intellectually with exceptional practitioner-scholars in various Asian jurisdictions and with my astute and dedicated editorial colleagues. I am delighted to share in the process of helping a contributor create a novel perspective on a noteworthy issue. My hope is that the very act of sharing in this process with the contributor will provide the foundation for a meaningful professional relationship going forward, with opportunities for future collaboration (and, if I ever venture their way, perhaps an introduction to the local culture!).

The benefits of being involved as an editor of the Blog are manifold, but I also think the Blog can be just as meaningful for its readers. The Blog is supposed to be a vehicle for connecting people with a common interest in international arbitration and enhancing their professional lives through scholarly exchange. Let's not be shy about maximizing its potential for those purposes by increasing the exchange of ideas stimulated by articles appearing in the Blog.

***This interview is part of Kluwer Arbitration Blog's "Interviews of Our Editors" series.***