

Kluwer Arbitration Blog

Interviews of Our Editors: Global Perspectives with Benson Lim, Enrique Jaramillo, Boris Praštalo, and Giorgio Sassine

Kiran Nasir Gore (Associate Editor) (The George Washington University Law School) · Saturday, December 12th, 2020

In this fourth installment of our “Interview of Our Editors” series, we take a global tour to gather perspectives from Benson Lim (Associate Editor), Enrique Jaramillo (Assistant Editor for Latin America), Boris Praštalo (Assistant Editor for Europe), and Giorgio Sassine (Assistant Editor for US and Canada).

Thank you each for joining me!

1. *Can you start by identifying a certain moment or experience – either during your studies or professional experience since – that solidified your interest in pursuing a career involving the world of arbitration?*

Enrique: My interest in international arbitration certainly grew the more I learned about its great reach and the practical solution it offers to companies doing business overseas. Unfortunately, traditional legal education does not focus much on this field. So it just amazed me when – through my pure curiosity – I started reading and learning about this international network of legal instruments (treaties, rules, etc.) that enable parties to have disputes decided by experts and under the rules of their choice, and to enforce their awards in most countries. It was like discovering a whole new spectrum of possibilities, beyond national courts.

Boris: I have a bit of a different experience as compared to Enrique’s. It was at Central European University (‘CEU’) where I discovered the intricate, yet fascinating world of international arbitration. I believe that it is during one’s university studies when preferences are formed. That is to say, during one already gets a general idea as to what area of law one would like to pursue, be it in the realm of practice or in academia. Of course, this is not something set in stone, but it helps a lot if you have a professor who will not only be there to instill the knowledge into you, but also to awaken curiosity and to present the topic in a way so that you yourself will wish to explore it outside of the class setting. This is the kind of an impact Prof. Tibor Várady’s course on international commercial arbitration at CEU had on me. During this year I strongly committed myself to pursue a career in academia as I joined the International University of Sarajevo. I just hope I too will be capable of inspiring my students to study arbitration.

Giorgio: That’s so funny, because I also took a course with Prof. Tibor Várady, but as part of a summer program through Cornell at the Sorbonne in Paris! It was during this class that I realized

international arbitration is my passion and the field of law that I wanted to pursue. Maybe it was being in Paris studying where some of the most influential philosophers taught or studied, but something about that summer transformed my life. I think what ultimately drew me to international arbitration (and what continues to drive me) is culture. Even though our cultures and legal educations are so different from one another, we still all have a global, humanistic sense of what is right and wrong – this sense of justice. I find it absolutely astonishing that no matter what your culture or legal background may be, we can use international arbitration to reach a resolution to a cross-border dispute. The United Nations was surely onto something when the New York Convention was passed shortly after the end of World War II!

2. *Each of you points to your informal and formal legal educations as inspiring your passion for international arbitration. Having since jumped into the field with both feet, is there anything that you were not prepared for? What is your best advice to others?*

Benson: Today many college students have both a greater number and diversity of opportunities locally, globally, and across disciplines. My advice to college students and younger lawyers is to make the most of what is now easily available. That said, my legal education paradoxically prepared me for the competitive arbitration space. That opportunities were rare only made me hungrier, more driven, and more creative in finding them. It is about seizing the opportunity just as Enrique, Boris, and Giorgio just explained how they did so. I think my college experiences were key to who I am as a lawyer, writer, and mentor today. I can cite many examples, including words of my mooted coach to me when I was filled with massive disappointment in the immediate moments after our team was defeated in Vis East; words in the reference letter from the professor overseeing my final year public international law research paper. Words can inspire. I hope that is truly what we are achieving with the Blog.

Enrique: As I said before, unfortunately, international arbitration is not part of many mandatory curricula in law schools around the globe. In a way, I stumbled into it by chance. That being said, probably my best advice to law students and young lawyers is to find an area of the law they are truly passionate about, be it litigation, arbitration, or corporate law. Then, let that passion drive them to learn about that field, to be curious and resourceful enough to discover all the opportunities that Benson mentions, and, finally, to be relentless in the pursuit of making a career out of that passion.

Giorgio: Writing legal briefs and correspondence, whether it be letters or emails. In my experience in the U.S., the legal education teaches theory, reading, and analytical/critical thinking skills; however, there is not enough focus on how to write. Often times, the only time law students write is for the final exam. In hindsight, this is not enough. On a daily basis, attorneys are required to write – whether it be letters, emails, reports, memorandum, legal briefs, etc. I believe that I was only able to begin honing my writing skills after law school. It would have been incredibly beneficial to have more practical writing lessons while in law school.

3. *Turning to your editorial roles with the Kluwer Arbitration Blog, what have you found to be most rewarding or surprising?*

Benson: I joined as an Assistant Editor many years ago with a particular focus to develop the

Blog's reach in PR China and Hong Kong. It seems a no-brainer the Greater China region today features amongst the leading regions for our global audience until you realize that English is not the first language in this region. We are lucky to have excellent partners with our Permanent Contributors from this region. I am lucky to have an East Asia editorial team who regularly goes the extra mile to bring articles to publication and so do my two other teams. That is the most rewarding part of my role with the Blog. I mentor and coach. I try to motivate and stretch my team. I use different methods to bring the best out of each individual. The journey is as important as the end. Frankly though, the end result of seeing each of my Assistant Editors fulfil their personal potential is more satisfying to me!

Enrique: I echo Benson's opinion. For me, the most rewarding aspect of being part of the Blog is the people I get to work with. Not just the Latin American team, which I share with two phenomenal professionals like Crina Baltag and Daniela Pérez-Salgado. We often work with members of other teams and they are all brilliant, courteous, and conduct themselves with the utmost diligence.

It is also great to be able to interact with so many authors from around the globe. Working as an Assistant Editor with the Blog, really keeps you connected to the international arbitration community spread in so many different countries. Interacting with our authors, and learning about their different points of view is definitely one of the best parts of being part of the Blog.

Boris: Like my colleagues, I would like to emphasize the rich interactions not only with my fellow editors, but also with the authors. You learn a lot, be it from working on a Year in Review piece with one of your colleagues, or reviewing a submission. And your knowledge is not limited to one jurisdiction as you get to review posts from various countries. Let me tell you an anecdote. A former professor of mine contacted me. He was writing an article on a very specific topic, and he was struggling to find appropriate cases. It just so happened I was reviewing a post from Czechia whose facts corresponded exactly to what my professor was looking for. Needless to say, he was rather impressed that not only could I identify a case he was in need of, but that I could reiterate the facts, the issues, and the analysis of the court in a rather detailed manner.

4. *Each of you touches on a different aspect of what I also love about working on the Blog, and it is true that we have the chance to engage in many interesting topics at the same time. For our prospective authors, what's your advice on identifying a meaningful and engaging topic to write about?*

Benson: There is no silver bullet to a good article. For what it is worth, I have three tips:

- First, write simply. It is harder to write a simpler sentence and for good reason because you have to capture the essence with so few words. But that makes it powerful.
- Second, think more and longer. Be deliberate. Challenge your ideas with open and candid discussions. It is true what Enrique and Boris mentioned: we editors actively engage in discussions with authors on how to make your draft article better.
- Third, make only positive contributions to the global literature. A public policy university professor once told me that the threshold question an author should ask before writing any piece is whether one is objectively contributing to the literature on that topic. I would second his advice!

Enrique: It's not hard to find good topics. There are numerous resources one can use to be up to date with new cases, laws, and developments. The challenge is being able to bring something new to the discussion. For that, authors need to be creative and daring enough to bring a novel point of view to an ongoing discussion, or even to start a new discussion.

Boris: I agree with Enrique. It is not problematic to get to that 'eureka' moment when seeking to find an appropriate topic. But there is the other side of the coin; there will be numerous other people having access to those same resources, identifying that great topic that you just found. If plenty of other people already write on it, it will kind of become stale, unless what you have to say is sort of revolutionary. So, try to be as fast as possible.

5. *Kluwer Arbitration Blog isn't the only 'must read' for the arbitration community. Can you tell us where else you go for timely and informative legal news (arbitration or otherwise)?*

Enrique: [ITA in Review](#), where I'm also part of the editorial board is a great resource! I also like to check articles from [ICSID Review](#) and try to listen to a podcast called [The Arbitration Station](#) as much as possible.

Boris: The resources Enrique listed are rather solid, and I too turn to them regularly. Moreover, I also follow several law journals, including the [Journal of International Arbitration](#), which is also published by Kluwer.

Giorgio: [Law360](#) is a terrific source for daily updates on many topics. I subscribe to daily updates on construction and international arbitration-related topics, which I always find quite informative. Their reporting has even inspired ideas for hot topics that could be addressed on the Blog!

6. *Any final parting words or advice for our readers?*

Giorgio: It is hard not to address the fact that we are all adapting to the post-COVID-19 world, which demands remote work and flexibility. We are all living through exceptional times. Losing our sense of normalcy has been very challenging, especially as humans who are naturally drawn to being in group settings. If you are able, I encourage you all to enjoy nature and spend time with close friends and family to support coping with working remotely.

Boris: Although risking to sound somewhat generic, in these hard times I feel the best thing I can say is that we should all try to the best of our abilities to take care of ourselves and of each other.

Benson: Make more work friends in arbitration. Better still, make true friends.

Enrique: A big thank you to all our readers! It is their support and participation that has made the Blog what it is today. I also invite them all to reach out to us if they have a topic they consider worthy of publication in the Blog.

Further interviews in this series of interviews of our editors are published [here](#).


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