

Kluwer Arbitration Blog

There's an East Wind Coming All the Same, Such a Wind As Never Blew on the Vis Moot Yet

Lia Harizanova · Sunday, May 15th, 2022

“The winner is Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski”, announced Dr. Günther Horvath – the presiding arbitrator of the final round of the 29th Willem C. Vis International Commercial Arbitration Moot (Vienna) before the crowd gathered in Hofburg Palace rose to their feet to applaud the Bulgarian team that prevailed over their esteemed opponents from University of Hamburg after an outstanding performance by both teams in the final round.

In the journey to the finals Sofia University met teams from all over the world, in the true spirit of the Vis Moot – SLCU (Bangalore), University of Heidelberg, University of Indonesia, Tbilisi State University, University of Mannheim, University of Göttingen, Rafael Landivar University, Bucerius Law School, and University of Pretoria.

The announcement came off the heels of Sofia University also winning the Werner Melis Award for Best Memorandum for Respondent. ? team winning both the Eric Bergsten Award for the Prevailing Team in the Championship Round and the Werner Melis Award has only ever occurred three times in the history of the Vis Moot. The last time was fifteen years ago. Then, it was the University of Freiburg that won both awards. Notably, that year there were only approximately 180 competing team whereas this year's Vis Moot hosted twice as many. Sofia University was also recognized with an honourable mention for the Martin Domke Award for Best Oralist.

The afternoon of 14 April 2022 became the crowning achievement of the 11-year journey of the Bulgarian team of Sofia University in the Vis Moot. Despite consistently winning awards for their written submissions and individual oralists over the years, the Bulgarian university had previously proceeded to the direct elimination rounds only once – in 2020 when it reached the Top 16.

The University's team members for the 29th Vis Moot were Joana Valova, Ivan Ivanov, Sofia Lefterova, and Dayana Zasheva. The team was coached by Anastas Punev, Lia Harizanova, and Oleg Temnikov.

The 2022 Vis Moot

The 29th Vis Moot (Vienna) comprised 365 teams from 84 jurisdictions and over 2,500 students, in

keeping with its reputation as the biggest international legal competition in the world.

As always, the final round of the Moot was judged by three distinguished figures in international commercial arbitration – Dr. Günther Horvath, Dr. Lisa Spagnolo, and Chiann Bao (herself a Vis Moot alumna).

The 29th edition of the Vis Moot marks the first time a team from the Balkans and the second time a team from Central and Eastern Europe has won the competition. It was also the third time a team from the Balkans has won an award for Best Memorandum – not since the University of Zagreb in 2001 and the University of Belgrade in 2013.

Sofia University's win is in line with the notable recent rise in interest in international commercial arbitration in the region. Several other universities like the University of Pristina, the University of Belgrade, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, the University of Zenica, the University of Bucharest, and the University of Zagreb, have also consistently made it to the rounds of Top 64. In 2019, the University of Zenica even achieved the prestigious Second Runner-up place in the 26th Vis Moot.

The Balkans have also been known for hosting multiple successful pre-moots – in [Belgrade](#) (the biggest yet, with a turnout of around 60 teams every year), Sofia, and Pristina all judged by local arbitration practitioners and distinguished foreign guests. Thus, even due to its sheer size, the popularity of the Vis Moot is a key part of the competence-building efforts of Eastern Europeans to advance the prominence of international commercial arbitration in the region.

Undoubtedly, the continued success of Eastern European teams is a key part in developing Eastern Europe as an international commercial arbitration hub after numerous Central and Eastern European jurisdictions have made continuous efforts to modernise their arbitration laws, making them compliant with prevailing international arbitration practices and responding to the needs of arbitration users. In line with this, Bulgaria can be proud of being one of the first jurisdictions to adopt the UNCITRAL Model Law in its domestic law.

The celebration of Eastern European teams was not limited to Sofia University. Each year the Vis Moot also gives a Michael L. Sher Award for the Spirit of the Willem C. Vis Moot for embodying and advancing the idea of international cooperation and educational zeal the competition strives to foster. This year [the award went to the four Ukrainian teams](#) which persevered in the face of Russia's war and a humanitarian crisis and refused to be deprived of the opportunity to participate – Ivan Franko National University of L'viv, Kyiv National Taras Shevchenko University, Ukrainian Catholic University, and Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University.

The Prevailing Team

As all other teams, Sofia University's team has always embarked on the competition with the same dream – to win the Vis Moot. However, the gap between a dream in Summer 2021 and winning in Spring 2022 is made up of a tremendous amount of hard work, teamwork, creativity, zeal for advocacy, and a pinch of luck.

Many of the limited number of teams which have won the Vis Moot – only 23 universities since

1993 (and only seven European, of which three from Germany and two from the UK) – come from traditional arbitration jurisdictions and boast rich arbitration programs with the participation of both prominent scholars and masters in oral advocacy. However, Sofia University has competed for only 10 years and despite its supportive faculty, it has no course in either international arbitration or international sales law. It only shows that hard work, dedication, and talent are so fundamental, as to overcome any challenges a team might encounter. It also shows that the world of international arbitration is ever widening and the Vis moot is accomplishing its main purpose – to foster the dialogue between different legal backgrounds and expand the geography of jurisdictions that are well prepared in arbitration.

Sofia University's success has been built on four key pillars:

First, the team harnesses the unique opportunities in the large and international Vis community. They take part in the Vis Moot School Switzerland and later on, they use every opportunity to schedule friendly pleadings with teams from all over the world. Additionally, a supportive local community of Vis alumni provides a lot of valuable feedback during training pleadings.

Secondly, the summer training includes drafting mini-submissions on selected issues from previous Vis problems. Acquiring the instinct and acumen for well-structured and persuasive legal writing takes time and it is best to give the students as many chances as possible. This includes having the participants revise their old drafts after some time has passed and they have developed their issue-spotting and analytical abilities. In any case, the main priority of the team has always been to plead only the best legal arguments, and this uncompromised legal substance played significant role in the success.

Thirdly, the team remained open to constructive criticism to the very end. They took into account the pleadings of other teams and arbitrators' feedback from every training session and every pre-moot. In fact, the team changed entirely their strategy on one of the four questions after the Belgrade Pre-moot, a mere week before the official Vis rounds began.

Finally, the decisive factor in many excellent rounds is the demeanour of the participants. Sofia University's oralists entered the Vis arena confident in their preparation and ability to think on their feet and held themselves as winners to the very end, even if they began a round as the underdog. At the end of the day, win or lose, the Vis moot is an educational opportunity and any participant should be proud of the investment they have made in themselves and their progress as a lawyer.

The success of Sofia University in the Vis Moot has spurred a previously unimaginable public interest in moot court competitions – from newspapers, through radio stations, to TV channels. The team was even invited to meet with the Minister of Justice of Bulgaria.

The coaches have only one future objective – popularizing the Vis Moot amongst the students not only of Sofia University, but in Bulgaria as a whole, and supporting their young colleagues' interest in international commercial arbitration and international sales law.

To make sure you do not miss out on regular updates from the *Kluwer Arbitration Blog*, please subscribe [here](#). To submit a proposal for a blog post, please consult our [Editorial Guidelines](#).

Profile Navigator and Relationship Indicator

Includes 7,300+ profiles of arbitrators, expert witnesses, counsels & 13,500+ relationships to uncover potential conflicts of interest.

Learn how **Kluwer Arbitration** can support you.

Learn more about the newly-updated *Profile Navigator and Relationship Indicator*



 Wolters Kluwer

The graphic features a black background with white text and a circular icon. The icon depicts a central figure surrounded by four other figures, with a magnifying glass over the central figure. The background is accented with horizontal lines in blue and green.

This entry was posted on Sunday, May 15th, 2022 at 8:00 am and is filed under [Vis Moot](#), [Willem C. Vis Moot](#)

You can follow any responses to this entry through the [Comments \(RSS\)](#) feed. You can leave a response, or [trackback](#) from your own site.