

Pitkowitz to take the helm at VIAC

Jack Ballantyne
13 September 2022



Nikolaus Pitkowitz and Patrizia Netal

Nikolaus Pitkowitz of Austrian boutique Pitkowitz & Partners is to take over as president of the Vienna International Arbitration Centre from **Günther Horvath**, who is stepping down after three-and-a-half years in the role.

The VIAC board elected Pitkowitz at a meeting yesterday. It also elected **Patrizia Netal** of Knoetzl as vice president. The appointments take effect at the start of next year.

Pitkowitz, who has been a vice president at VIAC since 2017, says he plans to continue with the centre's mission to strengthen Vienna's role as a leading disputes hub.

He says the institution has "four pillars" – international commercial arbitration (including energy transformation and technology cases); domestic arbitration with a focus on construction and M&A disputes; an "infant" investment arbitration caseload boosted by new rules [launched](#) last year; and mediation.

Pitkowitz will also continue to work as counsel and arbitrator at GAR 100-ranked Pitkowitz & Partners, the boutique he [founded](#) last year with a team that broke away from Austrian firm Graf & Pitkowitz.

Horvath, formerly at Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, is returning to full-time work as arbitrator and counsel at his own boutique, and as a member of the supervisory board at German carmaker Porsche.

Horvath says the VIAC presidency under Pitkowitz will bring "continuity and further progress" and that Netal serving as vice president alongside **Franz Schwarz** of WilmerHale in London makes a "great team set for success".

Schwarz, who was [re-elected](#) for a second term in 2020, says Pitkowitz has a "compelling vision" for VIAC as the "premier institution" in Central and Eastern Europe. He also highlights Netal's experience in the region, saying she will "no doubt bring an important and fresh perspective."

The centre has already seen change with the [appointment](#) of Irish national **Niamh Leinwather** as its secretary general at the start of this year. She joined from Freshfields in Vienna to replace **Alice Fremuth-Wolf**, who served for nearly a decade in the role before leaving for Swiss disputes funder Nivalion.

Leinwather says VIAC is extremely grateful to Horvath for his “hard work and dedication” as president and a long-standing board member. She says his continued support in recent months “on every front was vital”, particularly on VIAC’s sanctions initiative.

VIAC joined with five other European arbitral institutions earlier this year to obtain an important clarification from the EU that transactions with Russian state-owned entities are [exempt from its sanctions regime](#) where they are strictly necessary to ensure access to arbitral proceedings.

Leinwather says she shares a “conviction” with Pitkowitz that the future of arbitration lies in legal technology. She says the centre is planning to launch a new think-tank focused on legal tech.

VIAC says it is currently administering 54 cases with a combined value exceeding €1 billion, with its largest case valued at €250 million. The most common countries of origins for parties in VIAC cases were Austria, Romania, Poland, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary and Russia.

VIAC board (as of 12 September 2022)

- **Nikolaus Pitkowitz**, partner at Pitkowitz & Partners, Vienna (president)
- **Franz Schwarz**, partner at Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr, London (vice president)
- **Patrizia Netal**, partner at Knoetzl, Vienna (vice president)
- **Günther Horvath**, independent arbitrator, Vienna
- **Claudia Annacker**, partner at Dechert, Paris
- **Alexander Petsche**, partner at Baker McKenzie, Vienna
- **Dietmar Prager**, partner at Debevoise & Plimpton, New York
- **Lucia Raimanova**, partner at Allen & Overy, Bratislava
- **Stefan Riegler**, partner at Wolf Theiss, Vienna
- **Nathalie Voser**, partner at Rothorn Legal, Zurich
- **Irene Welser**, partner at Cerha Hempel, Vienna
- **George Kathrein**, Federal Ministry of Justice
- **Paul Oberhammer**, University of Vienna
- **Friedrich Rüffler**, University of Vienna
- **Erich Schwarzenbacher**, Judge at the Austrian Supreme Court, Vienna

Other VIAC positions

- **Anton Baier**, Baier, Vienna (honorary member)
- **Werner Melis**, Baier, Vienna (honorary president)
- **Niamh Leinwather** (secretary general)
- **Elisabeth Vanas-Metzler** (deputy secretary general)

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Author

jack.ballantyne@lbresearch.com