

GUEST EDITORIAL: TURKEY'S NEW NORMAL

By Done Yalcin, Managing Partner, YBK in cooperation with CMS



Are you still reading? Despite the title this is not a COVID-19 piece. Quite frankly we have had enough of that. We want life to go back to how it was – but it won't. Something new is happening. People have been humbled by the effects of the C-word on their very existence. Everyone is suddenly more aware of the need to change –

in Turkey, for example, we always kiss and hug upon meeting, and we are not used to the concept of social distancing at all. Now we stand a meter apart and elbow or fist bump – which still feels odd to me. We are aware and we are asking ourselves – “what needs to change? Was this our fault? What is biodiversity? What can we do?”

Well we have been doing things. This issue of being environmentally aware is tucked away nicely into those corporate social responsibility policies we all like to show off. Companies know that they risk losing customers if they do not address the issue of sustainability. These things were nice to have before - now they are mandatory.

Just as the current situation pushed along digitalization and automation at a faster pace, it has done wonders for my favorite topic: Sustainability. I am the lead on Sustainability within my firm. This all happened pre-C, in case you were wondering. When lawyers at our firm become equity partners, we are required to deal with one or two topics that are not directly related to law or our own areas of expertise, but which serve the interests of the firm. My two areas are Legal Tech/Knowledge Management and Sustainability. I am a proponent of the People, Profit, Planet trifecta. My partners and colleagues have supported me with full enthusiasm from the very first second in achieving the not-insignificant goal of becoming a sustainable law firm with a sustainable consulting practice – and we have actually achieved a lot. This is because everyone in our organization, from the lawyers to our

support staff, understands and is aware of the importance of this topic. I want to provide legal services that are more sustainability-minded from within a firm that is itself sustainable. I want to encourage our clients to adopt more sustainable practices. I want to offer legal advice on how to be more sustainable within the legal frameworks that affect them. I want to bring together all the professions in my organisation to deliver quality sustainable services.

You may be interested to know what Turkey is doing in the sustainability sphere. Law firms have been empowered to execute certain financial agreements digitally, which will contribute to decreasing carbon emissions by avoiding paper waste and unnecessary travel. We have seen more ESG-related investments in Turkey, such as renewable power purchase agreements and solar panel production. There is an environmental cleaning tax, green leases, a recycling contribution fee based on water consumption, and many more incremental changes.

During lockdown I was invited to lead a global competition project team that was developing a sustainability app as part of a legal innovation ‘hackathon’ promoted by an international publication. My team involved colleagues from the UK, Turkey, Russia, Germany, and the Netherlands who were all united in their wish for a better approach to sustainability in law firms. We had lawyers, experts from the IT, marketing, legal tech, consulting, and climate change worlds, and (unavoidably) our loved ones locked in with us, as we raced to develop an app concept in three weeks.

I am excited and proud of what we are developing as a profession. I have experienced what the power of uniting together in difficult circumstances can create. In my Istanbul office we are bringing sustainability into everything we do. It goes beyond recycling the thousands of pieces of paper we discard weekly. We are partnering with leading organizations both within and outside Turkey that have been pushing the sustainable agenda for 20 years; it is not new and it is not a fad. ■