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Ivan Sagál is the Managing Partner of Bird & Bird offices in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, heading the Czech and Slovak Corporate and Banking & Finance Groups. He represents domestic and international clients across sectors including financial services, real estate, renewable energy, IT, telecoms, automotive, life sciences and aviation. Ivan's expertise covers M&A, reorganisations, project and acquisition finance, capital markets, FinTech, regulatory matters and complex cross-border restructuring and employment projects. Ivan contributes regularly to legal publications and business media, and is a member of the Czech and Slovak Bar Associations.

IN THE CURRENT GEOPOLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CLIMATE, WHAT SHOULD SLOVAKIA PRIORITIZE TO REMAIN COMPETITIVE WITHIN THE EU AND GLOBALLY?

As global supply chains are being interrupted and defence spending is increasingly influencing industrial decisions in the EU, Slovakia has a genuine opportunity, particularly in the automotive industry transition, energy security, and advanced manufacturing. Attracting extensive foreign investment requires predictable regulation, an independent and efficient court system, and a government that signals long-term stability to international partners.

At Bird & Bird, we see this daily, as clients make location decisions based on legal certainty as much as tax incentives. Slovakia should leverage its EU membership more assertively, align with pro-business Central European neighbours, and present itself as a reliable, well-governed hub for technology and innovation investment.

IF YOU COULD DEFINE ONE BOLD REFORM OR STRATEGIC SHIFT THAT WOULD SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVE SLOVAKIA'S BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

A comprehensive digitalisation of public administration and the justice system. This is the single reform that would have the most immediate and far-reaching impact.

Lengthy court proceedings, paper-based bureaucracy, and fragmented public registries remain among the most frequently cited frustrations by both domestic and international businesses. Digitising these systems would reduce costs, increase transparency, cut corruption risks, and dramatically shorten timelines for resolving disputes and completing regulatory processes. Countries like Estonia have demonstrated that this transformation is achievable within a generation.

Slovakia has the talent and the EU funding available – what is needed is political will and coherent execution. From a legal services perspective, faster and more predictable institutions directly translate into a more attractive investment environment.

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST STRATEGIC CHALLENGE YOUR COMPANY IS CURRENTLY NAVIGATING?

Staying ahead of the pace of change in technology, in client expectations, and in the competitive landscape of legal services. Clients increasingly expect their law firm to be a strategic partner, not just a service provider. They want faster

turnaround, greater cost predictability, and advice that connects legal risk to business outcomes.

At the same time, AI and legal technology are fundamentally changing how legal work is structured and delivered. Our challenge and opportunity is to harness these tools to enhance the quality and efficiency of what we do, while ensuring that the human judgement, relationship depth, and sector expertise that define Bird & Bird remain at the core of our offer.

HOW DO YOU FOSTER INNOVATION WITHIN YOUR ORGANISATION, WHETHER THROUGH TECHNOLOGY, PEOPLE, OR BUSINESS MODELS?

Innovation at Bird & Bird is not a separate initiative – it is embedded in how we work. Globally, the firm has invested significantly in legal technology and AI-assisted tools that support research, document review, and due diligence. Locally, we encourage our lawyers to challenge conventional approaches and to stay close to the industries they serve, understanding business models and not just legal frameworks. We also benefit enormously from our international network, where best practices and new methodologies are shared across offices.

People are ultimately the engine of innovation. We hire curious, commercially minded lawyers and give them exposure to complex, cross-border work early in their careers. That combination of global reach and local depth is what keeps us innovative and relevant.

HOW IS AI OR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION CHANGING YOUR INDUSTRY, AND HOW ARE YOU RESPONDING?

AI is transforming legal services faster than most anticipated even two or three years ago. Document-intensive work such as due diligence, contract review, and legal research is being fundamentally reshaped.

At Bird & Bird, we are responding not by resisting this shift, but by embracing it strategically. We use AI-assisted tools to increase efficiency, reduce turnaround times, and allow our lawyers to focus on higher-value analysis and client counselling. Importantly, we are also advising clients on the legal implications of AI adoption – regulatory compliance, data governance, liability frameworks – which is rapidly becoming one of the most in-demand areas of our practice.

The firms that will lead in this new environment are those that combine technological fluency with deep expertise and sound legal judgement. That is precisely where Bird & Bird is positioning itself.