

# The Belgian Legal Awards

## Highlights trends in the legal sector

On February 6<sup>th</sup> the Belgian Legal Awards ceremony took place. This event, the first of its kind, was an utter success. With over 450 participants (the organisers were obliged to refuse some 100 further applications); it gathered together the biggest names from the world of law. The presence of a number of director generals, CEOs and secretary generals indicated that the ceremony transcended the microcosm of law and furthermore that the legal dimension is of fundamental importance to businesses.

The ceremony, overseen by Thierry Van Diest, (huissier de justice) and facilitated by Patrick Vyvey, paid tribute to the law firms, legal departments, lawyers and in-house practitioners of the year.

The biggest winner of the first edition of the Belgian Legal Awards was the law firm **Eubelius**, triumphing in three categories including the prestigious ‘Belgian Law Firm of the Year’ award. This provided much deserved recognition for the partners and associates of Koen Geens, who have created a firm with ever-increasing presence in major business matters, a firm that has worked hard on its « North-South » balance, achieving a growing quantity of francophones, a firm that has shown the high calibre of its techniques in numerous briefs of great importance, a firm that in spite of their successes, had the grace to remain humble. The jury rightly held them in high esteem.

The prize for the ‘Managing Partner’ of the year is an admirable award as it acknowledges an individual for their service to the whole. It was **Olivier Clevenbergh**, managing partner at **Stibbe** who took home the first trophy of its kind. This prize reflects positively on the entire firm, which has supported a talented young associate in the construction of a new culture and in successfully overcoming some considerable challenges.

The Belgian Legal Awards also acknowledges firms with a regional presence. **Firket Brandenburg Crahay Pichault**, based in Liège, was recognised as the Wallonia firm of the year. Despite having adopted a low profile, they won over the judges with their regularity and efficiency in a series of disciplines. On the Dutch-speaking side, **Monard d’Hulst** was acclaimed as the most outstanding Flemish firm. In recent years, the associates of Erik Monard have established a triangle, comprising of Hasselt, Courtrai and Brussels, which covers the Flemish region. The next challenge awaiting this firm will be to attain similar commendation on a national and subsequently international level, an achievement which is well within their capabilities.

**Nauta Dutilh** received the prize for ‘Real Estate & Construction’ law firm of the year. It’s a fitting reward for the team of François Tulkens and Didier De Vlieghe, who have proved themselves worthy of the honour with a series of important briefs over the course of the year.

Yves Tavernier, the new Managing Partner of **DLA Piper** accepted the award for ‘Administrative & Environment’ firm of the year. The team of Bob Martens, already very

well-known in this particular field, has been further strengthened in this area following their merger with Coudert van Ommeslaghe.

### **The main trends**

Eagerly awaited, the prize for corporate law firm of the year was presented to **Eubelius**. It is a further reward for the team of Koen Geens and Philippe Hamer, both defectors from Allen & Overy. It is true that the firm was present in a great deal of the country's major transactions, without having benefited from the 'referral' effect, something many of the international 'mega firms' can count on.

**Hanotiau & van den Berg** was the runaway victor in the category of arbitration. The reputation of this niche firm surpasses the borders of Belgium and the academic profile of its associates seized the attention of the judges.

**Simont Braun** was the worthy victor in the 'Intellectual Property' category, in which it was represented by Benoît Michaux. The judges took into consideration the overwhelming continuity of innovation within this firm.

A pleasant surprise occurred in the category 'Technologies, Media and Telecommunication' for the niche firm **Ulys** and its young associates. This victory illustrates that the 'mega firms' do not necessarily monopolize the market and that firms of a smaller size are well able to establish a worthy and prominent position for themselves.

A conspicuous absence was that of firm **Claeys & Engels**, who were awarded the prize for 'Employment' firm of the year.

In 'Tax' it was the firm **Afschrift** who took home the trophy. The judges had been meticulous in their technical approach to this complex specialisation, ultimately awarded to a very dynamic team.

**Praxislaw** excelled in the category of 'Insurance'. It is true that the old firm Grégoire counts in its ranks the specialists customarily recognised by the insurance companies. Nevertheless, the board of judges have shown their admiration for a new dynamic, initiated by Guido Verdeyen and his team.

The firm **Verhaegen Walravens** won the 'Criminal Law' trophy. It is repeatedly the man who prevails in criminal law who recognises that white-collar crime requires a legal arrangement engineered by the individual, as it is such a complex discipline. This firm has experienced a remarkable expansion in only a few years and this distinction does not come as a surprise to anyone.

In 'Competition and Anti-trust' **Linklaters De Bandt** triumphed. The board of judges took into consideration the highly-experienced team dedicated to this specialisation, which is resident on Brederode Street.

Ann De Roeck, the Secretary General of Dexia, remitted the trophy for 'Banking & Finance'. It was bestowed upon **Clifford Chance**.

Brussels is the legal capital of the world. This helps to explain the intense competition in the category 'US firm of the Year'. Howard Liebman of **Jones Day** had the honour of collecting

this prize. **Jones Day** has been resident in Brussels for a great number of years and under the skilful leadership of Luc Houben and Bernard Amory has recently been able to consolidate many of its divisions.

The ‘Erna Van Hoof Award’, rewarding the Marketing Manager of the year in the legal sector was bestowed upon **Carol Clancy** of **Van Bael & Bellis**. The judges have taken the initiative of arranging a DVD entitled ‘complying with EU competition law’ and the site [www.eu-competition-compliance.com](http://www.eu-competition-compliance.com) proves particularly useful and informative for clients.

## **In-house lawyers: a mature profession**

The President of the ‘Institute of in-house lawyers’, Pascal De Roeck, greatly impressed the audience, discussing primarily the importance of participating in a ceremony such as the Legal Awards. The event truly fosters an improved awareness of the big legal vocations: lawyers, in-house practitioners, notaries. The hundreds of in-house lawyers present along with the representatives of other professions recognised in this speech the mature evolution of the profession.

Philippe Lambrecht, Secretary General of the FEB and a practicing lawyer, presented the trophy for ‘Transaction of the Year’ to Pierre Schaubroeck, Group General Counsel of **Bekaert**. The competition was intense in this category, notable for the IPO of Elia and the merger of La Poste.

Jettie Van Caenegem, Secretary General of the ‘European association of in-house lawyers’ remitted the trophy for ‘Legal Department of the Year’ to **La Poste**. A recognition of the highest order for the team of Dirk Tirez, one of the most professional in-house legal departments. They set a remarkable example.

Finally, **Philippe Marchandise** received from the dynamic personality Anne De Wolf; director of the ‘Institute of in-house lawyers’, the prize for the greatest contribution to the profession of in-house lawyers. This is much-deserved acclaim for a remarkable individual from the world of law.

The first edition of the Belgian Legal Awards has highlighted the tremendous importance of enlightening the sector on the developments and trends affecting the most prominent actors in the industry. Law is an extremely dynamic area, in which it is nonetheless difficult to identify the trends. Equally, the ceremony has drawn attention to the status of Brussels, a cosmopolitan city with an enormous presence linking the international, national and regional legal markets together.

The test has succeeded. This triumph is due largely to the quality of patronage and sponsors gathered together, coupled with the credibility conferred by a board of judges which is without doubt the most prestigious group ever united together in this country for such an event. The Legal Awards will become the great annual pilgrimage of legal practitioners.

Laurent Marlière  
Professor at the EFB in Paris  
President of the Legal Awards

*A full listing of the nominations and results is now available at [www.legal-awards.be](http://www.legal-awards.be)*