

## Disputes boutique opens in Paris and Montreal

Cosmo Sanderson  
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Pierre-Olivier Savoie and Pierre-Olivier Laporte

Two practitioners who are bringing the first known investment treaty claim against Norway have launched a transatlantic disputes boutique based in Paris and Montreal.

**Pierre-Olivier Savoie** and **Pierre-Olivier Laporte** launched Savoie Laporte earlier this month after having both previously led their own boutique practices.

Paris-based Savoie says that following the provisional enforcement in 2017 of the EU-Canada free trade agreement – which he helped negotiate while working for the Canadian government – he and Laporte believe that the “Canada-Europe connection is an important one that will continue expanding.”

The Montreal-Paris connection is also an important one for Canadian companies doing business in Africa, says Savoie, while Montreal has “untapped potential” as a place to hold hearings and serve as a seat of arbitration.

The relationship between Savoie and Laporte dates back to 2001, when they began studying law together at McGill University in Montreal.

They went their separate ways after graduating in 2005. Savoie clerked for **Judge Peter Tomka** and **Judge Mohammed Bennouna** at the International Court of Justice before joining White & Case as an associate in New York. After another spell clerking in the Supreme Court of Canada, he joined the state’s Trade Law Bureau, where he helped defend Canada against eight NAFTA claims.

In 2013, he moved to Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer as an associate in Paris. He stayed there until 2016 when he launched his own boutique, Savoie Arbitration, where he remained until now.

Laporte meanwhile started out at Norton Rose Fulbright in Montreal and then went to Geneva to work as counsel for several international organizations including WIPO and the Global Fund to Fight Aids Tuberculosis and Malaria.

While at the Global Fund he had an opportunity to work with Savoie to help the organisation defeat an UNCITRAL claim brought by one of its grant recipients – as Freshfields had agreed to represent the fund pro bono.

Freshfields partner **Peter Turner QC** believes his former colleague Savoie and client Laporte will be a “winning combination.” The new firm, he says, will be “greater than the sum of its halves and its combined strengths will be most attractive to clients in both investment and commercial arbitration.”

**Gülen Newton**, the former general counsel of the Global Fund, says that Laporte was her “top star lawyer” while also praising the “bright and dedicated” Savoie.

“These two will make a formidable team, I’m sure of it.”

Laporte launched his own solo practice in Montreal in 2016, the same year Savoie left Freshfields to establish his own boutique.

The project to unite the two practices and reunite the two practitioners has been “in the works for the past three years or so,” Savoie says. During this time, they have already been “applying this integrated vision of the firm” while working on several international arbitrations together.

Recently the duo teamed up to bring the first known investment treaty claim against Norway, representing a Latvian businessman whose vessel was seized while trawling for snow crabs. The claim was registered at ICSID in April after two threats were issued over the last three years.

Romania, meanwhile, has instructed them to defend a pair of UNCITRAL investment treaty claims brought earlier this year by two brothers for the Communist-era expropriation of their family's film company – a dispute potentially worth as much as US\$2 billion.

Savoie has also been defending Latvia at ICSID in a claim brought by banking investors, last month fending off an application launched by the claimants to unseat the entire tribunal.

Savoie and Laporte say they have also been acting before the French courts in obtaining provisional attachments against a non-signatory to an arbitration clause, after establishing its participation in the contract, in respect to an ICC dispute and the provisional execution of an award.

Savoie and Laporte are joined at their new firm by two associates, **Justine Touzet** and **Ariane Zimra**, who were both previously at Savoie Arbitration in Paris.

**Iain McKenny** of third-party funder Profile Investment says that Savoie Laporte is one of a “new breed of boutique law firms offering specialised, high-quality international arbitration expertise historically the reserve of the very wealthy.”

“Access to justice must also be about access to highly skilled, professional and experienced counsel and that is precisely what Savoie Laporte offers.”