

MVP: Holland & Knight's Antonia Tzinova

By **Rae Ann Varona**

Law360 (November 12, 2024, 3:09 PM EST) -- Antonia Tzinova of Holland & Knight LLP successfully challenged U.S. Customs and Border Protection's refusal to share certain evidence used in a tariff evasion determination — spurring the agency to implement a new transparent Administrative Protective Order system, and earning Tzinova a spot among the 2024 Law360 International Trade MVPs.

Her biggest accomplishment:

In May, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, in an effort to make Enforce and Protect Act proceedings more transparent for parties to investigations, announced a new Administrative Protective Order process to allow authorized individuals to access confidential business information in the administrative record when subject to probes.

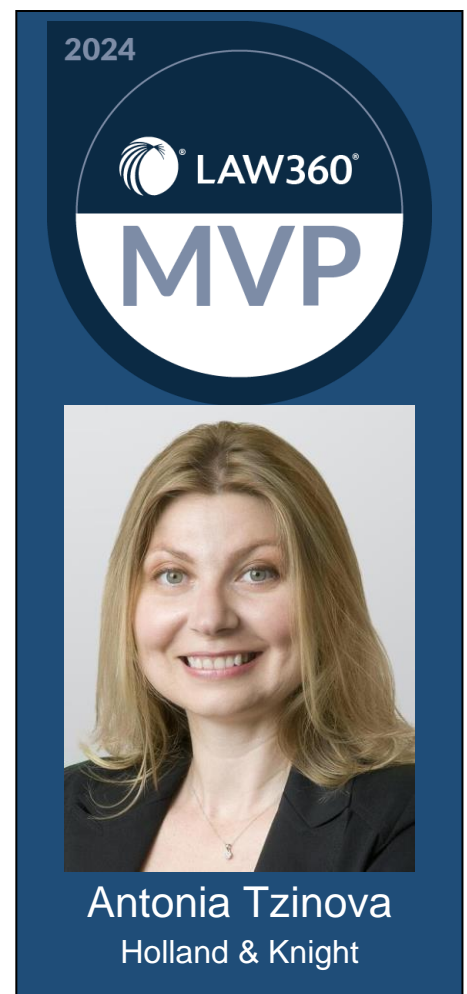
The agency said that it was implementing the new process in response to a case Tzinova handled for an art supply manufacturer, Royal Brush Manufacturing Inc. v. United States, which had been caught up in an EAPA proceeding and challenged a CBP policy against sharing evidence in tariff evasion investigations.

The Federal Circuit sided with Royal Brush in July 2023, ruling that withholding business confidential information from Royal Brush regarding its Filipino pencil supplier had violated Royal Brush's due process rights.

Due process, the Federal Circuit said, "includes the right to know what evidence is being used against one." CBP's reliance on factual information that wasn't provided to Royal Brush to determine that the company evaded duties was "in and of itself" a "clear violation of due process," the Federal Circuit said.

CBP's resulting new process was big for importers, Tzinova said.

"It was the first case of this type ... and it just made it a little better for the entire importer community," Tzinova said.



Her biggest challenge:

Managing different cases and priorities is a challenge many lawyers face, and that is especially true in international trade cases, where national security issues can come up, Tzinova said.

"It's a balancing game," Tzinova said.

An example of this challenge arose, Tzinova said, as she served as lead counsel for a Guernsey, U.K., investor in its September 2023 acquisition of a U.S. business and its three wholly owned U.S. subsidiaries.

Led by Tzinova, the Holland & Knight team on the matter was asked to gain approval from the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States on an accelerated timeline — all while dealing with several national security issues.

Also in September 2023, Tzinova served as lead counsel in a CFIUS matter worth hundreds of millions of dollars, leading German-based investment firm Meag Munich Ergo in its investment in Boston-based renewable energy company Longroad Energy, which has a goal to generate 9 gigawatts of power by 2027.

With transactions like Meag's, Tzinova, whose team had been working with the company for years, said that "financing is key" and comes with aggressive deadlines.

"We always have this pressure on clearing the transaction quickly so that parties can benefit from the offered financing," Tzinova said. "So it's a balance between national security and deal interest again."

Why she's an international trade attorney:

Tzinova said that her understanding of international trade was initially narrow. When the George Washington University Law School graduate first studied law at the Sofia University Law School in Bulgaria, she had her eyes set on foreign direct investments.

She said she believes foreign direct investment is a "great equalizer in the world, and allows for knowledge and capital and human potential to cross borders and bring the host country and the people involved up."

When Tzinova came to the U.S., she went back to law school and worked at the International Monetary Fund, which further solidified her goal of working in foreign direct investment, or FDI.

But the law firm she joined after graduating told her that she'd be doing trade work, as someone else they'd hired would be doing corporate finance — news Tzinova said almost brought her to tears.

But to her surprise, among her initial assignments was drafting a guide on FDI for the U.K. Ministry of Defense.

"This is what I wanted to do, and this is part of international trade," Tzinova recalled realizing.

"I realized that international trade is broader than one may imagine," she said, noting that it deals with almost everything that crosses borders, including goods, services and money.

"For the most part, the regulatory concerns are national security, and so that makes it a very interesting practice," she said.

"That makes for a very interesting and, I think, very impactful practice," Tzinova said.

What motivates her:

Tzinova, who leads Holland & Knight's CFIUS and Industrial Security team, said that the work itself is motivating.

"The type of work we do is very interesting," she said. "It keeps your brain involved and keeps you on high alert."

She added that she also enjoys solving people's problems and navigating through issues in ways clients don't expect.

"It may not necessarily develop the way they imagine, so we may find a creative solution," Tzinova said, adding that she had just got off a call with a client who was worried about possibly having to choose between losing an investment or complying with requirements.

Tzinova was able to ease her client's concerns.

"This type of interaction is what makes it very rewarding," she said.

Her advice to junior attorneys:

Tzinova said she believes in the adage that if you love what you do and do it well, success will follow.

She encourages junior attorneys to try different things and "try to have fun."

"Figure out what you like and stick with the things that you like," she said.

Tzinova also encourages junior attorneys to avoid seeking a linear approach to success and to allow themselves to notice and grab opportunities as they present themselves. She noted that her career has taken several unexpected turns since her early 20s.

Thirdly, Tzinova said, junior attorneys should take initiative. She noted that one of her junior associates, for example, hosts a podcast that the firm recently launched alongside its new Facility Security Clearance practice. Tzinova said that as a host, the associate has been able to interview people, learn, and create something meaningful for herself.

Throughout her career, Tzinova said, she has worked to carve out a niche in a practice dominated by men.

"It's a marathon, and you don't have to reach there quickly," Tzinova said. "You just need to be persistent and persevere."

--As told to Rae Ann Varona. Additional reporting by Jennifer Doherty.

Law360's MVPs are attorneys who have distinguished themselves from their peers over the past year through high-stakes litigation, record-breaking deals and complex global matters. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2024 MVP winners after reviewing nearly 900 submissions.

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