

Gentium Law founder supports UN leadership bid

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Parish and Jeremic

The founder of Gentium Law in Geneva, **Matthew Parish**, is combining his international arbitration practice with a role as chief political adviser to one of the European candidates to become UN secretary general after Ban-Ki moon's term concludes at the end of the year.

The British lawyer is working for **Vuk Jeremić**, former foreign minister of Serbia, in the race for the position, which – based on traditional regional rotation – would be expected to go to an Eastern European this time.

Jeremić, is fighting 12 other declared candidates, six of whom are Eastern European and six of whom are women. None of the eight holders of the office so far have been female. Among them are former prime ministers of Moldova, Portugal and New Zealand and leaders of bodies including UNESCO and the UN Development Programme

Australia's former prime minister Kevin Rudd declared his candidacy this week but has yet to be formally nominated.

Parish describes how he got to know Jeremić. "After practising as a disputes lawyer in London, and a spell in the World Bank's legal department, I became a peacekeeper in the Balkans. I was the Chief Legal Advisor to the Supervisor of the *Brcko Arbitration Tribunal*, an international tribunal established by the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords in Bosnia and Herzegovina to resolve the territorial and ethnic disputes between the warring parties in a contested region of northeastern Bosnia. The tribunal was chaired by a distinguished US arbitrator, **Roberts Owen**."

"During my time in that role, I met politicians from across the region, from mayors to councillors to members of parliament to prime ministers to presidents, from every political party and leaning."

"His Excellency Vuk Jeremić, then foreign minister of Serbia, was the same age as me. We are now both 40. He always impressed me as one of the most principled, decent and incorruptible politicians in a troubled region. His father was Serbian, his mother Bosnian. To me he represented the epitome of harmonious inter-ethnic Yugoslavia."



“We are now both Young Global Leaders at the World Economic Forum in Davos, and close friends. I believe he has the diplomacy, integrity and authority to mediate issues of international law and diplomacy at a particularly tricky time in the early part of the 21st century. We want a decent man to serve.”

Being part of a UN leadership campaign is “a once-in-a-lifetime experience and unusual for an international lawyer,” he says. “But I want to promote the rule of international law, and I want to support a candidate that shares my values.”

The UN secretary general has been described as chief administrative officer of the organisation. The Treaty of San Francisco provides that holders of the role are appointed by the UN General Assembly, upon the proposal of the UN Security Council. That means that candidates are subject to the veto of any of the five permanent members of the Security Council: China, France, Russia, the UK and the US.

The appointment process has traditionally been conducted behind closed doors, with the council proposing just a single candidate to the General Assembly, which has never rejected its choice. Following criticisms that the process is too opaque and lobbying by NGOs such as “1 for 7 billion”, there has been a move towards greater openness. This year, for the first time, all candidates have given public statements to the UN General Assembly and have faced questioning from the 193 member states represented in the assembly.

The traditional regional rotation of the role means Eastern European candidates are seen to be in a favourable position, with Russia particularly keen to have a secretary general from its historical sphere of influence. However, tension over Russian actions in Ukraine in the security council could lead to a deadlock over a candidate perceived as too soft on Vladimir Putin. Thus, candidates from other regions such as Costa Rica’s **Christina Figueres**, New Zealand’s **Helen Clark** and Portugal’s **António Guterres** are viewed as serious contenders.

Russia’s ambassador to the UN has indicated the state would not veto a candidate who was not from Eastern Europe in the way China threatened to veto a non Asian candidate in 2007, when Ban was appointed.

Parish says: “Every secretary-general to date has been from a different geographical region but there are no hard-and-fast rules. There are some who say that this is Eastern Europe’s candidacy to lose. My own desire is that the best candidate wins, irrespective of any consideration other than merit.”

After his spell in the Balkans, Parish worked at Denton Wilde Sapte in Cairo and Hogan & Hartson and Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld in Geneva.

He founded his boutique, Gentium Law, which specialises in commodities and commercial arbitration, in January 2015, after three years at Holman Fenwick Willan in Geneva. The boutique has a desk in Moscow and an office in Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan.

The UN security council is expected to select a candidate to succeed Ban Ki-moon in October and *Agence de France* reported an initial straw poll to whittle down the list today. Earlier this year, Ban gave a keynote address at the ICCA Congress in Mauritius on the important role of UNCITRAL - the UN Commission of International Trade Law - in promoting arbitration and a harmonious business environment, contributing to peaceful relations between countries.

Candidates for UN secretary general role as of 21 July 2016

Irina Bokova (Bulgaria), former director general of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

Helen Clark (New Zealand), former prime minister of New Zealand and administrator of the United Nations Development Programme

Christina Figueres (Costa Rica), former executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Natalia Gherman (Moldova), former deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs of Moldova

António Guterres (Portugal), former prime minister of Portugal and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Vuk Jeremić (Serbia), former minister of foreign affairs for Serbia and president of the Belgrade-based Centre for International Relations and Sustainable Development

Srgjan Kerim (Macedonia), former foreign minister of Macedonia and president of the UN General Assembly

Miroslav Lajcak (Slovakia), former minister of foreign and European affairs of Slovakia

Igor Lukšić (Montenegro), former deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs of Montenegro

Susana Malcorra (Argentina), former minister of foreign affairs of Argentina and aide to Ban Ki-moon

Vesna Pusić (Croatia), former deputy prime minister of Croatia and minister of foreign affairs

Kevin Rudd (Australia), former prime minister of Australia

Danilo Türk (Slovenia), former president of Slovenia and chair of the Global Fairness Initiative