

## Interview with Dr. Yuliia Kostkina

### (Alumna, Law for International Students & Professionals)

*From 2020 to 2022, the period of the coronavirus pandemic, Dr. Kostkina spent her time at the University of Bayreuth and completed her master's degree in Law for International Students & Professionals with top marks. Before coming to Germany, she obtained her PhD in Ukraine and worked in the Ukrainian Parliament for several years. Now she is a certified data protection officer at tacticx Consulting GmbH.*

**You studied law and earned your PhD in Ukraine. Why did you decide to come to Germany and why did you choose the University of Bayreuth?**

It was partly fate... You are right, I did my bachelor's, master's and then doctoral studies in Ukraine at the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv at the Faculty of Law. My dissertation on "Legal status of the High Council of Justice" was published in 2019, by the way, the monograph can be found in Bayreuth's library.



Before coming to Germany, I worked in the Ukrainian parliament for about five years. Since I was already actively involved in politics and interested in democracy and the rule of law, I always wanted to gain experience in the heart of democracy - in Germany. That's why I started learning German and applied for a programme offered by the German Bundestag. I got the scholarship and in 2020 I came to Germany. I did my internship in the office of the former Vice President of the German Bundestag, Dr. Hans-Peter Friedrich. At the same time, I attended lectures at the Humboldt University in Berlin as a part-time student.

Due to the unstable economic and political situation in Ukraine, I decided to stay in Germany after my internship. It was clear to me that in order to be competitive on the German labour market, I should enhance my knowledge of German law. That's why I looked at master's programmes for international lawyers at different German universities. When choosing a university, I did a lot of research and looked at different rankings. The Faculty of Law, Business & Economics at the University of Bayreuth had very good reviews in the rankings of German universities, so I decided to pursue my master's degree at the University of Bayreuth and I have never regretted this decision.

**During your studies at the UBT, you worked as a research assistant at the university. After graduation you are now a data protection officer at tacticx Consulting GmbH. Can you please tell us what your job is about and if you had to overcome any challenges along the way?**

I worked as a research associate at the Chair for German and European Consumer Law and Private Law and Comparative Law during my studies. It was a great honour and pleasure for me to work in Prof. Dr. Schmidt-Kessel's team. It was a very exciting time. While working at the Chair, I gave the lectures on data protection law and comparative law, co-authored chapter in the Handbook on Consumer Law, which will be published soon. In addition, I had the opportunity to present at the German-Italian seminar at the University of Verona and to discuss relevant issues regarding data protection law with German and Italian colleagues. It was an invaluable experience for me.

After I finished my studies at the University of Bayreuth, I got a job at tacticx Consulting GmbH and now I am the certified data protection officer. I consult our clients on their data protection concerns and conduct the data protection audits.

Of course, there were a lot of challenges on my way. First of all, because of the lack of time, as I had to balance my studies and work. I had to organise my time very well. Secondly, I still had a language barrier at the beginning. But „Übung macht den Meister“ [“practice makes perfect”], as they say in Germany.

### **How did your time at UBT prepare you for and influence your career?**

Both the studies and the work with the research group at the University of Bayreuth have helped me a lot. I increased my knowledge of the German legal system, gained a lot of new experience and, of course, overcame my language barrier. It was a good introduction to the German labour market.

### **What was your favourite memory or place at the university?**

There are, of course, very many places in the University of Bayreuth that have special meaning for me. I remember the first time I was on campus, how excited and inspired I was. Then came the first lectures in AudiMax. I have to admit that the university is very well equipped technically. I also have wonderful memories about the RW Library, where I spent many evenings working, as I wrote my term paper in my first semester. In the summer, I also liked to go for walks in the Botanical Garden. But the best memory for me is when I successfully passed my final exam and realised that my dream had come true.

### **Having worked in both Ukraine and Germany, do you notice any cultural differences in the workplace?**

I should admit that I was lucky with my colleagues in both cases in Germany. The working atmosphere was very friendly both at the Chair at the University and at tacticx, which made my integration easier. We always supported each other with colleagues. But of course, there are also the cultural differences which I noticed. For example, the working atmosphere is more informal here in Germany. You are on a first-name basis with your colleagues and your supervisor. In addition, employees' private lives and free time are respected here. That's why it is easier to maintain a work-life balance in Germany.

### **Do you have any tips, especially for our international students, for finding a job or starting a new job in Germany?**

People who want to study or work abroad are very brave. To leave your own home and study or work in a foreign language takes courage and a lot of effort. The most important thing is not to be afraid and keep your chin up, even if something goes wrong. Step by step, you can achieve all your goals.

In this context, I would like to quote Earl Nightingale: "Never give up on a dream just because of the time it will take to accomplish it. The time will pass anyway."

### **Is the current war in Ukraine affecting your life plans and would you like to make a comment on the current situation?**

Ukraine is my homeland and remains forever in my heart, that is why the current situation does not leave me indifferent. I am deeply concerned about what is happening and I sincerely hope that the war will end soon, peace will come and Ukraine will recover and become a prosperous country.



Photo: Dr. Yuliia Kostkina

Interview conducted by Bayreuth International Alumni Services