

## Burrata lunch with Morrison & Foerster's Angela Kerek: “Why are German firms so reluctant to invest in the next generation?”

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It's in Hungarian that Angela Kerek used to speak to Monica Seles, when she played against her on the tennis court. As a teenager, she had already won the Romanian tennis championships, and later played in the German tennis Bundesliga—having moved to Germany with her family. Her tennis pro career helped her pay for law school.

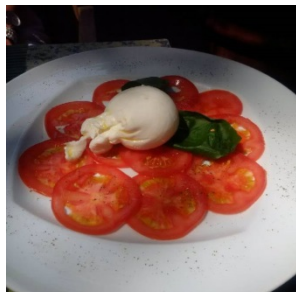
Being a tennis pro was not enough for Angela. She earned a doctorate in constitutional law, and today still raves about the quality of the lectures by former Constitutional Court Judge Böckenförde in Freiburg, and on occasion still gives university lectures herself in Hungary. She has just become a partner at U.S. law firm Morrison & Foerster in Berlin, after working nine years as an attorney at



British law firm Linklaters in Frankfurt. Her area of focus: loans—of any kind. For there are so many kinds: corporate takeovers financed through bank loans, real estate transactions, or the financing of entire highways.

While at Linklaters, Angela Kerek was more likely to advise banks. She is now mostly advising borrowers and wants to build out a finance practice at Morrison & Foerster. The law firm with San Francisco roots has not been in Germany for very long (since 2013). Overall, the firm has about 1,000 lawyers worldwide; here in Germany, they have around 40—comparable to Angela's previous banking practice group at Linklaters in Frankfurt.

We are sitting in “Casa Luigi”, in the heart of Düsseldorf's old quarter, and Angela has ordered burrata—that's cheese made of cow milk, a type of mozzarella—with tomato slices. That's all she needs, she says, as she wants to take up tennis training again, because it “*feels really good.*” Even though these days, she no longer wants to train for two hours twice a day, as she used to. She spends the limited amount of free time lawyers working at large firms typically get with her husband—also a lawyer and in fact a judge—and her two-and-a-half-year-old daughter.



Burrata in “Casa Luigi” in Düsseldorf

## **Why British lawyers share offices**

Angela explains why London lawyers often have to share their office and are not granted their own four walls: it's because the British feel very strongly about training and developing young lawyers, meaning a senior lawyer usually shares their office with a younger one. This helps the younger lawyer absorb knowledge from seeing their experienced colleague in action—it is very much part of the corporate culture. The senior lawyers welcome it, as they enjoy passing on their knowledge to younger colleagues.

This culture rubbed off on Angela while she worked in Linklaters' London office. As soon as she got back to Frankfurt, she asked a trainee to share her office, and hasn't looked back since. The outcome? Angela now has great connections with a wide variety of law firms throughout the country, mirroring where the former trainees ended up. It is called being well-connected.

## **Germans' lack of interest in investing in young people**

There is only one thing, she, a native Romanian, still doesn't understand about Germany: why so many Germans have so little interest in investing in the next generation—so very different from, say, the British? It is down to attitude, the adopted Berliner says. It cannot be solely blamed on a lack of time—that she dismisses vehemently. And she adds that American universities have such a strong focus on passing on to the students what they will need for their professional lives, not simply academic knowledge. That makes her proud. As her professor Gad Allon at the American Kellogg School of Management used to say: *“For every business area, you should be able to ask three core questions”*. All U.S. professors find it important to *“pass on to their students something for life, constantly self-reflect, always aim to improve themselves, be brave, give something to others, always look for the best in people, think from an entrepreneurial perspective, always act ethically, and also take care of their own health. And whatever happens, family comes first.”*

Dennis Patterson, the U.S. professor who sent Angela a whole package of books for her University thesis—at his own expense—is another case in point. When she thanked him for it, his response was: *“Just promise me that you will do the same for someone else one day”*.

So Angela's motto now is: *“It's fine to wonder what happens if we educate our employees and they leave. But what happens if we don't educate them and they stay?”*