Report of European Regional Group

1. Introduction

1.1 Over the last 4 years the ERF has developed and implemented a new strategy for the Forum.

1.2 The starting point for the new strategy was to define the role of the ERF within the IBA. Set out below is the Statement of Purpose summarising the key elements as follows:

**Statement of Purpose of ERF**

- Support objectives of IBA and its members in Europe
- Foster closer connection between lawyers in Europe particularly re professional development and networking opportunities

1.3 The ERF is split into 4 regions as follows: Northern, Western, Central and ‘Southeastern’. Each region has its own Chair and Vice Chair who are ERF Officers. The aim of the Regional Groups is to focus efforts in each region on mutual support and assistance amongst Council Members and to organise networking and professional development initiatives in their region.

1.4 Working Parties and Taskforces have been established to plan and implement specific initiatives. These include initiatives on:
  - Diversity and Inclusion
  - Mental Wellbeing
  - Young Lawyers
  - Public Policy (which is currently focusing on certain aspects of the ESG agenda)
  - The Rule of Law
  - Communications
1.5 In addition, the ERF organises 3 annual specialist conferences on the following topics:

- European Fashion and Luxury
- European Automotive and Mobility Services
- European Start-ups

1.6. The ERF also organises 2 sessions at the IBA Annual Conference. This year the sessions are on Legal Tech and the Rule of Law.

1.7 It also supports other conferences most notably the Balkan Legal Forum conference which is taking place in Vienna this year.

1.8 The ERF currently has 26 Officers including 6 Senior Officers and approximately 45 Council Members

1.9 The role of Council Members is to build and maintain contact with their local National Bar Association as well as universities and other legal institutions in their countries. This helps to increase awareness of the IBA and its mission. Council Members are also encouraged to become actively engaged with one of the Working Parties/Task forces established by the ERF to implement agreed initiatives.

1.10 Set out below is a diagrammatic representation of the current structure of the ERF.
2. Detailed initiatives

2.1 Annual reviews  At the end of each year the Senior Officers discuss progress of the Working Parties and Regional Groups with their Chairs/Vice Chairs. The purpose of the review is to see what further support is required by the other Officers or Council Members. A copy of the review at the end of last year is attached to this report. It provides details of the work undertaken by the Working Parties and Regional Groups. There is also attached the consolidated business plan for last year. The aim of this exercise is to ensure that Working Parties and Regional Groups have a clear idea of their focus and the initiatives for the year ahead.

2.2 Council Members  Council Members are the “eyes and ears” of the ERF in their jurisdictions. Critical to the success of the Regional Groups and the Working Parties is the level of engagement of Council Members. In February we had an open online meeting for any ERF members who were interested in becoming Council Members. Approximately 50 people attended the event and as a result we appointed 13 new Council Members. We are seeking ways to increase both the profile and levels of engagement of Council Members

2.3 ERF Leadership Strategy Retreat: Every year the ERF leadership has a facilitated retreat comprising all or its Officers. This year the retreat was online. The purpose of the retreat is to review progress to date and identify the key strategic aims for the year ahead. Attached is the impact statement coming out of these discussions.

2.4 Dublin Retreat In addition to the Leadership Strategy Retreat, the ERF also has a retreat for Officers, Council Members and members of the Advisory Board. This is an informal opportunity to meet up and share with each other some of the challenges we have been facing. We have a morning session in which we discuss in breakout groups some of the critical strategic issues. This year the retreat was held in Dublin on 8 April.

2.5 Communications  The ERF is ultimately there to support the 7,000 + ERF members within the IBA. As part of this process, we are seeking to improve our level of communications with our members - what is important to them and what are we doing to support them. We are currently focusing on improving the ERF Webpage to make it more accessible and informative. We also want to use it as a repository of helpful information about different aspects of the ERF making our role and operations as transparent as possible. At the same time, we are looking to produce on a regular basis informative newsletters for all ERF members.

2.6 Advisory Board The members of the Advisory Board are currently reviewing its structure and role. Potentially the Advisory Board has an important role to play in assisting with the longer-term strategic aims of the ERF. This does not mean getting involved in the day-to-day activities of the ERF or in any way second guessing its operational aspects. It can also be an important source of contacts. The review is considering fixed term appointments to the Advisory Board as well as more regular structured meetings.
3. Other Initiatives

3.1 The Diversity & Inclusion Working Party ran a survey on D&I issues for European law firms. They are currently preparing a toolkit for smaller law firms wishing to introduce a Diversity and Inclusion policy into their firms.

3.2 We have been asked by the senior IBA management as well as the Human Rights Institute to look at the rule of law issues faced by commercial law firms across Europe. A taskforce has been established and their terms of reference have been agreed.

3.3 The invasion of Ukraine has been hugely traumatic for many Europeans. We have been supporting our Ukrainian Officer originally based in Kyiv and provided her the opportunity to share her story as widely as possible. We have also been providing the IBA with detailed information from around Europe on the initiatives under way to support refugees. We have also had active correspondence with the IBA senior leadership about the challenges faced by the ERF as a result of the conflict.