

MVP: Covington's David Pinsky

By **Caroline Simson**

Law360 (November 12, 2025, 4:03 PM EST) -- Covington & Burling LLP partner David Pinsky acts as lead counsel for Ukraine's state-owned oil and gas company and has achieved several victories in an enforcement battle over a \$5 billion arbitral award the company won following a dispute with Russia, earning him a spot as one of the 2025 Law360 International Arbitration MVPs.

His biggest accomplishment:

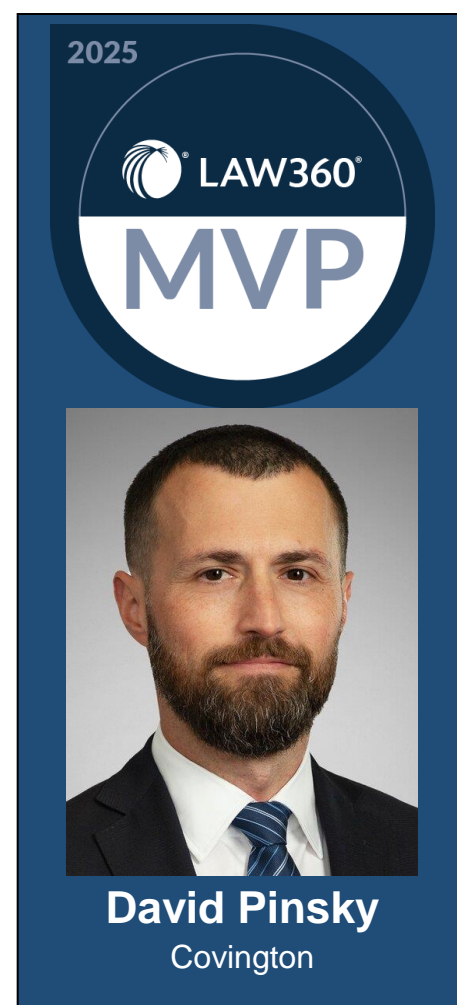
International arbitration practitioners are well aware that enforcing an arbitral award of any size against Russia is no easy task, and enforcing one of the magnitude secured by the Covington team for longtime client Naftogaz has been a particularly arduous task.

For that reason, Pinsky told Law360, he's proud of the successes he and his team at Covington have secured for Naftogaz in France, Finland and — most recently — Austria in enforcing the massive \$5 billion award that the company won in 2023 after the Kremlin seized its Crimean assets. The award followed a six-year arbitration in The Hague.

In France, the Covington team and co-counsel Le 16 Law secured permission to enforce the award in April, resulting in Naftogaz registering an interest in more than €120 million (\$138.7 million) worth of Russian state-owned assets. In Finland in October 2024, the Covington team and co-counsel at HPP Attorneys secured an interim freezing order over Russian state-owned real estate holdings. Russia's objections against the freezing order were rejected by the Helsinki District Court in June and the freezing order was subsequently affirmed by an appellate court in October.

In Austria, Naftogaz was granted permission to seize approximately €120 million of Russian assets this summer.

"That has been gratifying from the perspective of how long our team has been working on this case, but also just given our relationship with this particular client and the underlying facts," Pinsky said. "To be able to achieve a success for a client [that] it wouldn't be an overstatement to say is fighting an



existential battle — to actually force Russia to compensate them, knowing that the Russian Federation does not want to do that."

His biggest challenge:

As an extremely busy attorney, Pinsky told Law360 that his biggest challenge over the last year has been balancing a busy practice and commitment to his clients with "simply put, life."

"Being there for my kids ... that's a challenge, particularly for international arbitration practitioners, which typically involves a fair amount of travel," he said. "One of the things that I take a lot of pride in on the professional side is really building a sense of team, and to build a sense of team among your colleagues ... requires an investment of time in addition to just doing the work."

"And so that is a challenge — making sure you're not only on top of your client work, in achieving the results you want to achieve for your clients, but also mentoring your colleagues and making enough time for that, in addition to balancing your dedication to your family and your children," he added.

His proudest moment:

Pinsky said he takes special care to ensure that the members of his team have a sense of camaraderie.

"Whether it's on the Naftogaz matter, or [one of our] other long-running arbitrations ... I am extremely proud of how the younger lawyers on our team have developed, and how the senior lawyers on the team work together," he said.

"I take pride in it most because of how important the work we do is for our clients, but also that we do it in a way that our colleagues feel supported and that people genuinely enjoy working together," he added.

In one recent example, he noted, he and the Covington team were all together with their Ukrainian colleagues at a hearing in The Hague involving Russia when it invaded Ukraine in 2022.

"That type of experience ends up forming very strong bonds among the team members," he said.

Why he's an international arbitration attorney:

Pinsky said he stumbled on his career path more or less by accident. As a young associate at Covington, he explained that he had a "general sense" of wanting to be an international lawyer in the dispute space without really knowing what that meant.

So he attempted to merge his interest in being an international lawyer and in international affairs and geopolitics with the practice of law. He began cultivating relationships with international arbitration attorneys at the firm, like partner Marney Cheek, and learning more about the practice.

"It's an absolutely fascinating space to be active in, and that's what led me to it," he said.

He said he became particularly interested in the practice area when he began working on cases that related to the Kremlin's dismantling of the oil giant Yukos in the early to mid-2000s. Having spent months in Moscow as a U.S. State Department-sponsored fellow where he studied the challenges facing Russia's press, Pinsky said, he witnessed that story unfold in real time.

"That's how I got the arbitration bug — when I realized that this extremely interesting and historically important event that I was just devouring in the news when I was living in Moscow — that I would be able to work on it, on the side that I felt was the right side, which was the side of the shareholders in the company," he said.

--As told to Caroline Simson. Editing by Karin Roberts.

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 2025 MVP winners after reviewing nearly 900 submissions.

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