

Europe, Courage & Curiosity – A Conversation with Nathan Kaiser”

Series: Europe, where are you?!

NBK Legal

1. Introduction – A European lawyer who opened the world

Nicole:

Nathan, your path is extraordinary. Lausanne, Strasbourg, St. Gallen – and suddenly: China, Hong Kong, Taiwan. You co-founded the first Swiss law firm in China and later built the first foreign law firm in Taiwan. Today, you’re a Swiss-Taiwanese dual citizen, you work between Zurich, Silvaplana and Asia, and you were admitted in multiple jurisdictions – Zurich, Berlin, Hong Kong, Taipei, and now Graubünden.

What connects Europe with your global identity?

Nathan:

Europe has always been my departure point. Lausanne, Strasbourg, an internship in Paris, St. Gallen – those were formative years. Europe taught me how differently law, politics and identity can be understood.

But Europe also carries a promise: the freedom to move.

I never left because I wanted to get away from Europe –

I left because I wanted to understand how other parts of the world build the future.

Paris, Zurich, then my first steps in Asia: Shanghai, Beijing, Hong Kong, Taipei.

There was no master plan.

It was curiosity – and partly the freedom of youth, the urge to see the world.

And the willingness to constantly expand my own horizon.

2. A pioneer between Europe and Asia

Nicole:

In 2000, you and a Zurich law firm founded the first Swiss law firm in China. Later, you built the first foreign law firm in Taiwan. No Swiss lawyer had done that before. What drove you?

Nathan:

At that time, I was already practicing law in Taiwan – Beijing was “just around the corner”, four flight hours with a stop in Hong Kong. I wanted to be where things were being built.

China in the early 2000s was like the eye of a storm – a workshop of world history.

Everything was under construction: markets, structures, rules, institutions.

As lawyers, we weren’t just advising – we were building with enthusiasm.

Europe gave me stability.

Asia taught me speed, but also patience – because nothing in China was ever simple.

That combination still shapes me today.

Nicole:

And legally, you operated in multiple systems – Zurich, later Beijing, Taipei, even Berlin in between, then Hong Kong, and today Graubünden.

Nathan:

Yes. Each admission changed the way I see the world.

Every system has its own details, but the underlying logic is similar.

When you've experienced several systems, you recognize opportunities much faster.

3. Europe, where are you? – A view from the outside

Nicole:

You've observed Europe from afar for many years. What do you see?

Nathan:

For a long, long time, Europe excelled in thinking, in action, and in building legal frameworks that enabled people to create new things. The milestones range from habeas corpus, the Enlightenment, the Eiffel Tower, Rhine navigation, to the Channel Tunnel and the four freedoms established between member states in 1957.

Europe has drifted far from that path.

Many have forgotten these achievements – and the values and goals behind them.

But I'm convinced Europeans still have the ability – and actually the desire – to do those things.

You simply have to let them!

And this is where Europeans and Asians are ultimately similar:

If you let them build, a lot becomes possible – unique things, and quickly.

4. A technological early starter – an unusual lawyer

Nicole:

What many people don't know: you were technologically ahead of 95% of your legal generation.

Tell us how that happened.

Nathan:

I started in 1982 with a ZX81. Then came the Commodore 64 and Atari.

At 16, I was importing software and disks – from Taiwan, long before I knew I'd one day live there.

By 1996, I had my first Hotmail address.

And in 2008, I ran our firm across three countries fully on Google Workspace and cloud-based tools – when most people still thought “digitalization” meant sending PDFs by email.

From 2017 to 2020, I was an affiliate at the Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University, focusing on AI & Ethics.

I gave talks on AI in daily life, digitalization in healthcare, decentralization, and China.

Technology has always been both tool and toy for me.

5. The art of reinvention

Nicole:

You reinvented yourself multiple times – geographically, professionally, technologically.

What keeps you adaptable?

Nathan:

The thought that life is long and the world is big – that made and keeps me curious, literally “hungry for the new”.

Curiosity isn’t a personality trait – it’s a craft.

Switzerland gave me structure.

The US showed me openness.

Asia taught me to question what I thought I knew and to make the seemingly impossible possible.

6. The future of the legal profession – and why no single path is a blueprint

Nicole:

The legal market is transforming rapidly. AI writes due diligence reports. Platforms replace parts of compliance. Big4 firms move into fields like DORA, NIS2, ESG. Traditional models – especially hourly billing – are under pressure.

What from your past helps you stay successful in this new world?

Nathan:

That I never believed the business model would stay stable. Richard Susskind’s *The Future of Law* came out in 1996 – almost 30 years ago. Everything was already in there. I highly recommend reading it.

When we built law firms in Asia, there were no processes.

We created structures where none existed.

Today, the same thing is happening in Europe – through AI, platforms and new professional roles.

AI is not competition – it's another tool, removing routine tasks and making real legal advice more valuable.

I worked interdisciplinarily and geographically “in between” from early on.
That forces openness and creativity.

Lawyers who define themselves solely by “knowledge” will struggle.
Knowledge is no longer scarce.

Understanding is scarce – not only legal understanding, but an understanding of business, systems and client realities.

Clients want advisors who understand:

- what the client *actually* wants – or as English puts it well: “*What are you trying to achieve?*”
- how companies work
- how governance is built (including game theory basics)
- how technology and law interconnect
- how to think in systems, not just read statutes

Nicole:

Would you agree with the phrase “Interdisciplinarity is the new specialization”?

Nathan:

Absolutely.

A modern lawyer must speak several languages:

1. Law
2. Technology
3. Organization & structures
4. Economics (macro and micro)

Anyone who speaks all four will be needed more than ever.

7. Five learnings from Nathan's journey – for lawyers who want to stay relevant

1. **Curiosity beats predictability**
Careers are not straight lines.
Those who dare to change environments stay adaptable.
2. **Technology is an amplifier, not an enemy**
AI removes routine tasks, accelerates work – and makes real advice more valuable.
3. **Interdisciplinarity is the new specialization**
The future belongs to lawyers who understand systems – not just documents.
4. **Business models change – mindset doesn't**
Those who deliver value, not hours, remain indispensable.

5. **Europe is a starting point, not a boundary**

A global perspective strengthens European values – it doesn't weaken them.