

NJORD Estonia: How to differentiate one law firm from another in Estonia

Working at NJORD Law Firm in Tallinn, Estonia, we encounter more and more clients who have received poor quality legal assistance from other lawyers and law firms, or after paying an invoice in advance they have not received any services at all.

This problem is particularly acute for those clients in need of services related to the Estonian so called crypto licenses.

The Internet is full of service providers who advertise themselves as Estonian professional law firms and sell services like "buy the service of a board member from us", or "we offer AML officer services", or "we offer virtual office service for your crypto business". All promises of this type should be seen as red flags for anyone who knows anything about Estonian law since these services are not in compliance with the law and "board member" as a service is not permitted.

The reason this can continue is the language. The services in question are mainly targeted to persons who do not speak Estonian, so English language is used. In English language "law firm" can be used by anyone in Estonia. You need not even to have a lawyer's degree. The same goes for the title "lawyer" that can be used by everyone with or without a lawyer's degree, as it is not a protected title.

In Estonian language, however, it is easier to distinguish the qualified legal service providers from the non-qualified. In Estonian, there is a clear difference between a "Advokaadibüroo" and a "Õigusbüroo", both of them would be translated to law firm in English.

The first type of law firm, Advokaadibüroo, can only be owned by persons who are members of the Estonian Bar Association ("Advokatuur" in Estonian). To become a member of the Bar Association, you need to have at least a master's degree in law and have passed the Bar exam. As a member of the Bar Association, you must undergo training regularly and you have to hold a professional indemnity insurance policy.

The activities of a member of the Bar Association are regulated by the Estonian Bar Association Act.

As a member of the Bar Association, clients may turn to the Bar Association's Court of Honour, if case there are complaints about the quality of the service given.

Many so-called law firms servicing the crypto sector in Estonia have no qualified lawyers, sometimes no lawyers at all. They are consultancies with various levels of quality. They have no supervising bodies, they have no licences to show their quality of legal services. If they have a name in Estonian, it cannot be Advokaadibüroo and no persons working there can call themselves "advokaat" in Estonian.

In summary, before you buy legal services in Estonia for your blockchain business, use 5 minutes to try to understand what level of services you can expect from your legal service provider. You can use these simple questions:

1. Are you an Advokaadibüroo in Estonia?
2. Do you have professional indemnity insurance policy?
3. Where can I turn if I am not satisfied with your service?

If you get non-satisfactory answers to any of these, we recommend you to find another law firm!



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