

Ondřej Koutný, of the Bohemian-Moravian Real Estate Union: We want to be an alternative for smaller real estate agencies

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Real estate merchants already have their Association, and the Chamber joined the ranks last year, plus many other regional associations. What was the reason for setting up the Union, i.e. another professional association?

I think there is demand for an efficient professional or civil association in the sector. An overwhelming majority of all real estate agencies that I am in contact with are dissatisfied with the activities of the existing associations. They are looking for an alternative, and our Union has been set up for that reason.

Your seat is in Brno - isn't it just an answer to Prague-centric tendencies?

Definitely not, we want to have a nationwide coverage, our membership is open for everyone interested. The truth is, however, that so far most of our members really come from Moravia, but we already have a member in Mariánské Lázně, for example.

How many members do you have?

Seven, to date; the Union was only founded in April. We are realistic and our goal is to have thirty members by the end of this year. We'll see if that's real. Many potentially interested agencies are currently waiting how things will turn out and what we actually offer.

This looks a bit like a fragmentation of powers. Adding another association to the two national groups, it doesn't sound too reasonable?!?!

Time will show if the founding of the Bohemian-Moravian Real Estate Union was reasonable. By the way, we don't oppose the potential future merger with other entities. But as I have already said, we're especially targeted at those dissatisfied with the activities and results of the existing associations. At the same time, we offer an alternative - the Association and the Chamber are mostly focused on large real estate agencies, and the amount of the membership fee is in line with that focus; it is too unbearable for smaller agencies, which we are trying to appeal to.

However, lower fees are certainly not the reason for your establishment. What will you do differently than your "competitors"? What will you offer to your members?

In addition to the standard offering of educational programmes, professional seminars and so on, we especially offer a guarantee fund. Taking into account the number of our members, it is not too large yet, so we aren't able to compensate the damage potentially caused by our member to a client. So far it is used to cover the costs of legal services used by the client to recover any such damages. And this has to do with one of our direct goals: to push for mandatory insurance of liability for damage for all real estate agencies.

Do you believe that you would be able to push for this type of legislative change?

But it isn't necessary. The sector can do it by itself. If the webpage of one real estate agency displays an insurance certificate and that of another one doesn't, the customers will behave accordingly. They only have to know that something like that exists and what it means. So we have to negotiate it and jointly act accordingly. The clients can only benefit. And so can we, because some of the 60% of all potential customers who perform their real estate transactions without the help of agencies would find their way to us. This is in the best interest of the whole sector.

But this is not certainly the biggest problem that plagues your sector?!?

Yes, it is mostly about the quality of work of real estate agencies and brokers. Today, almost anyone can trade in real estates, you only have to register with the trade license office. No practice is required, no adequate education - unlike activities in the travel industry or in restaurants. This has to change.

A logical way to achieve this would be changes in legislation. If President Novotný of the Association were sitting in my place, he would certainly say that they have been trying to achieve this for almost twenty years, and would explain why they have failed so far...

And I'm not saying it will be different within a year. We offer a helping hand to the others. Together we will have a larger say. Who else should shape the legislative framework for the activities of a specific sector than its professional associations?

I suppose you have submitted offers for cooperation to the Association and the Chamber. What was the response?

None so far, more or less. Nobody has rejected or accepted it. Obviously they're waiting where and how the Union will develop.

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