·openlaws

the legal information platform

Information Brochure

openlaws is a registered European Community Trade Mark (CTM)

www.openlaws.eu

July 2014

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🛈 Executive Summary

openlaws will help you find legal information more easily, organize it the way you want and share it with others. The Internet platform is adding a "social layer" to the existing "institutional layer" of legal information systems.

Together with you we will create a network between legislation, case law, legal literature and legal experts - both on a national and a European level, leading to better access to legal information.

openlaws is a platform for legal professionals, businesses, citizens and governments and will cooperate closely with software developers and publishers. It combines legal content and the knowledge and feedback of the community.

The cloud-based system will be built on open data, open innovation and open source software. This means that everybody is invited to participate in the creation of openlaws. Mass customization, big data analysis, social features and social networks are already highly successful in other markets and openlaws introduces them in the legal domain on a European scale.

The openlaws core team is organized around the University of Amsterdam, the Salzburg University of Applied Science, the University of Sussex, the London School of Economics and Political Science, the Italian software SME Alpenite srl and the Austrian BY WASS GmbH. This group will also create a "BOLD" Vision 2020 about what Big Open Legal Data (BOLD) can do in the future and propose a roadmap to the European Commission. openlaws is co-funded by the European Union/DG Justice.

Please contribute your ideas and suggestion by contacting us! This is your opportunity to shape the future of the law in Europe!

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💬 Survey

We have run a survey and have received feedback from over 200 legal professionals and other users who need legal information for their work. People were asked what they need and what is necessary to build a legal information system of the future.

Keeping the overview is hard

Not surprisingly, respondents agree that there is an enormous amount of legal information and that it is hard to keep the overview. This goes hand in hand with the complaint that legal texts are hard to understand, especially for non-lawyers.

One-stop-shop solution

There are many different databases and no single point of access for all legal information. This is also leading to the situation that the majority of the respondents are using Google and other search engines in order to find legal information in a first step.

Professionals databases

Even though there are free governmental databases, legal professionals are using commercial databases for their daily research, that include commentaries - even if the costs for such tools are often high.

Personalization

People want to be actively informed on a recurring basis about changes in their field of practice. They are looking for solutions that are catered to their personal needs.

Sharing

Legal professionals do not work alone, they collaborate with others. Therefore they need to exchange information. Due to confidentiality reasons, users want to share information in private. Still, there is a high interest in discussing legal information in public, in particular cases.

🚀 So What's Different?

openlaws takes legal information systems beyond closed and static databases to an open and interactive level.

The rule of law is fundamental to all democratic states. The sheer growth of legal documents and their complexity make access to legal information burdensome.

The Internet has made it a lot easier to search for legislation, case law and legal literature. There are growing numbers of online commercial and government databases to consult online. Today, Web technologies allow users to collaborate with each other, creating and sharing content. Personalized search and group profiles enable users to cater content to their needs.

openlaws will take advantage of these new technologies in order to provide better access to legal information. The system will include a meta-search engine to cover multiple legal databases at once. Instead of accessing different database one after the other, openlaws will offer a user-friendly entry point, which will then refer to the original source of information.

It will also include productivity tools like personalized search alerts or customizable, intelligent search folders. This will help you save time and focus on the real work that needs to be done.

In the „social layer" of openlaws you will be able to find and collaborate with legal experts throughout Europe and generate new knowledge that will also make existing databases better.

open data sources → **social layer** → metadata enrichment

institutional layer
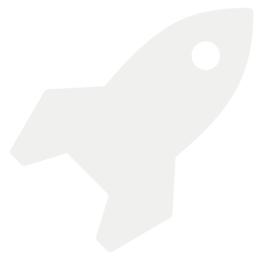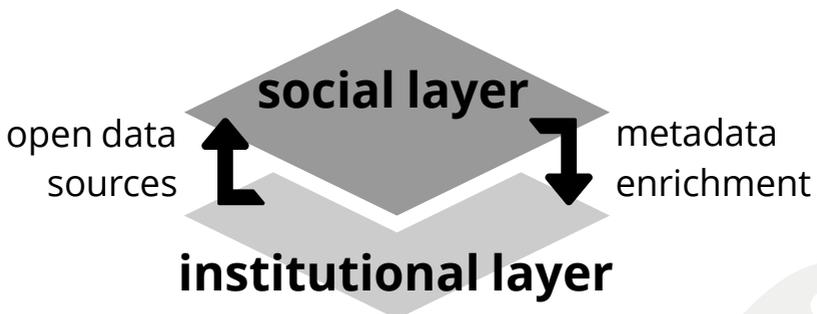
What's in there?

Taking advantage of open data and open interfaces, openlaws will cover multiple databases and user networks in one single system. Such a comprehensive platform could not have been built in the past. But thanks to the newest technology and open data, access to legal information is getting easier.

Legislation

There is an enormous amount of legislation within the EU and its member states. openlaws integrates EUR-Lex and national databases. You can create links between national legislation and cases, making it easier to identify

	Legislation	Case Law	Literature	Community
openlaws	✔	✔	✔	✔
governmental legal databases	✔	✔		
commercial legal databases	✔	✔	✔	
research community networks			✔	✔
social networks				✔

Together We Can Do More!

During the initial phase of the project, EUR-Lex and databases from Austria, the Netherlands and the UK will be covered. If you want to connect additional databases, please contact us! We have open interfaces!

implementing laws of EU instruments across member states. You may even uncover previously unknown anomalies between EU legislation and national law.

⚖ Case Law

Cases are not only important in common law systems, but also in civil law systems. The European Court of Justice interprets EU law to make sure it is applied in the same way in all the EU countries. Accordingly, it is highly important to be well informed about cases on a European level. openlaws will help to find related cases, not only on a national level, but also in other member states. The platform will also refer to the underlying legislation.

📕 Literature

openlaws will provide an extensive overview of legal literature. This will include papers, books, articles in online journals and also PhD dissertations and Master's theses.

Access to these sources will depend on the licensing scheme of publishers. With open access publishing becoming more and more popular also in the legal field, direct access to legal literature will be more common.

👥 Community

openlaws will bring the legal community together. Whether you are a lawyer, a judge, a notary, a civil servant, a legal scholar, a law student, a business person or an interested citizen - openlaws will make it easier to find the right experts and to work with them. Together we can make law more accessible and more understandable.

★ Features

Based on the feedback from the openlaws survey and many personal discussions and focus groups, a three key features have been identified for the openlaws platform.

🔍 Search

Including a search functionality is essential in every information system. The main difference compared to other legal databases is the meta-search approach of openlaws. Legislation, case law and literature databases can be searched in one simple step. In addition, directories of legal experts can be included at the same time.

This means a search for a certain case will result in finding the case, related (national and potentially EU) legislation, related literature where the case has been discussed and also legal professionals who are specialists in the subject matter.

openlaws is open. It will be possible for governments, publishers or open data software developers to connect additional sources to openlaws, making the search results even more comprehensive. This means oepnlaws will not be restricted by the contents of only one data provider, but combine the results and redirect to the original source.

📂 Organize

Users do not want to search for the same content over and over again. They want to organize information according to their personal needs. This includes storing the search results in personal folders and receiving e-mail alerts if anything changes.

For example, you can collect everything about copyright law in one folder. Or you can create a folder that includes all the cases that are relevant for the next exam. Or create a list with all legislation that is relevant in a specific domain. With a mobile device like a smartphone or a tablet PC you can then also access your personal data remotely.

➦ Share

Once you have found the information that you need, openlaws will allow for sharing it with others. This feature results from the fact that people today are not only better connected than ever before, but they actually need to collaborate with others.

As a law student, you might want to work together with others for the next exam. As a legal scholar, you might want to share your findings with other researchers. As a lawyer, you might want to collaborate with the colleagues in your law firm. As a citizen, you might want to start a public group where all information regarding an every day legal problem can be found. As a company, you might want to inform your employees about the relevant legal framework that applies at the place of work. Or you want that your lawyers shares results with you.

For whatever reason you may want to share legal content, openlaws will make it easier for you to do so.
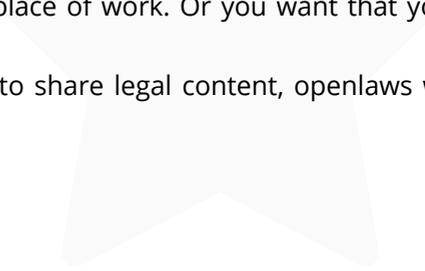
♫ If openlaws was a music library...

Compare openlaws to a music library solution. In a music "store" you can find a lot of content, based on meta-data information, recommendations and collaborative filtering, ratings, user comments, etc.

You can organize your library the way you need it, create folders and play-lists and edit the file information. When you are on the move, you can take your tracks with you... or rather, relevant legislation and cases for you.

Share your content with colleagues privately - or with the wider legal audience. Perhaps you may publish your next "song" - your commentary to the latest controversial case to attract your peers and generate interest in your practice.

⚙ How will it work?

Building an ambitious and comprehensive solution like openlaws would not have been possible in the past. Today there are new technological solutions. Lawyers are changing and adopting new methods to co-create – working together to solve problems and provide new solutions.

🔓 Open Data

Open data is the idea that certain data should be freely available to everyone to use and republish as they wish, without restrictions from copyright, patents or other mechanisms of control. More and more governments are opening up their databases so that the content can be re-used by others.

Openlaws takes legislation and case law databases and adds value to it by providing new functionalities.

For copyright protected material like legal literature, authors and rights holders decide how much they want to make their content available. Some content may be protected by a paywall, other content may be published under a Creative Commons license so that it can be freely accessed.

Over time, more and more databases will be connected to openlaws via open interfaces. Contact openlaws if you want your legal content to be found.

👥 Open Innovation

Open innovation means that an institution includes external knowledge to make its own core products and services better. New solutions may be also made available to others, to benefit from these findings as well. Open innovation is often related to 'crowd-sourcing' and 'co-creation'. For openlaws this means that the community can contribute ideas for the design of the openlaws platform, that experts can share their knowledge with others (e.g. by adding commentaries or by publishing papers), and that software developers can use open interfaces to extend openlaws and/or to build new services on top of openlaws.

🐧 Open Source Software

open source software is long established and deployed across the entire Internet. The WWW relies on Apache HTTP Servers, Firefox is a prominent browser, smartphones use the Linux based Android operating system and the most important servers run in a Linux environment - and so does the International Space Station.

openlaws will not have to re-invent the wheel. The project will use software such as that from Apache Software Foundation. It will be highly modular and the source code of openlaws will be available under an open source licence.

✉ Yes, We Are Open

Please contact us if you are working with legal information as well! openlaws can integrate open data that you have and might provide data that you could need. All ideas regarding the platform are highly welcome. And if you are a software developer who wants to get some experience with legal data, even better!

👥 Stakeholders

Legal Experts

Work better by reducing search effort, increase your visibility to clients and collaborate with others.

openlaws will provide a new way of accessing legal information. Links to related case law, legislation, commentaries or other field experts (also in other member states) will help you save valuable time.

You can contribute to openlaws by publishing papers or commentaries in your field of expertise, which can be added to your profile and help businesses and clients to find you. You can use openlaws to work in private, sharing information with your colleagues, clients or research associates.

Businesses

Stay compliant, get basic national and international legal information quickly and find the right expert for further questions.

With all the unfiltered legal requirements it is hard to focus on the core of your business. openlaws will help you to keep the overview of the legal framework that applies to your company on a national and on a European level.

openlaws will not always be able to answer all your legal questions, so find the right expert through openlaws.

openlaws enables you to stay in contact with your preferred lawyers.

Citizens

Find answers to routine legal questions and know your rights as a European citizens.

There are over 500 million people living in the European Union. We are all affected by thousands of national and European regulations. openlaws helps to filter relevant legal information for you personally.

openlaws cannot replace a lawyer in case of a legal dispute, but it can provide helpful initial information.

Governments

Make your legal databases available as open data, connect to openlaws and integrate with EUR-Lex.

Governments have a lot of primary and secondary legal content. Follow today's best practice and open access to these sources for your citizens.

open data can be integrated in other platforms like openlaws, creating new ICT applications that deliver added value to users. National legal information can be linked to EUR-Lex, creating references between national data and European legislation and case law.

Publishers

Use openlaws to promote premium content written by your authors.

Legal experts require premium legal content for their daily work. Your content needs to be found. openlaws can integrate the titles and abstracts of premium content written by your authors. You do not have to make available full text for free.

The aim of openlaws is to provide a comprehensive overview of legal literature. To promote your content, get in touch.

Software Developers

Support and extend the development of the openlaws platform and create your own solutions on top of it.

openlaws is an open source project and you are invited to join the development team. You may want to contribute to the core of the platform, integrate additional databases from different member states, build your own solutions on top of the openlaws interfaces, create visualizations with the data from the system, test the platform or simply provide some ideas... Whatever it is, we are looking forward to building a great legal information system together with you!

📄 Quite a lot to read...

In 2013 alone there were 1,026 Regulations, 14 Directives and 539 Decision made available through EUR-Lex. 293 Regulations, 64 Directives and 159 Decisions were amended. This less than in the past, but still all these documents add up. Of course, these legislative acts do not include contents from your member state.

The Court of Justice of the European Union has received 450 Requests for Preliminary Ruling in 2013. The requests since 1961 add up to 8282. The Member States addressing the Court the most often are Germany, Italy, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, the UK and Austria.

Number of Regulations (dark blue), Directives (light blue) and Decisions (grey) from 1990 to 2013, including amendments (dotted lines).

Source: EUR-Lex website
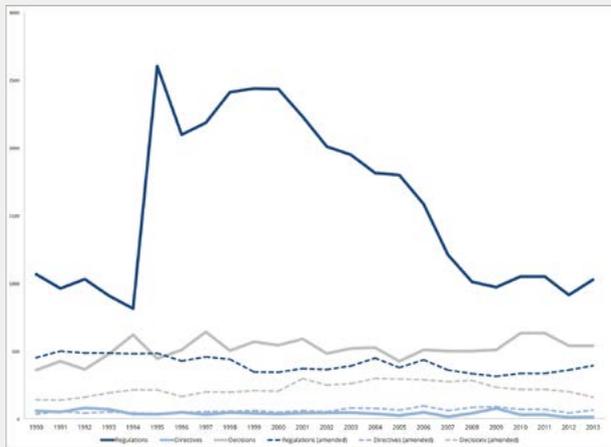
Number of Requests for Preliminary Rulings received by the Court of Justice of the European Union per Member State from 1961 to 2013.

Source: Court of Justice of the European Union, Annual Report 2013
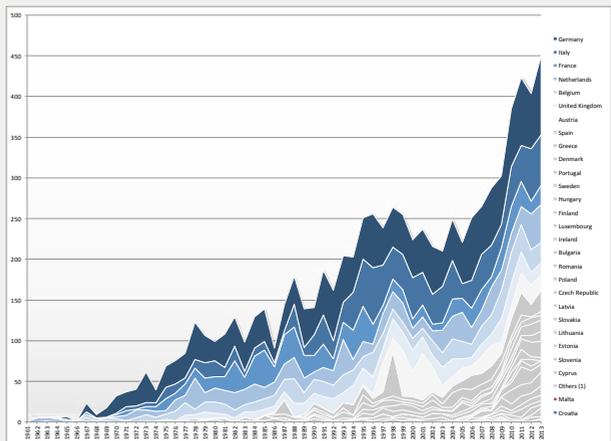
🜇 The EU Project

👁 BOLD Vision

Legal texts are basic information of all democratic states. As such legal information must be accessible to all members of society to the widest possible extent, to aid inclusiveness and to enable participation in public decision-making. In recognition of this, the EU and its Member States work to make laws, court decisions, etc, publicly available on line. Much has been achieved locally already. However, the sheer mass of legal norms, instruments and interpretations in courts decisions, commentaries and other sources, makes it increasingly difficult for citizens, civil society, businesses and all involved in legal practices to locate the relevant law. The challenge for the future is to link local legal information and have in place structures to enrich it through aggregation and mass customization. The technological possibilities to achieve this are there. openlaws.eu aims to initiate a platform and develop a vision for Big Open Legal Data (BOLD): an open framework for legislation, case law, and legal literature from across Europe. This contributes to better access to legal information and ultimately to better governance, both of which support higher social welfare goals.

Today, a huge amount of legal information remains published and administered by a limited number of organizations, typically in closed structures in public authorities and public-private partnerships. This includes the management of legal metadata, which is the basis for automated processing. Legal scholars and practitioners publish mainly through traditional highly specialized commercial publishing or isolated websites. Back-channels are limited, and there is little space for contributions from wider communities. Fully automated processing of legal data is not yet possible. Strikingly, whereas in many domains such as statistics, spatial information, and life sciences research data open information infrastructures are rapidly developing, this is not the case for legal information. This project's aim is to help build and promote an open ICT environment (using existing tools and sources, like EUR-Lex, the European e-Justice System, e-Codex, national databases, etc.) so that all stakeholders can benefit from it (e.g. additional metadata, data curation, etc.).
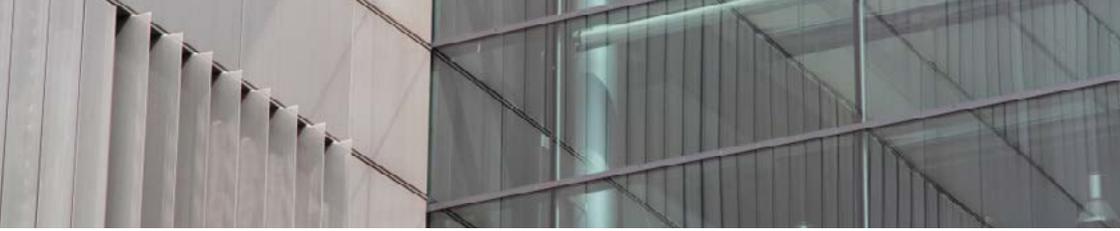
🖥️ BOLD Platform

The project will build on top of the current state of knowledge. We will use the open EUR-Lex API and other legal content from open data sources, in particular legislation and case law databases from Member States ("institutional layer"). Metadata will be created in compliance with the ELI and the ECLI standards. Insights from other EU projects will be used, e.g. from the LOD2 and the LAPSI projects. The Eurovoc thesaurus will also be used to better link data. We will use free and open source software (FOSS). The theoretical framework will take into account and the methodological approach will strive to comply with other activities under the European e-Justice Action plan, especially the European e-Justice Portal and e-Codex, and also with the new EUR-Lex, so that openlaws.eu can use input from this "institutional layer" while returning output from the "social layer".

In the legal community the openlaws.eu approach represents a great innovation leap. Until today legal information systems have been almost completely closed: not only those operated by commercial publishers, but also those by public bodies. This project will engage the users actively and use their input in the "social layer" and even go beyond what Legal Information Institutes (LII) as part of the Free Access to Law movement ("FALM", such as BAILII in the UK) are doing today. openlaws.eu can benefit from advanced technologies and the commitment many public administrations show towards open and linked legal information.

The aim is not to replace existing platforms like EUR-Lex, N-Lex, the e-Justice Portal or national Member State databases, but to provide additional functionality in the additional "social layer" based on the open interfaces of such systems (APIs), compatibly with the European Interoperability Framework 2.0. Conversely, the results may be used by such other European projects. After the analysis project is successfully carried out, a follow-up project will be initiated to implement the developments described. The solution will be provided to other EU Member States and third countries.

👥 The Core Team

The core team around openlaws is an interdisciplinary group of four universities and two SMEs, contributing know-how in the areas of law and legal informatics, political and social science, ICT, and economics and business administration.

University of Amsterdam

The University of Amsterdam is the lead partner of the openlaws project. The Leibniz Center for Law of the University of Amsterdam started in 1988 and currently employs about 10 people. It is part of the Faculty of Law and maintains strong connections with the Science Faculty. The Leibniz Center develops intelligent technology to support legal practice both in the private and in the public sector. It applies Artificial Intelligence (AI) techniques to problems in legal theory, legal knowledge management and the field of law in general. In this capacity, it participates in many (inter)national research initiatives and maintains strong ties to the international research community and government agencies. The Leibniz Center has participated in and coordinated numerous national and European (applied) research projects and has coordinated various European Commission sponsored projects including the 6th framework project ESTRELLA, the Leonardo project TRIAS and the eParticipation project SEAL.

Salzburg University of Applied Sciences

The school of Information Technologies and Systems Management (ITS) of Salzburg University of Applied Sciences (SUAS) offers two BA and three MA programs to a total of 350 students and is focused on software engineering, systems engineering, network technologies, and the crosscutting application field of eHealth. SUAS's staff comprises faculty with long track records in ICT research, mathematical and biomedical modelling. SUAS has participated in several EU projects and is eager to extend its competences in the fields of self-adaptive software systems and symbiotic system architectures.

University of Sussex

Law at Sussex was rated 16th in the UK in the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise. Research within the Sussex Law School is organised around thematic research groups, supporting research by hosting conferences and workshops, engaging in interdisciplinary research and collaborative projects. Law's expansion has enabled the development of new research areas, notably information law, pursuing an ambitious research agenda. The Information Law cluster runs two major EC projects, Internet Science and openlaws, led by Professor Marsden.

London School of Economics

The LSE is regarded as one of the world's leading academic institutions and remains a specialist single-faculty constituent college of the University of London, the only such institution in Britain. The aim of LSE's Media and Communications Department is to keep pace with rapid change in media, technology and society demands through dynamic and imaginative research. Based on the results from the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise, on grade point average the department is rated third-best in the UK.

Alpenite srl

Alpenite is an IT software consulting and system integration company with headquarters in Venice, Italy. The major areas of expertise of Alpenite are in portals, mobile applications, e-commerce websites and business intelligence, using open source technologies and integrating with enterprise components where needed. Alpenite has developed strategic relationships with open source vendors and has competencies in the main open source products available on the market.

BY WASS GmbH

BY WASS has initiaded the openlaws project. The focus of the company is to innovate in the legal sector. BY WASS has developed the RIS:App, the official mobile interface for the award-winning Austrian legal information system. The top-ranking app is based on Austrian Open Government Data and was downloaded over 30,000 times. Considering that there are only 5,000 lawyers in Austria, BY WASS has successfully proven that a user-friendly legal service with added value can attract many users – including average citizens – in a short period of time.

⊘ **The Advisory Board**

Members of the openlaws Advisory Board are:

Brigitte Barotanyi and **Günther Tschabuschnig**, Federal Government, Austria; **Marc van Opijnen**, Knowledge Center for Official Government Publications (KOOP), Netherlands; **Mirena Taskova**, Schoenherr Attorneys at Law, Bulgaria; **Kurt Lassacher**, Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC), Austria; **Oleg Lavrovsky**, Open Knowledge Foundation (OKFN), Switzerland; **Josep Lluís Larriba Pey**, DAMA-UPC, Spain;

FAQs

Why do we need openlaws?

Everybody has a legal problems from time to time. More and more legal questions have not only a national but also a European dimension. Since law is the basis of our democracy, legal professionals, citizens and businesses should have adequate access to legal information.

Isn't there anything similar already?

There are free governmental databases with basic functionalities and subscription professional databases, but no community driven open platform that includes legal experts.

What's different compared to Internet search engines?

openlaws will provide very specific functionalities for law. While it can be difficult in a normal search engine to narrow the results down to legally relevant documents, openlaws will only provide legal results.

How does it differ from research networks in other sciences?

While research networks typically combine experts and the community, there is no legislation or case law included. These element are of utmost importance when you have a legal question.

Will I find the full text of legal papers and books?

A typical answer from a lawyer: It depends. If an author chooses to publish under an open access license then yes. However, there will be premium content from commercial publishers who will charge for the article or e-book. We aim for a comprehensive overview so that you do not miss anything.

What does "map the law" mean?

One basic principle of openlaws is open innovation. We believe that we can create a great legal information system together where we collect (or "map") the available legal content jointly.

Which software and tools are you using?

openlaws will use a lot of open source software. We will on an open source content management system and state-of-the-art graph databases. openlaws will use proprietary solutions only in cases where it is not feasible to use open source solutions.

Where is openlaws located?

The platform itself will be operated only on servers that are located within the European Union. The core team members are based in the Netherlands, the UK, Austria and Italy.

Isn't legal information too sensitive to work with in an open environment?

openlaws does not share confidential information to you or your clients. It helps you search, organise and share legislation, case law and legal literature that is publicly available.

Why is openlaws a registered Community Trade Mark (CTM)?

Trade Marks exist to keep the quality of a product or a service high. The same is true for openlaws.

Does open also mean free?

Access to case law and legislation will be free. Legal literature may be copyright protected and therefore will not always be free of charge. The platform will also host premium features for legal professionals who wish to access those publications.

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info@openlaws.eu

twitter.com/OpenLaws

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