

ACT LOCAL THINK GLOBAL

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The ability for clients to connect nationally and internationally is fundamental to the expansion of PLMJ's network across Portugal, says Vitor Réfega Fernandes.

The announcement by PLMJ, Portugal's largest law firm, that it is to expand its national network with exclusive referral relationships with law firms in the north of Portugal and in the Azores and is indicative of the firm's emphasis on connecting with clients wherever they are, says Vitor Réfega Fernandes the partner in charge of the regional network

Para los clientes, la posibilidad de conectar tanto nacional como internacionalmente es fundamental para la red de PLMJ en Portugal, apunta Vitor Réfega Fernande. La expansión de la red nacional a Guimarães y las Azores se construye sobre la ya existente relación con Coimbra y hace eco de uniones similares en el marco internacional. El objetivo, comenta, es expandir la cobertura internacional de PLMJ y reforzar los puntos estratégicos de apoyo para así poder ofrecer, independientemente de la localización del cliente, un gran servicio en materia de asesoría jurídica.

"A larger geographical coverage and reinforced strategic points of support all help to meet our clients' needs and increase our capacity of response. Our aim is to ensure that regardless of a clients' location it is able to access top level advice," he says.

The firm, which already has offices in Lisbon, Porto, and Faro in the Algarve has now signed partnership protocols with Guimarães-based Gama Lobo Xavier Luís Teixeira e Melo and Associates, and Viseu based Luís Loureiro Joao and Associates, to serve the north of Portugal and Galicia, and Azores-based Borges da Ponte Linhares Dias and Associates.

The terms of the protocols are unique, he says, and similar to those already in operation with the firm's joint venture partner in Coimbra, Manuel Rebanda Pereira Monteiro and Associates.

"Such connections enable clients to benefit from the legal knowledge, local experience, and regional contacts of each of the partner firms. This proximity means that we are able to extend our reach in to new markets and to explore new opportunities."

Guimarães is noted for its textile, shoe and stone finishing industries and close to the border with Galicia, and able to capitalise on cross-border flows, as well as being designated as the 2012 European Capital of Culture. The Azores is seeing increasing investor interest in the development of the islands' tourism and leisure and agricultural sectors.

Connections

PLMJ's expanded network approach also enables it therefore to adjust its offering in areas and markets in which the specialism of the firm's own lawyers is not necessary, or justified, in order to allow clients the ability to better manage their budgets.

But the aim is also to access small and medium size companies with operations that may be seeing a need for more sophisticated legal advice, says Réfega Fernandes, as well as to assist them as they develop cross-border opportunities.

In a related development, PLMJ has also established a dedicated Central and Eastern Europe platform likewise intended to increase its geographic reach and to capitalise on the increasing flow of Portuguese businesses to the region.

The firm's dedicated Eastern Europe Desk, led by partner and current head of the German Desk, Vasco Ataíde Marques, is intended to build closer ties with the Austrian, Czech, Slovakian, Hungarian and Romanian Embassies in Lisbon, as well as with the AIP (Portuguese Industry Association) and law firms within each of the countries.

"Our aim is to support foreign investment and the internationalisation of both Portuguese companies and those from Portuguese speaking countries and to provide a privileged liaison between investors, local public authorities and local major law firms," he says.



PLMJ's experience of such a model extends also to Angola, where it has a new joint venture with Luanda-based AVM Advogados, and also in Mozambique, where a new joint venture with leading local firm MGA Advogados will take effect in January 2009. It is also connected in Brazil, with TozziniFreire Advogados, and with Macau-based C&C Advogados which also reaches into mainland China, to Shanghai and Guangdong.

"Proximity, local knowledge, local contracts and specialisation are key aspects that all clients need and value, which are achieved through an open, efficient and mutually advantageous system of cooperation between firms," says Réfega Fernandes.

He emphasises also that the firm's joint ventures are not merely a series of independent connections, but a multilateral network. Besides connecting to Lisbon, clients across Portugal may

now connect internationally. For example, those clients in the Azores may now connect to Guimarães, and those in Coimbra with Brazil.