

JABIER BADIOLA: "CHANGES ONLY COME AS A 'SHOCK' IF THEY GENERATE AN IRREVERSIBLE EFFECT"

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In the middle of the pandemic, on the eve of summer, taking the helm of a ship the size of Dentons... Tell us, did you expect it? How did you hear the news and how did you receive it? What

does it mean to be the head in Spain of the world's largest firm?

Although I was recently approached by Europe to co-manage the firm, I did not formally consider running the Spanish offices of Dentons until I received a formal request from Tomasz (CEO of Dentons Europe) and Richard (CFO of Dentons Europe). I cannot deny that it took me by surprise, essentially due to the timing and urgency of the required response. Running the Spanish offices of Dentons is one of the most beautiful and important challenges I have taken on to date. I am confident that with the support and help of all the members of Dentons Spain, Dentons Europe and in particular my partners in the Spanish offices, we will be able to successfully carry out the agreed strategy for the Spanish offices.

What is your plan for the firm? What are you going to change and what are you leaving "as it is"?

The idea we have at Dentons for the Spanish offices is to continue with the growth and specialisation plan recently proposed by the firm for Spain, similar to the one that has been carried out at a European level in other offices such as those in Italy, Germany or Holland, among others.

In this process of growth and specialisation, we count on all the lawyers and support staff of Dentons Spain, who are identified and committed to the firm. Likewise, we continue to pay special attention to the opportunities offered by the market to continue growing in those core areas for the firm (Energy, Mergers & Acquisitions, Finance, Banking, Labour, Real Estate and Litigation) without neglecting the growth and development in other important areas for a firm like ours (for example, Intellectual Property, Competition and Tax Law).

The changes experienced in Dentons have been public. The departure of the key lawyers in the Real Estate area, including the managing partner and head of this area Jesús Varela, left many astonished, who thought that his project in the firm would be longer. We are not going to ask you for your reading of these facts, which we understand are personal and you will not want to share them, but we will ask you how you intend to "rebuild" the firm in this regard. In other words, we assume that calming down the shock and doubts in the project caused by Varela's departure is among your most immediate to-do list.

In my opinion, changes only come as a "shock" if they generate an effect that is difficult to reverse. Logically, the fact that a partner decides to walk away from us has an impact on the personal, professional and, in the short term, to a certain extent, on the results, but we must not forget that the large business law firms base their continuity and success precisely on not depending on individuals but on solvent teams, capable of quickly recovering from the departure of the visible faces of their departments. For this reason, rather than a "shock", and more precisely at a time of impasse such as the one we are experiencing, I would speak of a unique opportunity to (i) be able to implement our growth plan in the Real Estate department as well and, in general, (ii) be able to implement the strategic plan for the coming years in a more transparent and public manner among the Spanish partners, and between the Spanish partners and the European management.

As I anticipated, the firm has demonstrated that no lawyer is above the firm and situations such as this allow, given our current growth policy, great opportunities to arise for the next generations. In this sense, all the counsel and senior lawyers of the Real Estate team have decided to continue with us.

Probably using the term "key" surprises me if you consider that only the partner of these key lawyers has decided to leave. This Real Estate team and firm's decision confirms our commitment to (i) internal growth, by giving our two counsel (Bárbara Hernández-Mora and Itxaso López), who have been co-leading this area on a daily basis for the last few years, to head the practice; and (ii) maintaining and reinforcing the quality standards that our national and international Real Estate clients continue to request from us.

Without wanting to expand on this, it is worth mentioning that, with few exceptions, the clients that our Real Estate department has been advising over the last few years –mainly international Real Estate investment funds– have expressed their interest in continuing to work with us. Therefore, more than “rebuilding” we can say that during the last month we have “reordered” the Real Estate practice, considering that the most experienced lawyers and the main clients are still the same. As far as the firm is concerned, the task on which we partners were very keen to work and which we have been working on since day one is to promote communication at all levels. Over the last few months, the level of communication between the partners has improved very significantly.

Interview by *desiré vidal*

To read the interview in full please download issue [N.97](#) [here](#)