



LEGALINK
INTERNATIONAL BUT PERSONAL

THE INTERVIEWS
SERIES

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Haroldo Espalter

— HUGHES & HUGHES



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What is new in your firm? Is there any recent news you would like to mention?

The most recent news is that some months ago we added a new partner in our partnership - Juan C. Oreggia. This means we are now seven partners. Juan comes from a very large and reputable firm and that is a situation that is very uncommon in Uruguay. As it is a small market, this kind of moves from one firm to another is not very frequent. Juan is a senior lawyer with a lot of experience in banking and corporate areas and we are proud to have him in our team.

What you or your partners have been working on recently?

One of the most relevant cases in which we are involved now refers to the potential decision for the construction of a pulp mill by one of our clients. The Finnish company UPM already has one pulp mill in Uruguay, which was built 10 years ago and since the

experience in Uruguay has been very positive, they are now analyzing the possibility of building a second plant that will imply an investment of nearly 4 billion dollars. It needs a lot of new infrastructure, both in port and railway, so that is a big challenge.

Currently we are advising this client in the negotiations with Uruguayan government to agree on the most relevant issues regarding this new endeavor and we are working in order to sign an investment agreement, which also would be a landmark because there have been only very few investment agreements in Uruguay, so this is keeping us very active.

In that context, I would like to add that only a couple of weeks ago, the president of Uruguay along with a large committee of ministers visited Finland. I was also part of this committee, representing our firm in the meetings that they held with our client in Helsinki. I think that that is the most visible and most exciting matter that we are now dealing with.

Which practice areas are the most in demand in your firm?

We are a full-service firm but nonetheless I would mention practice areas that have been more active in recent years. For sure the energy area - during the last four years a very large number of renewable energy projects have been constructed and are now operating in Uruguay, both wind power and solar projects. We have quite a number of clients in both areas of these projects, so our energy team is very active.

Another area which has also been very active is the labor department. Labor issues in Uruguay are very important and significant in any kind of M&A transaction or when starting a new business in Uruguay. Uruguay is a very

labor protective country with very protective laws. Also, there are a lot of labor law suits. That means that any kind of businessman or investor needs to have very deep and solvent advise in labor issues. If not, they would certainly end up bankrupted. So, we have a large labor team and they are always very busy.

The third most active team has been the arbitration and litigation team. We got involved in three or four large arbitration proceedings, mainly connected with big construction works and those are mainly ICC cases, they are still around.

As a fourth one, the corporate and M&A area is as always one of our core businesses. Even though M&A has not been that active lately, corporate and commercial staff are always present in our practice.

How long have you been a member of Legalink?

Our firm got involved with Legalink in the late 2000's, one of my partners of that time was a good friend of one Brazilian partner at Felsberg and he connected us with Legalink. This partner of mine attended three or four meetings and afterwards in early 2010 he departed the firm, so I started to attend the meetings and my first meeting was in Sao Paulo in October 2011.

In terms of referrals, which jurisdictions are the most important for your firm?

Traditionally, the most referrals came from both US and Europe, mainly from the large countries but now in the last years there has also been a lot of referrals from other South American countries like Peru, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Colombia, Chile, so South

American countries that have been a very important origin of referrals. Not very much from Asia but we expect that that will eventually grow in the future.

What do you think about Legalink, where do you think it should be heading? What challenges are we facing?

I think Legalink is an extremely useful network and tool to expand our businesses. I have seen in the last years and I agree that there has been a big effort of the Committee to expand the network in order to include more law firms from countries we are not represented yet and also in order to expand in big countries in which we are already represented but nevertheless there is a need to bring law firms from other cities too, like in the US, Canada or other regions. I think that is the main need and urgency that Legalink has.

Legalink has something like a core structure, that has been existing for many years and is very good and brings a lot of spirit and unity but nevertheless, if we want to be more effective, we must enlarge the network. That may in some extent impact the personal touch, but growth of the network is certainly very important.

I think the conferences are absolutely needed. Not all members can attend both general meetings but without the conferences it would be very difficult for this organization to survive. I also think that it is important for the same person to attend because it is not easy to establish a relationship with the other members if you are changing the attendee every now and then. But although it is sometimes not possible to attend both conferences as they may conflict with other conferences or activities that we do and have, overall I think that having a

conference twice a year is OK, more than that would be too much and just one would not be enough. I think that we should always try to make the conference programme as interesting and attractive as possible in what regards the quality of speakers, so that after their presentations you can say this was worthwhile. The topics do not necessarily have to be legal issues. Also, I think the current organization of the practice groups still needs to be improved, so that the discussions in the groups are proactive and useful.

What is your favorite thing to do in your spare time?

My big hobby is motorbike. I have a group of friends and whenever possible we travel around, not very far away but like for a weekend. Also, I like to spend my time with my family and I like travelling.

Thank you very much!
Haroldo Espalter