



# In-house counsel in MADRID



Around 400 in-house counsel met in the Spanish capital for a two-day debate and networking event: the ACC Europe annual conference

by ilaria iaquinta

# "B

Building the future of the legal profession together. This, in a nutshell, was the purpose of the annual conference that brought together the European members of ACC, the Association of Corporate Counsel (the world's largest international association of corporate lawyers with over 45,000 members in 85 countries).

The two-day event was held in Madrid from 22 to 24 May as part of the annual conference of the European chapter (which brings together lawyers based in the Old Continent, ed.), entitled "Embracing new beginnings - inspiring perspectives for in-house counsel". The annual meeting was an opportunity to discuss and debate the future of the corporate law profession.

"The importance for the in-house counsel reconnecting with each other after three years is evident from the energy of the attendees. We can learn from one another and support one another, this is also a principle to the heart of the value of ACC Europe membership", said **Marlene Connolly**, ACC Europe board member and co-chair of the annual conference in Madrid.

The 22 working sessions, which involved around 70 speakers, covered a wide range of topics: antitrust advice across global borders; legal operations; digitisation; ESG, diversity equity and inclusion; wellbeing; etc. "We set up a big committee to prepare a programme full of interesting topics. It has demanded a big effort, but we are all very happy with the result", explains **Teresa Minguez** co-chair of the the annual conference and co-country representative for Spain.

In particular, the attending in-house lawyers worked on three major themes: lead the law, lead the business and lead yourself. The first two themes relate to the need to anticipate legal matters and business needs in order to provide companies with the necessary tools to navigate the complexity that characterises our times. The last one is about leadership development, on which the imperative for general counsel to gain a seat around the decision-making table

THE IMPORTANCE  
FOR THE IN-HOUSE COUNSEL  
RECONNECTING WITH EACH OTHER  
AFTER THREE YEARS IS EVIDENT  
FROM THE ENERGY  
OF THE ATTENDEES

**MARLENE CONNOLLY**

# "



WE SET UP A BIG COMMITTEE  
TO PREPARE A PROGRAMME  
FULL OF INTERESTING TOPICS.  
IT HAS DEMANDED A BIG EFFORT,  
BUT WE ARE ALL VERY HAPPY  
WITH THE RESULT

TERESA MINGUEZ




has emerged. The call for lawyers was to shed their 'guardian' clothes, often detached from the reality of the company, and to prove themselves as strategic advisors to the CEO and the board of directors. Real business people, able to bring opportunities to the company.

The approach to technology, which is set to bring major changes to the profession, also featured in the discussions. During the meetings, the importance of using tools on a daily basis was discussed, but there was also a renewed focus on developing creativity, relationships and building up trust with colleagues. The human factor, therefore, remains a key element, according to the experts.

The moments of discussion and debate that explored the legal market topics, innovations and international trends were followed by moments of leisure and entertainment. These were all occasions to carry out networking activities and take advantage of the unique opportunity to "make a system" and grow together to build, united, the future of the legal profession.





The real drive for the development of the profession is the sharing of views, ideas and strategies. In addition to the panels and conference sessions conference, the association strongly focuses on networking. "Networking is very important for the in-house lawyer who, differently from lawyers working at law firms, can't exchange views frequently on legal topics. In-house lawyers are somehow 'a bit alone' as they are the only expert in law in the company, so being able to share experiences with other colleagues is always very useful", said Teresa Minguez. 

NETWORKING IS VERY IMPORTANT  
FOR THE IN-HOUSE LAWYER  
WHO, DIFFERENTLY FROM  
LAWYERS WORKING  
AT LAW FIRMS, CAN'T EXCHANGE  
VIEWS FREQUENTLY  
ON LEGAL TOPICS

TERESA MINGUEZ

”



BARBARA VAN KOPPEN  
THOMAS MEIERS

# The in-house counsel of the **FUTURE**

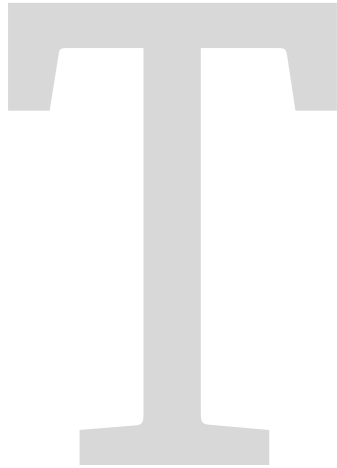


Video

On the sidelines of Acc Europe's annual conference, Iberian Lawyer interviewed some in-house lawyers to discuss the great transformation of the legal counsel

by ilaria iaquinta





The profession of in-house counsel is constantly evolving. Corporate lawyers, who entered the company as the guarantors of corporate legality, have collected roles and assignments over the years. This has happened for several reasons. These include the proliferation of regulation to which companies are subject to, the digital transformation that is changing the face of business, and the focus on issues increasingly related to legality and justice, such as ESG.

These changes require in-house counsel to acquire new skills and functions. This is to anticipate change, without being overwhelmed by it and to lead companies into the future.

**Barbara van Koppen**, svp corporate center & general counsel of Klm Royal Dutch Airlines, **Thomas Meiers**, chief governance and legal officer of Seat and Cupra, **John Rigau**, vice president, general counsel of Pepsico West Europe and **Elizabeth Walker**, general counsel & company secretary of Cancer Research UK, spoke about this at the opening plenary of ACC Europe's annual conference "*Embracing new beginnings - Re-inventing in-house counsel profile*", facilitated by **Craig Budner**, Global strategic growth partner at K&L Gates.

## NEW SKILLS

The health emergency caused by Covid-19 and the uncertainties generated by it, have accelerated the transformation of the legal function. Many new skills are demanded to corporate lawyers. "Generally speaking, – explained van Koppen – corporate counsel need to have the right level of technical expertise in their area of activity, and this will continue to be extremely important in the future too. On top of that, in-house counsel also need expertise in various other domains. Among them ESG, privacy and compliance, that will become increasingly important for their internal clients. Next to that, talking about the competences of the future, corporate counsel will have to be agile and open to change and new challenges. The business partners respect our advice when it's not strictly legal, so we need to be the best version of ourselves."



JOHN RIGAU

## DISRUPTIVE TIMES

Corporate lawyers are required to help their organisations in strategically and proactively navigating a legal and policy framework in our disruptive times. “There are a lot of new topics coming up at the moment: geopolitical and ESG topics, for examples. I think corporate counsel need to show more flexibility and to be able to learn, even though they have been doing their job for 10 or 20 years. In times of uncertainties, in-house lawyer needs to discuss with the business partners and to be more business focused than ever,” explains Meiers.

In-house lawyers will play an increasingly important role in the transformation of companies over the next few years and will need to learn how to anticipate the legal challenges posed by constant changes.

“Corporate lawyers have a key role in prevention, based on their expertise and functions in the company, close to the business and the leadership team. They must sit at the decision-making table and be able to contribute as much as possible, not only from the legal side, but also as business managers. In this case, they will always be able to anticipate troubles and keep the company safe,” said Rigau.



THOMAS MEIERS

ELIZABETH WALKER

## THE RELATIONSHIP WITH OUTSIDE COUNSEL

In these changing times the relationship between in-house and outside counsel is changing too. “They need to become more than one team – confirms Walker –. People working together and form one single team is going to be way more important in the future, it’s that collaborative piece that is key to moving things forward.” In conclusion, the in-house counsel of the future, in Walkers’ words: “will just not giving legal advice but will be the advisor to the board on all sorts of topics. He will be a business leader bringing to the party his/her legal experience and knowledge.” 