



JOSÉ MANUEL SÉRVULO CORREIA

# Sérvulo, 25 years strengthening partnerships

Founder José Manuel Sérvulo Correia explains how the firm is broadening horizons to strengthen alliances in strategic regions and boost collaborations while outlining the successful path the firm has followed over the past 25 years

by mercedes galán

On the occasion of the firm's 25th anniversary *Iberian Lawyer* spoke with **José Manuel Sérvulo Correia**, founding partner of Sérvulo and Full Professor at the Faculty of Law of the University of Lisbon. With a distinguished career spanning over six decades in public law and dispute resolution, Sérvulo Correia shares his insights on the current and future challenges of the legal profession, the importance of ethics and continuous education, and the keys to his firm's success and longevity in a globalized and constantly evolving market. This is a journey through an unparalleled professional career and the firm's ongoing commitment to expanding its network and fostering collaborative relationships with key legal partners in strategic regions.

**Besides being the founder of the firm, you are also a university professor. What sparked your interest in dedicating your life to advocating for justice?**

At the Faculty of Law of the University of Lisbon, where I was a student and professor, it is a long-standing tradition for some of its members to combine university life and the practice of law. The practice of law provides a platform for using the in-depth theoretical knowledge required of a professor in practice.

**What would you say has been the core value that has defined you throughout your career development?**

It is not easy to identify a "core value" amidst a set of fundamental values. Having been invited to choose, I would say: loyalty to my "múnus".

**Sérvulo is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year. To what do you attribute the longevity and success of the firm in the legal industry?**

I attribute Sérvulo's longevity and success in the legal sector to two main factors: the unity among the partners based on the consensus of a common project and the market's recognition of the quality of the provided legal services.

**Recently, Sérvulo has been closing international collaboration agreements with other firms. Could you tell us more about these**

## Sérvulo

**1999**

year founded

**€16.845.000**

turnover 2023

**+40**

areas of activity

**150**

number of professionals

**17**

equity partners

**15**

partners

**4**

of counsel

**57**

associate

**6**

countries - desk

**3**

international networks:  
(Legalink, Cathay Associates, The Roxin Alliance)



JOSÉ MANUEL SÉRVULO CORREIA

**partnerships and what they mean for Sérvulo's global strategy?**

"Sérvulo" takes part of different kinds of partnerships and other collective initiatives from law firms and other lawyers' organizational structures. I put three of them in relief. "Sérvulo Latitude" is a multilateral network, founded by us, of law firms and lawyers' chambers in Portuguese speaking countries and autonomous regions. With some foreign law firms we have been having, along several years, a mutual assistance agreement which involve a constant flow of legal work of all kinds. For a long time now, we have also been the Portuguese law firm in "Legalink", a global net assembling law firms from a large number of countries and the main cities of some larger countries.

Our interest in these collaborations stems from several factors: strengthening mutual knowledge exchange among professionals

from different parts of the world, responding to globalization which demands concerted actions among lawyers from diverse jurisdictions, and addressing judicial proceedings with international repercussions. Additionally, there is a growing emphasis on international human rights protection and the resolution of disputes through arbitration, conciliation, and mediation, leading to increased work in these areas.

**How do these international collaborations align with Sérvulo's vision and objectives for the future?**

Our aim is to consider the practice of law in the fields of international law, European law and multinational economic relations as a specific field of specialization and permanent upgrading.

**In your opinion, what are the current challenges and opportunities law firms in Portugal are facing, especially in the context**

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### **of increasing globalization and digital transformation?**

There are several challenges and we must respond to them in order to exploit the related opportunities. The integration of AI into the legal profession is an asset that is constantly changing and, as such, demands monitoring and agility from organizations. And we must conform our initiatives in this sector to the limits of financial capacity resulting from the lack of reserve funds imposed by an archaic tax system for law firms.

### **What role do you believe Sérvulo plays in shaping the legal landscape in Portugal and beyond in the next decade?**

As Prosper Weil once wrote, the daily work of jurists corresponds to the permanent segregation of silk for the making of a "cocoon", which is the Law. It follows that this "cocoon" is constantly evolving, adjusting to changing values and collective needs. Through our eagerness in the fields of theoretical elaboration, opinion, commentary on case law, positions taken in paradigmatic cases, and support, namely the pro bono given to good causes, we are convinced that we are contributing, in our modest way, to the improvement of the law.

### **How has the human capital within law firms evolved to compete in an increasingly competitive market?**

I would say that the crucial factor lies in the methodical care put into the selection of new members, into their training and close support of their work from the partners, and in a periodic evaluation, based as much as possible on objective data and geared towards acknowledging merit.

### **Looking back on your career and the establishment of Sérvulo, what advice would you give to young lawyers aspiring to build successful careers in law today?**

Given the different historical conditions, I don't believe my path in the legal profession can be perceived as a model for young lawyers starting their professional lives in a law firm. When I returned from military service in Africa at the end of 1962 and joined the Portuguese

### **ABOUT JOSÉ MANUEL SÉRVULO CORREIA**

José Manuel Sérvulo Correia, founding partner of Sérvulo in 1999 and professor of law at the University of Lisbon, specialises in public law, litigation and arbitration. He is co-founder of the European Public Law Group and received an honorary doctorate from the University of Athens in 2015. Since 2005, he has been acting as an arbitrator at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague and was an ad hoc judge at the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea between 2011 and 2014. He has held important roles in the Superior Council of the Bar Association, in the Entrepосто business group and in various parliamentary and governmental institutions in Portugal.

Bar Association, there were no law firms in Portugal. In successive stages, I moved from an isolated, generalist law practice to one that was increasingly specialized in Public Law and I gathered around young people who had been my students at university and my trainees. I can, however, draw from my experience, which is unrepeatable today, a piece of advice that remains valid for young people starting out in the profession: adherence to values and ethical rules, respect for judges and other lawyers, loyalty to clients, self-demand for the quality of work, constant study and rejection of routine.

### **Reflecting on Sérvulo's journey so far, what achievements are you most proud of and what are your ambitions for the firm in the future?**

Faced with a *continuum* that began 25 years ago, it is difficult to isolate "achievements". There are a number of "hard cases" in which we have obtained results worthy of pride, particularly those in which we have boosted innovation in the case law of higher courts. Year after year, the directories show that we are among the ten most important law firms in Portugal (among Portuguese and foreign firms with permanent

activity in our country). And there are several areas of practice in which our partners have obtained high ratings from their peers. My ambitions for the firm in the future can be summarized as follows: unity among the partners and “esprit de corps” embraced by all lawyers; constant upgrade of knowledge and experience; collective ambition for professional results; preservation (if not improvement) of competitive conditions; and patriotism, with a deepening awareness of our responsibility as a Portuguese law firm with regard to the credibility of the Portuguese legal system.

**There will certainly be another 25 years, how do you see Sérvulo in the future?**

I wish there will be more than another 25 years.

However, I don't have prophetic gifts that allow me to predict the future. Given my age (86 years), that future will no longer be mine. And I can't forget an interesting text by a French female rabbi read a few years ago, in which, with the classic Jewish sense of humour, she pointed out, regarding the anxiety of certain people in determining all the details of the organization of the lives of those who will succeed them, that this is a matter for those who stay here and not for those who will no longer live those moments. 📖

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