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Introduction

MARLENE HERMANN
Editor
Chambers Europe

ROMY DE LEMOS
Deputy Editor
Chambers Europe

In-house legal departments are becoming increasingly significant within the Portuguese market. The demands of driving growth in international markets encourage the steady increase in the functions required of the legal department and the emergence of new structures to facilitate successful outcomes. The general counsel and legal division general managers highlighted in this list are recognised for the contributions they have made and the examples they have set in the development of in-house legal culture.

Research Methodology: Our GC Influencers have been chosen following research among private practice lawyers and other in-house counsel. We identified the key areas in which GCs have displayed substantial influence:

- Effective management and development of an in-house team.
- Navigation of substantial business projects and strategic business change.
- Understanding the pressures faced within industry.
- Ability to influence and respond to regulatory change.

Our aim is to celebrate excellence within the legal profession. Our GC Influencers have created best practice pathways endorsed by both private practice and other in-house lawyers. In spotlighting their achievements, this list encourages collaboration among the in-house legal community.
Engaging content, networking and celebration with leading General Counsel and top ranked lawyers globally.

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Mariana Abreu serves as Head of Legal & Compliance at Banco BNI Europa, having joined the growing digital bank in 2017. She is highlighted as an influential general counsel for her skills in banking and finance as well as her involvement in fintech and regtech. Market sources are swift to recommend her as an authoritative name in the industry, one stating: “She is very bright, with a trajectory that encompasses working at a law firm and then acting as a GC in a broader perspective. She is very skilled in regulations.”

Prior to joining BNI Europa, Abreu gained experience in private practice, with stints at market-leading firms Cuatrecasas, Linklaters and Miranda & Associados. She is a regular speaker at industry conferences and panels, showcasing her skills and experience managing a legal team responsible for regulatory and compliance matters. She is also active in negotiating contacts and key partnerships with other fintech actors.
Miguel Varandas heads the legal team at Robert Bosch Portugal and comes highly recommended by market sources for his impressive work at the company. One interviewee notes: “He is fantastic, I have a huge amount of respect for him,” adding: “You know there are so many elements of law that he has to cover in his job and he deals with all of them.”

Another market commentator praises his practical and organisational skills, enthusing: “I would strongly recommend him – he has to accommodate a lot of matters, in three different locations in Portugal. From a legal standpoint there are quite a few issues and it’s a demanding job for him. Because of the company’s structure in Portugal he has to master matters going from employment through to commercial, corporate, M&A and real estate.”
Cimpor’s Head of Legal Ana Paula Reis has been with the company for 15 years and previously acted in private practice for over a decade.

She is recognised for her impressive experience in the legal sector and tremendous knowledge of the cement industry, regularly acting on a range complex issues involving competition, compliance, international trade and dispute resolution, with particular experience in arbitration for construction disputes. Reis is additionally highlighted for her multi-lingual skills and experience in coordinating legal work in different jurisdictions.

Interviewees are keen to recommend her as an influential general counsel, one enthusing: “She knows the cement business by heart! She knows the legal market perfectly and is an outstanding lawyer herself, very competent.”
Manuela Vasconcelos Simões serves as General Counsel, Head of Legal and Compliance at Companhia de Seguros Tranquilidade. She joined the company in 2015 following a ten-year tenure at Deutsche Bank, where she also led the legal and compliance team.

Market commentators recommend Simões as an influential counsel with key industry experience, one stating: “She is a very good lawyer and knows the sector really well.” Another interviewee asserts that she is “one of the most relevant GCs in Portugal.”

Her impressive skills and accomplishments include acting on complex matters relating to structured finance, financial regulatory, capital markets, investment banking and anti-money laundering, as well as day-to-day corporate issues.

Simões is a law graduate from the University of Lisbon, with an LL.M from the University of Essex in the UK. She also completed a leadership programme from the Catholic University of Portugal.
Rui de Oliveira Neves currently acts as General Counsel and Company Secretary at GALP. He is a highly-regarded lawyer with extensive experience in the legal profession. Prior to joining GALP, he was a partner at market-leading firm Morais Leitão, Galvão Teles, Soares da Silva & Associados (MLGTS), where he worked for 15 years.

Market sources agree that Neves is a prominent counsel with strong influence in the energy sector. One interviewee reports: “He is a star wherever he is: he was a star at MLGTS and he’s a star now at GALP. He’s very flexible and he knows the energy sector really well.” Another source concurs: “He’s a superb lawyer and he has done a very good job at GALP, he is very powerful internally, not only as GC but also as company secretary.”

He is regularly involved in complex M&A transactions and regulatory issues, whilst managing a growing team of in-house counsel. Neves also boasts a strong academic background, with multiple publications in corporate law and corporate governance and a role as visiting lecturer at the Catholic University of Portugal.
Patricia Afonso Fonseca currently serves as Head of Legal at Novo Banco, leading the team since 2010, when the bank operated as Banco Espirito Santo.

Afonso Fonseca acts on complex regulatory and transactional work and has been instrumental in navigating the bank through different issues the entity has faced in recent times, including its rescue by the Bank of Portugal in 2014 and recapitalisation by a resolution fund.

Market sources highlight her sector expertise and management of complex issues, one stating: “She has deep knowledge of the banking sector and of company law, so she is very well prepared from a technical point of view. NovoBanco has faced several challenges and she has had to implement different transactions in which she’s always been involved as a key person.”

Another interviewee comments: “She has taken up the hard task of advising and leading NovoBanco’s work following the resolution, which was very intense and now as a new operating bank, which is a very hard and demanding task.”

Prior to launching her in-house career, Afonso Fonseca was a corporate finance associate for over seven years at Linklaters in its Lisbon and Madrid offices.
Marta Almeida Afonso heads the legal department at REN, also acting as company secretary. She joined the company in 2015, following over a decade as an associate at Linklaters in Lisbon.

Sources are quick to recommend her as an influential counsel for her technical knowledge and team-management skills, one reporting: “She is well prepared from a technical point of view.” Another interviewee further notes: “She has done a very good job of organising the department and creating it from scratch.”

Almeida Afonso adeptly handles the complex corporate and regulatory issues the company faces as holder of the concession of large energy infrastructure networks in Portugal, with expertise in negotiating international agreements.

She is a law graduate from the University of Lisbon and holds an MBA from The Lisbon MBA.
João Gomes da Silva serves as General Counsel at Santander Totta. Market sources are swift to recommend him as an influential counsel for his experience and commercial awareness, one interviewee noting: "He is profoundly aware of the business and the company, knows the legal market extremely well and is an extremely competent lawyer who can practice in various areas."

Gomes da Silva routinely oversees all legal work at the bank, including general corporate matters, commercial and labour disputes, structured finance and acquisitions.
Alexandra Reis is a renowned counsel with a solid track record at Tabaqueira, the subsidiary of Philip Morris International in Portugal, where she joined as counsel in 2003, taking up the role of head of the legal department in 2009.

Reis is highlighted for her innovative approach to current regulatory and compliance issues faced by tobacco corporates as well as advising on legal matters related to the launching of novel products seeking to reduce health risks. She is also an experienced litigator who is routinely involved in various commercial and labour disputes.

Prior to joining Philip Morris, Reis acted as in-house counsel at PGA Portugalia Airlines for over half a decade.

Additionally, she is regularly appointed as a speaker on panels and conferences to discuss new developments in the legal corporate world as well as matters around corporate social responsibility.
António Neto Alves serves as General Counsel at The Navigator Company. Highlighted for his prowess in creating a solid team of lawyers and his project management skills, Neto Alves is also recommended for his ability to act on multi-jurisdictional matters and advise on issues ranging from competition, corporate and capital markets to complex dispute resolution and M&A.

Market sources are quick to note his impressive skills, recommending him as an influential counsel: “He is very knowledgeable, and as the General Counsel of the company, he should be highlighted.”

Neto Alves has played a key role in the company’s growth following several mergers and rebranding from Portucel Soporcel to its current operating name.

Prior to joining The Navigator Company, he spent over a decade at the legal department of Jerónimo Martins and was part of its financial reorganisation.