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# A lawyer first: José Luís Arnaut

The managing partner at CMS Portugal reflects on his years ahead of the law firm, the evolution of intellectual property, and the impact of AI

A professional portrait of José Luís Arnaut, a middle-aged man with grey hair, wearing a dark blue suit, white shirt, and blue tie. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred office setting. The portrait is framed by a thin red border.

# A lawyer first: José Luís Arnaut

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the evolution of intellectual property, and the impact of AI

by glória paiva

I arrived early at the historic building at 50 Rua Castilho, in Lisbon, headquarters of CMS Portugal, and it was just as well. The interview with **José Luís Arnaut** started immediately: an unforeseen commitment would shorten our time. The mobile phone on the table reflected the intensity of his schedule — “if they call me, I’ll have to run”, he warned.

Arnaud, former Portuguese minister and chairman of parliamentary committees, is chairman of ANA – Aeroportos de Portugal, a board member of companies such as REN and Goldman Sachs, and has led CMS Portugal for a decade and a half. His continued tenure at the law firm for another three years was confirmed at the latest partners’ meeting on 30 January, with the election of a renewed executive board, maintaining himself, **Francisco Xavier de Almeida** and **Susana Afonso**, and welcoming **Margarida Vila Franca** and **Nuno Alves Mansilha**.

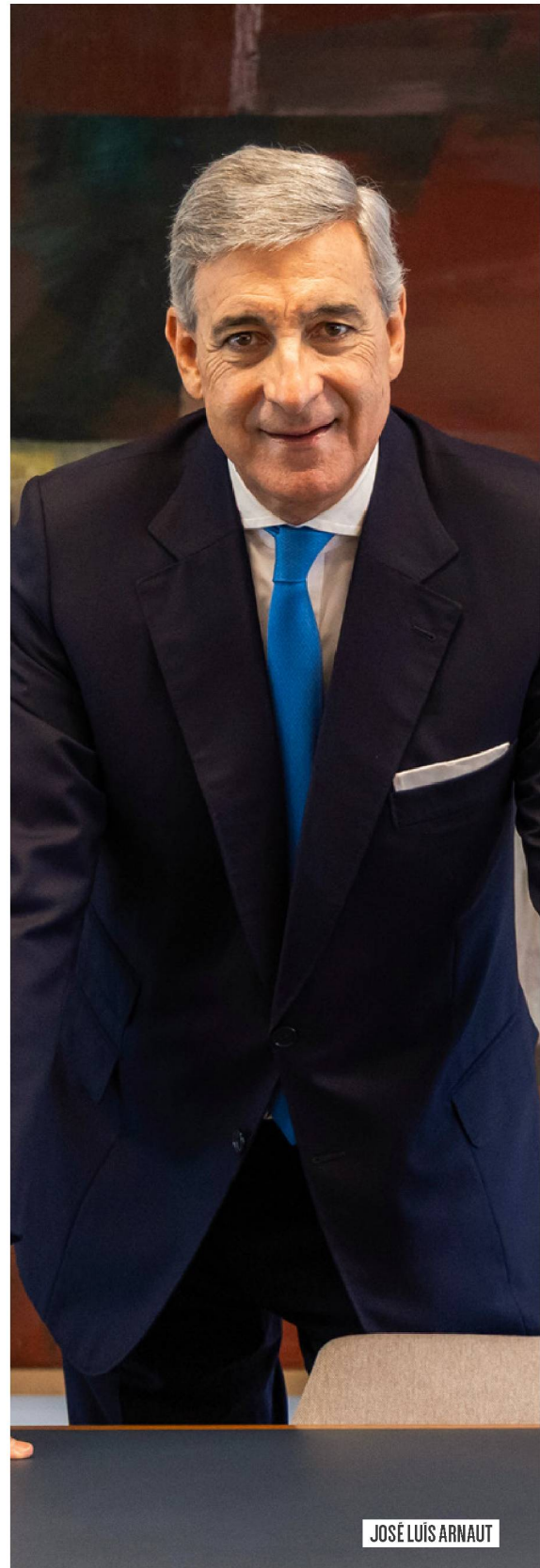
An intellectual property lawyer, he began his career in 1989 at Pena, Machete & Associados, the precursor of today’s CMS Portugal. After 12 years in public service, he returned to the firm in 2006, overseeing growth from 24 to 158 professionals and the consolidation of a multidisciplinary structure. Despite his numerous roles and commitments, Arnaut considers law his vocation. “Of all the positions I have held, I have always seen them as temporary. Law is what I am”, he told *Iberian Lawyer*.

#### **What are the key lessons from your experience so far?**

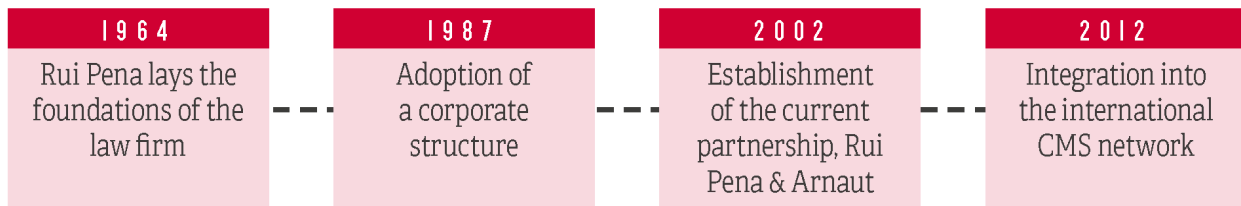
In every role I have held, there has been one constant: I am a lawyer. In other roles — as a minister and member of the Parliament — I was there temporarily, but I am, and have always been, a lawyer. When I left public life, I realised that it’s not proper to combine both. I clearly chose the legal profession.

#### **Do you still find time to practice law, or do other duties take over?**

As with doctors, lawyers cannot lose their touch. If we stop working on cases, we lose accuracy, knowledge, and even enjoyment. Today, I am less directly involved in intellectual property and more in corporate, M&A, and client advisory work, in addition to my roles as managing partner and member of the CMS executive committee.



## The History of CMS Portugal



### How have these other roles informed your daily practice?

My experience in government and years on Goldman Sachs' advisory board have given me a broad perspective on the business and institutional world. As chairman of ANA, I encounter different realities that enrich my outlook. I see these experiences as complementary to law, and this enrichment also benefits clients.

### Which areas have been most strategic for CMS Portugal?

We came from a boutique approach, mainly in public and energy law, and have since diversified. In 2006, we created one of the first structured intellectual and industrial property departments in Portugal. Today, all areas are strategic: we aim to be a full-service law firm, delivering consistent quality. We are lucky to have very strong partners and highly capable teams.

### What projects have you developed in the field of innovation?

CMS's international scale allows us to invest heavily in technology. We are the firm with the largest implementation of Harvey in the world: all lawyers, from trainees to partners, use AI tools. A purely national firm of our size could hardly support this investment.

### How have you faced increasing competition?

I see competition as a stimulus, not a threat. We have a well-established position, a solid corporate structure, and a network-wide strategy defined until 2030, based on three pillars. First, structure and business development: we have shared tools, a common vision, and we know where we are

heading. Second, integration, innovation, and talent retention: those who do not invest in innovation today are out of the game. Third, reporting and leadership: an organisation of our size requires transparency, solid reporting chains, and strong leadership, with each partner playing an active role. I am not concerned with growth for growth's sake, but with recognition for quality, uniqueness, and responsiveness. That is why our main goal is to be The Leading Global Relationship Law Firm.

### What trends are shaping the legal market in Portugal?

Trends in Portugal are similar to those in other markets. AI and new technological tools are profoundly changing the way we work and respond. There is also a growing focus on multidisciplinary teams: we have created groups in areas such as ESG

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and data centres to address this complexity. Pricing systems are also evolving, driven by technology and new client demands. The market is more volatile today, both on the professional and client sides, creating challenges but also opportunities.

#### Do you work in integration with other geographies?

We have a truly global presence: Europe, Asia — including Singapore, Shanghai, Beijing and Hong Kong and recently the integration of IndusLaw in India— Latin America, and a strong presence in Africa, from Morocco to South Africa, including Lusophone Africa. Interaction is constant. We manage international clients globally, and Portuguese clients and companies benefit from our international range through a single point of contact. This gives us a competitive advantage.

#### How has the intellectual property practice evolved?

I worked in intellectual property for many years early in my career. Today, I am less directly involved but remain engaged in the development of the practice. The evolution of patents and generic medicines was particularly significant. We played a key role in introducing the generics market in Portugal, challenging originators in dozens of arbitrations. It was a complex battle, but the market is now consolidated. Current challenges include counterfeiting, data protection, cyberattacks, and new technologies.

#### You have been managing partner for 15 years. Have you considered a transition?

It is a natural topic. We foresee continuity management, but with significant renewal, ensuring greater gender diversity. For the next three years of my tenure, I plan to consolidate a transition model, but through a democratic process involving all the partners.

#### What qualities are essential in a lawyer?

I have witnessed great evolution in the profession, from telex to permanent connectivity. There are no perfect lawyers, but two factors are decisive: quality and availability. Today, responsiveness is central and often outweighs technical skill. Communication, business development, and understand-

## CMS IN NUMBERS

**7,200**  
lawyers

**10,000**  
people in total

**21**  
member firms

**90**  
offices

**50**  
jurisdictions

**€2**  
billion in revenue

ding the client's business are also required. Being technically excellent is not enough. Loyalty is now more volatile; clients compare and choose. Law, like medicine and the priesthood, is a vocation: it does not adhere to fixed hours and requires commitment and availability.

#### How do you spend your free time?

Family is my foundation. I can maintain this level of professional demand because I have a solid family structure that supports me. I have always believed that the quality of time spent with family makes the difference. When I am present, I am fully present. My greatest support is, without doubt, the backing of my family and family balance. ▣

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