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Interview with Cristina Vallejo, President of the Ilustre Colegio de la Abogacía de Barcelona (Barcelona Bar Association)



Congratulations on your appointment as President. What are your first impressions and priorities as you take over the leadership of one of Spain's most influential Bar Associations?

Firstly, thank you very much for your kind words and for giving me the opportunity to share this interview with you for the European Bars Federation (FBE) e-newsletter.

One of the first impressions I would like to highlight, regarding the enormous responsibility of taking on the leadership of one of the most influential Bar Associations, not only in Spain but also in Europe, is that I have felt very supported.

As President, the support I have received at an institutional level from various representatives of different administrations and organizations, as well as from various professional groups, both in the justice system and in other sectors, and the personal support of many colleagues, has been a revitalizing boost of positive energy.

This is undoubtedly comforting and very necessary, given the unique context in which we find ourselves and the momentous challenges that lie ahead. Although it is true that in my case I have previous experience as a member of the Council of the President Emeritus M^a Eugenia Gay Rosell between 2017 and 2021, since taking office on 3 July 2025, I have taken on the challenge of leading the ICAB with a new perspective compared to then and, above all, with great enthusiasm.

And I do so accompanied by a magnificent Council made up of a professional and cross-disciplinary team, whose main mission is to reaffirm and deepen the prestige of the Barcelona Bar Association, emphasizing the defence of the individual and collective rights of its members, as well as the social function of our Corporation. To this end, the current Council has designed an ambitious 2025-2029 Governance Plan, comprising 100 measures grouped into the following 15 program priorities:

1. Public functions: Ethics, Legal Aid and Fees.
2. Justice and Protection of the Legal Profession.
3. Training.
4. ADR.
5. Bar Association Life.
6. Corporate and Public Sector Law (In-house Legal Services).
7. Young Lawyers.
8. Senior Lawyers.
9. More Social Lawyers.
10. Delegations.
11. Catalan in Law.
12. Internationalization of the Legal Profession.
13. Governance, Environment, and Ethics.
14. Fair Retirement.
15. Artificial Intelligence.

It is a comprehensive program that aims to focus on the specific needs that arise at each stage of professional practice, as well as the different ways in which the legal profession can be practiced, especially taking into account the paradigm shifts resulting from digitalization and the important reforms being carried out with the so-called efficiency laws.



The Barcelona Bar Association has long been an active member of the Federation of European Bar Associations (FBE). How do you see the role of the ICAB in strengthening European cooperation between Bar Associations and the legal profession?

The ICAB was one of the founding members of the FBE, during the time of President Emeritus Eugeni Gay Montalvo, and since then it has renewed its commitment to this organization, which today has more than 200 Bar Associations as members, representing a total of more than 1,000,000 lawyers from 20 different countries.


Since then, and even earlier, as a participating member of the Conférence des Grands Barreaux d'Europe, the predecessor of the current FBE, the ICAB has been supporting its members and responding to the challenges of an increasingly complex and globalized world. The internationalization of law and client needs requires the Bar Association to focus on strengthening these cooperative and friendly relations with the main players and representatives of the legal profession at European and global level.

The FBE offers an ideal framework for this objective, as well as providing a forum for reflection and collective debate on common problems affecting the professional practice of law.

For this reason, at the ICAB we have proposed, as a core part of our 2025-2029 Governance Plan, among other actions, to attend the FBE's meetings, contributing to those issues in which we are required to do so, sharing the vision of legal certainty that we defend and promote from a global city such as Barcelona, promoting and strengthening the network of International Delegates, as well as attending and organizing, in coordination with the International and European Union Law Section, high-level conferences and training sessions as a way of promoting networking.

Without a doubt, European cooperation between Bar Associations and lawyers is essential, not only because of the increasing importance of European Union law within the legal systems of each Member State, but also because of the growing number of cases with an international element. In this regard, the ICAB can play an important role, as it is a member of numerous international organizations representing law and justice, and has extensive experience in supporting members in the exercise of their profession abroad.

An example of this, of strong collaboration between the various European Bar Associations in the FBE forum, is the Convention on the Protection of the Legal Profession, which is still pending ratification by Spain, and is so necessary to eradicate the European legal profession at risk.

 **Spain and Catalonia have a strong tradition of legal advocacy and innovation. How can the ICAB share its experience with other European Bar Associations?**

Legal defense and innovation have been a constant feature in the development of the Spanish and Catalan legal systems, from the codification

processes of the 19th century, through the successive stages we have experienced, to the integration of European Union law today.

The ICAB has always been active in the modernization of law, offering its technical and legal perspective through various proposals *de lege ferenda* on a wide range of issues of concern to society, the most current of which, by way of example, are illegal occupation, the right to housing, and multiple recidivism.

As it already does in its current congresses, and as a new way of collaborating, would be to seek the participation of European speakers from the FBE. The Bar is strategically analysing European regulation in areas such as sustainability, anti-money laundering, compliance, and artificial intelligence. The value of this debate is immense and shared among all the Bar Associations. There will be a complete revolution in this area in the coming years, which is why knowledge of its practical application at the European level must be developed jointly and in a pioneering manner.

Finally, one of the measures we have included in the 2025–2029 Government Plan is to strengthen the Commission for the Promotion and Study of Catalan Civil Law, which stands out for being a very European and open regulatory body.



What do you consider the main challenges currently facing the legal profession in Spain and Europe?

Specifically in Spain, in recent years there have been a series of very important structural reforms at the organizational, procedural, and digital levels, under the so-called Public Justice Service Efficiency Laws.

In many respects, these reforms represent a paradigm shift for the legal profession. On the one hand, the base of the judicial pyramid, originally designed to meet the needs of the 19th century, with a more rural and geographically fragmented society, is being updated. With the reform, there is a shift from single-judge courts as the first line of jurisdictional action, with a judge, a court clerk, and several support staff, to a Court of First Instance as a collegiate body in each judicial district, organized into specialized sections to handle cases in a collective manner.

On the other hand, in civil jurisdiction, which is my area of expertise, MASCs have been introduced as a general requirement for the admissibility of a lawsuit. As lawyers, we were already engaged in negotiations

prior to filing any lawsuit, in the interests of our clients and always with the intention of avoiding litigation, as we are ethically obliged to do. However, this is now a requirement that we must meet in order for a lawsuit to be admitted, despite the added time and difficulties that may arise in practice in some cases.

In any case, the legal profession has always been open to change and has demonstrated its ability to adapt in the interests of the law and in response to the legal concerns of citizens at all times. Likewise, for some time now, we have been experiencing a legislative maelstrom, which is a challenge that is also common at the European level, along with the digital transformation of society.

Therefore, in addition to legal knowledge, today's legal professionals, both in Spain and in Europe, are required to have other types of competencies and skills, known as soft skills, among which we must highlight, although this is merely an illustrative list, the ability to work in more flexible and technological environments, both from an international and a digital point of view.

Finally, and taking this context into account, legal professionals must seek continuous training and commit to specialization, but without losing sight of the perspective or broad-mindedness regarding the legal system that every good lawyer must have.



How do you plan to strengthen relations between the ICAB and young lawyers, interns, and newly qualified lawyers?

As mentioned above, the ICAB must support its members throughout all stages of their professional practice, paying particular attention to their early years, and facilitate, as far as possible, their compliance with professional association obligations and professional training.

This is a function of the ICAB specifically provided for in its Statutes, specifically in Article 9(h), and is one of the priorities of our 2025-2029 Government Program, which gives priority to young lawyers.

Therefore, in addition to dividing membership fees to facilitate access to the profession and promoting a scholarship system as measures to ensure that talent is exercised in Barcelona, we will deepen the already excellent relations we have with the Young Lawyers Group (GAJ), as the specific professional body representing this sector.

In this regard, we count on the presence and voice of the GAJ at all Council meetings, to learn firsthand about the main concerns of young lawyers. Likewise, the GAJ may appoint members to represent this sector on all the Delegate Committees of the Council, whose main mission is none other than to assist the latter in the performance of its public functions, which the legal system attributes to professional associations.

Finally, and to paraphrase my two youngest colleagues on the Board, Cristina Capuz and Alexander Salvador, in their statements commemorating Young Lawyers' Day on October 31, we must bear in mind that the law is a reflection of society, and therefore it is constantly evolving. It is the role of the ICAB to facilitate access to the profession and ensure quality training.

In short, the ICAB supports young Lawyers through guidance and mentoring, through its job pool and agreements with companies and universities, and through advice on entrepreneurship, because today, in addition to being a lawyer, you have to be an entrepreneur and acquire a range of skills, as we mentioned earlier, which can range from leadership and business creation techniques to team management and talent attraction.



What advice would you give to young female lawyers who aspire to leadership positions in Bar Associations or professional associations?

Firstly, they must dare to take the plunge. Although we have made great strides in terms of legislation, equality, and work-life balance, it is still necessary, from a sisterhood perspective, to encourage women to be bold and trust in their abilities.

At the Barcelona Bar Association, we carry out numerous actions in favor of equality, having been pioneers in many of them, such as the promotion of an Equality Plan that, in addition to the Bar Association, could also serve as a model for law firms, as well as a "Development Program for Female Executives: Women on the Board of Directors," which is now in its sixth edition.

Secondly, being aware of how demanding our profession is and the enormous responsibility that comes with certain positions, the advice I would give to young women aspiring to occupy them is to surround themselves with a team of people who share their ambition and commitment to a project that is worth taking on certain challenges for.



Finally, what message would you like to convey to the member associations of the FBE and the European legal community as a whole?

First and foremost, I would like to convey a message of reassurance. I am optimistic by nature, and while it is true that we are currently experiencing significant changes at a rapid pace, many of these changes will result in better service.

I am thinking, for example, of digitalization in general and artificial intelligence in particular, which, far from viewing with concern, we must consider as another tool that should be put at the service of people and law firms. It is even a tool that, if we women prepare ourselves technically and empower ourselves, can reduce the gender bias that still exists.

It is true that we must legally limit its use, above all to ensure that fundamental rights, especially privacy, are not violated, ensuring that new technologies are used responsibly and ethically.

Also, from the Bar Associations and as a sign of the social function that defines us, we must continue to work in defence of the interests and freedoms of citizens, especially the most vulnerable, promoting legal culture and seeking actions that have a positive impact on our environment, such as working to be able to participate alongside the legislative power, for which European data and culture are very important as a precedent for change.

In this regard, the message I would like to convey to the Bar members of the FBE and to the legal community as a whole is that the Barcelona Bar Association is committed to continuing to work for the law and in service of the law, both for its members and for the citizens at large. ◀



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