

Interview with Professor Marta Pertegás

Professor—please describe your general background and 1-2 highlights of your career:

I was born and raised in Barcelona (Spain) where I also studied law. My graduation year coincided with the Olympic Games in my home city. This was back in 1992! It was exciting to see how Barcelona underwent a significant metamorphose to welcome the Olympics and since then the city has been a touristic hotspot for visitors all over the world.

My origins notwithstanding, most of my professional career has taken place outside Spain. I completed an LLM in Leuven (Belgium) and, after a short professional experience with a law firm and a contract at the European Parliament, I went back to academia to pursue a PhD. Professor Hans Van Houtte was my doctoral supervisor and I learned a great deal from him and from the excellent cohort of PhD candidates during my time in Leuven.



After completing my PhD, my academic career continued in Leuven for two more years until I was appointed as a full-time Professor in Antwerp University, my academic home for the past 22 years! There was a 'time-out' though: for almost a decade, I reduced my academic activities and took up a position as a Diplomat-Lawyer at the Permanent Bureau (Secretariat) of the Hague Conference on Private International Law (HCCH), an intergovernmental organization with seat in The Hague (The Netherlands). This is why I moved to The Netherlands in 2008 and this is where I have been living since then.

Since 2018, I have been a full Professor and Holder of the Chair on Private International Law and Transnational Law at Maastricht University. I still keep a part-time position at Antwerp University and hold visiting positions at the University of Johannesburg in South Africa and at IE University in Spain.

It has been a rich and quite enjoyable career so far! I think one of the tasks I most enjoy is my role of coordinator of the [PAX Moot](#) Competition, an international moot court competition in the area of private international law. In my former capacity of international civil officer, I look back with fondness at the time the 2005 Choice of Court Convention entered into force. I am also fond of my role in relaunching treaty negotiations on the so-called Judgments Project. These negotiations culminated with the conclusion of the 2019 Judgments Convention.

2 What in your life has led you to an interest in development and how do you think law can shape positive development trends? What do you think are the most important law and development trends currently?

I think any international lawyer is struck by the inequalities in our world and is keen to seize opportunities to redress them. As a lawyer, you wonder how the rule of law can advance economic and social development. For me, this was one of the reasons to leave academia in 2008 and join an IGO in my area of expertise. I was willing to make a more impactful and straightforward contribution to the negotiation, implementation and promotion of legal instruments with potential global relevance. With hindsight, I am glad I could contribute to the legal support, technical assistance and other development programs that the Hague Conference on Private International Law has in place. Together with the other members of the Secretariat and thanks to the contributions of a very wide network of international contacts, I tried to maximize the opportunities for those who can really advance the development agenda on a local, national or international scale. For example, setting up priorities for the technical assistance requests, managing the HCCH internship and secondment programmes or partnering with other stakeholders to maximize impact.

In my academic capacity, I am persuaded that education and research projects are essential for the empowerment of the new generations which, in turn, will foster sustainable development. One of my current PhD candidates is from Uganda and his research deals with the WTO rules on digital trade from a development perspective. I have learned a great deal from his commitment, as well as from his research findings. Research communication remains challenging but ideally his work should influence the WTO agenda on digital trade. The current conditions may not be ideal (think about the planetary crises we are facing or the WTO's own challenges) but scientific-based research offers a solid basis to advance development.

3 When were you first introduced to Lex:lead and what are your thoughts on the initiative?

I was first introduced to Lex:lead around 2015 and have been a big fan of this programme ever since. I find it very stimulating to be able to contribute to the selection of young professionals who may benefit from professional opportunities outside their narrow domestic environments and may become the new leaders of the international community.