



ON SECONDMENT

Above and beyond for ADQ

Counsel Marika Harjula speaks about her secondment with sovereign wealth fund ADQ



Brussels-based Counsel and anti-trust specialist Marika Harjula's secondment with Abu Dhabi sovereign wealth fund ADQ has strengthened our relationship with this important client.

ADQ was only established in 2018 but has grown rapidly ever since.

Marika explains: "ADQ approached Abu Dhabi Partner Steve Worthington to see if the Firm would be interested in providing a secondee, mainly to help them with their expanding merger control and FDI workload."

Among other things, Marika assisted ADQ to prepare for global anti-trust and foreign direct investment filings, which are required when deals are done.

"It was so important to them to get everything rolling the right way and they didn't want to leave it too late to put a robust regulatory system in place."

She says: "Merger control and FDI work is hugely important for a large organisation like ADQ. It has multiple transactions on the go at any one time, so it needs to be coordinated and can't risk taking different approaches.

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The client required a senior secondee with substantive experience who would be comfortable and persistent when gathering information within the organization and working up the regulatory framework.

Marika explains: "It wasn't easy because the people I needed to get information from are so busy and merger control and FDI work isn't always the top priority in the context of a transaction, so I needed to communicate the value and importance of what I was doing.

"That included educating people on the importance of the many merger control and FDI filings required during a transaction, how the processes work, how long they last, what type of information is needed by whom and why it's needed, as well as explaining where there was flexibility in the regulatory requirements and where there wasn't."



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MARIKA HARJULA, COUNSEL



The process was made more challenging by the fact that Marika's secondment was completed remotely due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

She remained in Brussels but kept in touch daily with her colleagues in Abu Dhabi using Teams, the phone and email. Marika says: "It was a shame not to be able to meet in person, especially because business in the Middle East is particularly based around relationships.

"However, I did get to meet everyone in person after the secondment, when I travelled out to Abu Dhabi to train the client's lawyers and people from the wider business on regulatory issues."

Another element of Marika's secondment involved working on ADQ's acquisition of a stake in the Louis Dreyfus Company.

She says: "It was a really big deal involving around 20 merger and FDI filings and I'd already been working on it from the White & Case side before starting my secondment.

"From that point on I became the coordinator on the client side, working with my colleagues in Brussels to help with preparation for merger control and FDI filings and to coordinating those consistently.

"Because ADQ is a sovereign wealth fund, there are limitations on what they can disclose, so we needed to manage that and liaise with authorities throughout the process."

Marika also enjoyed getting the opportunity to step outside her comfort zone when answering any ad hoc legal queries that she received from ADQ colleagues.

She says: "I enjoyed being able to help people with random things – questions about anything from corporate due diligence to anti-money laundering – things outside my usual field of expertise.

"That was challenging, but it added variety and everyone was very grateful for my support."

While working remotely meant she couldn't meet her ADQ colleagues face to face, this didn't stop her forging relationships and building knowledge of the client that will be invaluable going forward.

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"Although the secondment was remote, I still felt that I was much closer to the client," she says. "I got more involved and they shared information with me that you don't usually see as external counsel. They really took me in and I felt part of the organisation.

"Helping them to set up their regulatory regime was really rewarding and gave me a unique insight into their business, which I couldn't have got otherwise.

"Of course, I was in touch with my colleagues at the Firm regularly during the Louis Dreyfus transaction, but I also had catch-ups with Steven to discuss how things were going with the secondment specifically."

Marika believes the secondment has also been beneficial to the client. She says: "I believe I managed to share a lot of useful information with ADQ and they are better equipped to deal with regulatory issues as a result. A secondment like mine also builds trust and is one of those things that could set the client experience apart. It is part of the work we have been doing to strengthen the relationship with ADQ, and we believe it will lead to other engagements.

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