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Debriefing: University of Buenos Aires winning the 23rd Willem C. VIS Moot

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“And the winner is Buenos Aires” said Alice Fremuth-Wolf, deputy Secretary General of the Vienna International Arbitral Centre and presiding arbitrator of the final round, in the afternoon of 24 March 2016. This was the moment that a group of coaches, students and former students of the University of Buenos Aires (“UBA”) had long worked-and also dreamt about- for almost 20 years.

This is the first time a Latin-American team wins the final round of the prestigious Willem C. Vis International Commercial Arbitration Moot (“VIS Moot”), and it was certainly a great year for the region too, since 3 teams, including 2 Brazilians, made it within the top 8 universities.

With more than 311 teams coming from 67 different countries, the VIS Moot is the largest arbitration moot competition. The cut from 311 to 64 teams after the general rounds makes it one of the most competitive moots as well. Whether you come from Buenos Aires or any other part of the world, it is impossible to immunize oneself against the shock of losing yourself between thousands of students and practitioners coming from all over while attending the opening ceremony at the Vienna *Konzerthaus*. Indeed, the moot is not only one of the most amazing educational experiences but also an incredible social and cultural experience.

Undoubtedly, every Vis Moot participant has dreamt about winning the Moot. We, at the UBA, are no exception. But dreaming about it and believing it is possible -while important- is not enough; you also need to strain every nerve to prepare yourself for winning. In fact, winning the moot was the result of a lot of hard work, little sleep, uncountable meetings (physical and through Skype) and - above all - the eagerness of reaching the final round. Since only a limited number of privileged teams have actually done it, we wanted to share with other teams some of our lessons and experiences on the way to winning the VIS Moot.

First, there is the process by which we select our students. For us, this starts in July with an arbitration and international sales law course given by former participants. This course eventually leads to the selection of the members of the team by early October. During this period, the students receive not only general arbitration and

international sales law lessons but also the know-how gained by the UBA since 1996. The support of the members of what we call “The UBA Vis Family” is one of the most important characteristics of the preparation of the team representing the University. Throughout these years, the different generations of former participants remain in close contact, share their past experiences and help the new generations to develop their own moot skills. In turn, this creates an invaluable feeling of belonging and teamwork.

Second, the team focused on the preparation of the oral hearings from a very early stage. This allowed them to develop their advocacy skills right from the very beginning of the preparation, in parallel to the preparation of the written memorials. Furthermore, immediately after the written phase, we had numerous practice rounds through Skype with many universities. In addition, the UBA, which is a public and free university, supported the students so that they were able to participate in pre-moots held in Sao Paulo and Curitiba in Brazil and Belgrade, Serbia. All these practice rounds constituted a crucial element of the team’s training.

Third, it is needless to say that the students left no rock unturned in connection with the relevant legal issues. In this sense, they researched endlessly and tested a variety of arguments to support both parties’ submissions. The amount and organization of information collected this year and also during the previous years was another key for this year’s success and (we hope) for the future success of the UBA’s teams.

Finally, and one of the factors that we think was decisive, is the strong belief that we could actually win the competition. This was the message given from the group of coaches and was repeated until the last day of the Vis Moot. In fact, if something characterized this year’s team was the strong belief that it was possible to win as well as the humble and hard-working preparation aiming at achieving such a goal. From an early stage, we realized that these students were eager and capable of achieving something big and, eventually, time proved us right.

In light of the potential we had already seen in our students, we (the group of coaches) already knew that our team was second to none other university in the world. However, we then needed the students to believe that for themselves. Hence, the first Skype rounds we arranged -back in February 2016 (two months before the oral rounds)- were with some of the most renowned universities, such as Harvard, NYU and Columbia. After these rounds were over, we did not need to convince the students of their potential anymore. Nevertheless, UBA’s team climbed the ladder towards the final round step by step, with humbleness and teamwork, conscious that any mistake could take their dream away.

Since the team came back to Argentina it has been extremely hectic for them. Numerous public figures and reporters were interested in the achievement and wanted to hear what the VIS Moot was about. Furthermore, a lot of students have shown interest in knowing about the VIS Moot and arbitration. In a country where a large part of attention is given to investment arbitration, in view of the number of cases Argentina is / was part, the achievement of the UBA has put commercial arbitration on the spotlight. We expect that the attention given in the last months to the success of the UBA will positively impact or at least increase the awareness of

arbitration as an effective alternative way to resolve disputes. Likewise, we expect that additional attention is given to arbitration law at Argentinian universities.

With respect to the members of the team, we do expect that these young students will continue developing their already proven knowledge in international arbitration. Experience shows that the VIS Moot is not only an invaluable educational experience but also an entry ticket to practice international arbitration. The majority of former students participating in the VIS Moot for the UBA are either pursuing a career in international arbitration in Argentina or abroad or have been admitted to the most prestigious post-graduate programs in the field. Undoubtedly, there is more than meets the eye when it comes to the impact that the VIS Moot has on its participants.

We really hope that these tips and the success of the UBA motivates and serves as an example to other universities of Argentina and, every other region in the world (no matter how small, with limited resources or inexperienced), to participate in the VIS Moot and believe that it is possible to win it.

UBA's achievement was the product of the work by an outstanding group of young students: María Guillermina Fortunati, Juan Massun, Juan Ignacio González Mayer and Iván Levy. The team was co-coached by Julian Bordaçahar, M. Belen Pironi, Victoria Rodriguez Goyena, Juan Ignacio Ruiz Emmanuel E. Kaufman, Roy Goldsman, Florencia Lebensohn, and Laura Lafuente, which are all former moot participants and students of the UBA.

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