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CURTIS from Rome looks at the Mediterranean

George Kahale III, global chief of the American firm, lays out to MAG the reasons that led him to invest in the Capital: *“Our objective is to fortify our position as a leading international law firm, known not for size but for quality”*.

New premises, four new partners plus two counsel. Over the last year and a half Curtis Mallet-Prevost Colt & Mosle has strongly invested in Italy. The new offices are located in Rome, opened at the end of 2014 and inaugurated recently with an exclusive party, with the participation, among others, of the American Ambassador in Italy **John R. Philips**, of **Andrea Montanino**, Global Business and Economics Program Director of Atlantic Council and of **Giampiero Massolo**, Chairman of Fincantieri.

The Rome office is the law firm’s 17th location in the world. Not just another pinpoint in the chessboard of global market arena for legal advisory, but a strategic outpost which makes Curtis’ presence in Italy reflect the features of the international activities of the law firm more precisely. This is the interpretation that **George Kahale III**, global chief of the law firm, gives in this exclusive interview with MAG on the occasion of the opening celebrations of the Rome office. *“We have always been interested in Rome, but were waiting to find the right opportunity”* states Kahale.

The opportunity presented itself in November 2014 when the law firm, led in Italy by **Galileo Pozzoli**, opened up the partnership to **Alfonso de Marco** and **Sergio Esposito Farber**, and with whom the construction of its presence in the capital began. This project developed steadily in the months following when partners **Dino Dima** and **Daniela Sabelli** and counsel **Carmin Gravina** and **Franco Caccioppoli** joined the team.

In less than two years the total number of the law firm’s attorneys (excluding trainees) rose from 16 to 24 (+ 50%).

Why Rome after years in Milan?

Milan is one of our most successful offices, thanks largely to the leadership of Galileo Pozzoli. We have been recognized in Italy as a leading firm in international arbitration and oil & gas, which are two of our areas of strength worldwide.

Does the Rome office opening reflect the desire to expand your activities in other areas?

We wanted to expand into other areas that fit into our international practice, such as investment management, real estate, finance & infrastructure, and we seized the opportunity when we found the right people. We were able to establish ourselves in these areas thanks to the work and expertise of our attorneys.

Wasn't the Milan office enough to cover all areas?

There are many markets where one office is enough for an international law firm like ours. In France, for example, it would not make sense for us to open anywhere but Paris. The same is true in the UK, where London is where we need to be. There are of course many other important cities in both countries, but the opportunities for us as an international law firm are limited there.

Are these considerations valid only for Europe?

Even in the U.S., an international law firm needs to be in New York first and then Washington, but not necessarily Chicago or Atlanta.

On the other hand, in Italy ...

In Italy, Milan and Rome are both important for us. We have always been interested in Rome, but were waiting to find the right opportunity, which came when Alfonso de Marco and Sergio Esposito Farber agreed to join. Now, with the additions of Dino Dima and Daniela Sabelli, we have a very powerful group in Italy, with both offices acting as one unit under Galileo's leadership.

What are your expectations regarding this expansion?

Our objective is to fortify our position as a leading international law firm, known not for size but for quality. Milan and Rome fit neatly within that plan because they are high quality, compact and internationally oriented offices with the drive and global vision that is characteristic of our offices in the other major centers of international business.

Do you believe that Italy, for an international law firm like yours, can act as a hub for the Mediterranean and Africa?

Yes, that is part of the idea of expanding into Rome. We have important clients in the area for which Rome and Milan are both important. This includes Sonatrach and National Oil Corporation of Libya.

What are the benefits today for attorneys who are part of an international structure?

Lawyers are attracted to Curtis not only because we have exciting work, but also because of our style of work. Most of our practice worldwide is cross border, meaning that at least two offices and sometimes more are often involved.

What would be the effects?

This certainly promotes integration and a common approach that our international clients can recognize no matter which office is involved. The sharing of knowledge and experience across offices also allows us to compete effectively with the largest international firms. That's how we can combine the personal touch and environment of a midsize firm with the power of the largest firms in size. It is also what makes us attractive to first rate talent who are looking for that precise combination.