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**Liberalisation of '.pt' extension set for May
Portugal - Hogan Lovells International LLP**

Domain names

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FCCN, the Portuguese registry, has announced that it will finally liberalise the '.pt' extension on May 1 2012.

While the third-level domain '.com.pt' has always been unrestricted and thus open for registration to anyone, up until now domain name registrations under the second-level domain '.pt' were reserved only to entities that could justify a right in the domain name - that is to say that only legal entities and holders of word trademarks covering Portugal could register their name or their trademark, respectively, under '.pt'.

This liberalisation was first planned in 2008, but was postponed several times by the Portuguese registry. It is now official: as of May 1 2012, anyone will be able to register domain names under '.pt'.

The '.pt' liberalisation will follow a two-phase process:

- Sunrise period from March 1 to May 1 2012 - during this period, holders of registered rights will be able to secure their domain names under '.pt' on a first-come, first-served basis. These rights include trademarks (no longer restricted to word trademarks covering Portugal, but extended to all registered trademarks) and also cover registered rights in general, such as those relating to company/organisation names, logos, professional, literary and artistic names. The domain name being applied for will need to be identical to the registered right. However, companies/organisations can apply for an abbreviation or acronym of their name.
- General opening from May 1 2012 onwards - as of this date, any entity (eg, companies and private individuals, and local and foreign entities) will be able to apply for a '.pt' domain name,.

In parallel to this, the registry has announced that it is withdrawing the extensions '.net.pt', '.int.pt', '.publ.pt' and '.nome.pt' due to their lack of popularity. Thus, since March 1 2012, it is no longer possible to register domain names under these extensions. However, existing domain names registered under these extensions will not be affected by this measure. The extensions '.gov.pt' (reserved for Portuguese governmental organisations), '.org.pt' and '.edu.pt' (reserved for non-profit organisations and individuals) remain available for registration.

Domain name registrations directly under '.pt' have been on the rise since the beginning of the sunrise period - in February, before the sunrise period started, there were 4,346 '.pt' domain names registered, but in March, after the opening of the sunrise period, there were 7,895. This number is likely to increase again in April until the general opening on May 1, when a boom in domain name registrations under '.pt' can be expected.

The '.pt' extension is not one of the most popular country-code top-level domains (ccTLDs), with currently less than half a million registrations in total (as opposed to '.de' in Germany, for example, which is the currently the most popular ccTLD with over 15 million registrations). With the change in rules, this may eventually change.

Companies holding existing rights are advised to secure their domain names under '.pt' before the general opening on May 1 2012.

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