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Edition





Alliance with roots in Leiria unites European universities

It is one of the boldest European proposals: the creation of European universities. Politécnico de Leiria embraced the challenge and helped to create one

It was September 2017. French leader Emmanuel Macron, in a speech at the Sorbonne, spurred the European spirit in the sphere of education, mentioning the qualities of European universities. The concept is based on groups of higher education institutions from several countries that would develop joint training

solutions, in addition to innovation and research activities. Integrated curricula and other solutions capable of motivating students to circulate between participating institutions would be aspects to be privileged and aspired to. The idea didn't die. It was nurtured by projects that were

emerging. Currently, 41 European universities are taking steps to achieve this vision. Embraced by the European institutions, this concept has strengthened the innovation and competitiveness of the Union's higher education and increasingly developed a strong feeling of shared values and European inclusion. Leiria is



part of this process. In addition to the formal steps that accelerated the creation and deepening of the Regional University Network — European University (RUN-EU), led by Politécnico de Leiria, there is a contribution to the creation of cultural intelligence, resulting from exposure to diversity. Added to the inclusion and attractiveness of talent, as some of the most valuable ingredients of this new recipe.

of this new recipe.
RUN-EU, an alliance of seven institutions from various regions of Europe, emerged in 2020, as part of the European Universities Initiative. Portugal, the Netherlands, Hungary, Austria, Finland and Ireland are the countries where the institutions that make up this alliance come from. The implementation of

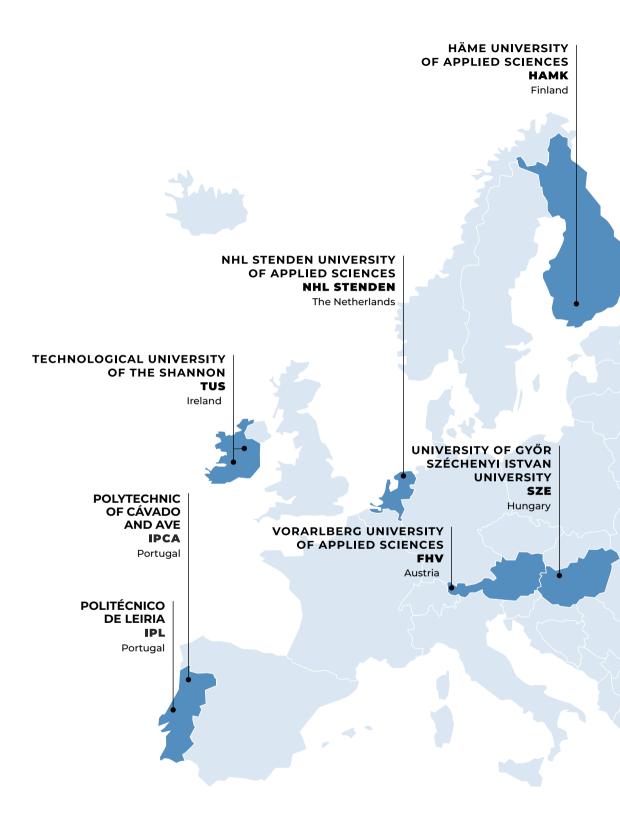
Born in 2020, the Regional University Network – European University (RUN-EU) brings together higher education institutions from various parts of the old continent.

this project implies a strong connection and exchange. The most recent meeting between the heads of the institutions that make up RUN-EU took place in May, in Leiria.

About 60 representatives of the seven higher education institutions belonging to the network gathered in the city of the Lis. Presidents, deans, students, professors, researchers and technical staff of the seven institutions were in Leiria to discuss the future and the strategy for the extension of the European university, among other aspects.

This event has included visits to the five schools of Politécnico de Leiria and to the cities of Leiria, Marinha Grande, Caldas da Rainha and Peniche, as well as visits to the CDRSP – Centre for Rapid and Sustainable Product Development, to Cetemares – Peniche, the Health Innovation Hub and the Social Innovation Hub, the Batalha Monastery, the Leiria Castle and the Óbidos Technological Park.

The programme also included a meeting between the presidents.



and rectors of the seven RUN-EU institutions. Led by Politécnico de Leiria, the Regional University Network - European University is made up of six more partner higher education institutions: the Polytechnic of Cávado and Ave (IPCA), from Portugal; the Technological University of the Shannon (TUS), from Ireland; the Häme University of Applied Sciences (HAMK), from Finland; the University of Győr Széchenyi István University (SZE), from Hungary; the NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences (NHL Stenden), from the Netherlands; and the Vorarlberg University of Applied Sciences (FHV) from Austria. 'All our institutions are global, but with a strong regional focus, especially through research and innovation with an impact on the transformation of society. We are in the middle of the first three years of this journey, and we have already achieved some accomplishments', stated Rui Pedrosa, president of Politécnico de Leiria, in the opening session of the meeting in Leiria, on 10 May.

At the time, this leader highlighted the creation of Future and Advanced Skills Academies (FASA), interuniversity academies for the development and promotion of joint learning activities. The president of Politécnico de Leiria also addressed several projects developed within the scope of this network, specifically the creation of short-term advanced programmes, as well as the establishment of a European Mobility Innovation Centre, a centre that will be developed

The Regional University Network -**European University** is made up of six more partner higher education institutions: the Polytechnic of Cávado and Ave (IPCA), from Portugal; the Technological University of the Shannon (TUS), Ireland; the Häme University of Applied Sciences (HAMK). from Finland: the University of Győr Széchenyi István University (SZE), Hungary; the NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences (NHL Stenden), from the Netherlands; and the Vorarlberg University of Applied Sciences (FHV) from Austria.

around the co-creation and sharing of experiences within the scope of international mobility initiatives, offered to students, researchers, professors and technical staff members of the seven institutions.

Rui Pedrosa

'The Regional University Network is a unique opportunity and an achievement'

The president of Politécnico de Leiria reveals the advantages of integrating and leading a process that unites several European higher education institutions around an innovative project. The network is consolidating and promises to help develop regions and strengthen European cohesion

What advantages, challenges and opportunities do you identify in this European network?

Leading a European university, the Regional University Network, is a unique opportunity and an achievement that has a unique value for the transformation of higher education in Europe, but also for Politécnico de Leiria itself. This is a network that is funded and supported in perfect alignment with the policy of transforming higher education in Europe. At the moment, there are only 41 European universities.

A minority...

That's just five per cent of

universities across Europe: just over 280 out of over 5,000 that exist. We are part of this group and we lead one of these European universities. Internationalisation, multiculturalism, the values of freedom, of European thought, are very important to us. And recent times have shown that it is a work that is never finished, that needs to be increasingly supported by higher education, education, science and knowledge. Our participation is a great opportunity. On the other hand, the European Commission has already announced a second phase for these European universities: they will receive

a funding almost four times higher.

Our network currently has direct funding of approximately six million euros for three years. And the Commission will quadruple this funding for another six years: the submission of applications is at the end of this year, open only to existing European universities. This is something that will position us even better. As the Commissioner [for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth] Mariya Gabriel often says, Europe counts on us a lot. She often says that we are at the forefront of higher education transformation. And there is a lot to be done: joint European



degrees, the idea of microcredits, with modular structures that can be integrated into bachelor's. master's or PhD programmes, but which are, above all, used for updating and advancing skills. Most people, when they are working, they do not have much time to spend one or more years doing specific training. However, if they are short and advanced trainings, with some of the best specialists we have in Europe and in the world, for one, two or three weeks, they will probably be available to do it.

Is this one of the projects on the table?

One of the great ideas we have within the University are short advanced courses - the Short Advanced Programmes – and European Degrees: having joint degrees within the European university with other higher education institutions. And we also have the identity matrix of this European University which is based on the fact that we are global, leading higher education institutions, all public. We are a national reference in each country and an international reference, but we are all focused on regional development. We want the European University to help in the development of our regions and put them to work together, to become more competitive in the future. We, as small and medium-sized universities, in a network, can compete with the very large universities in Europe. What we are doing is giving cohesion to Europe, through knowledge. We have some research projects together, as well as the idea



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of building three **European** Innovation Hubs, with a regional focus: one in the area of Bioeconomy, another in the area of Social Innovation and one in the area of the Future Industries and Sustainable Regional Development. I also highlight the creation of a platform for innovation in international mobility. We are now in the process of expanding the European University. With great criteria, we are selecting potential universities that can join the network.

When will a student be able to say: 'I am a student at the European University, I was in

Leiria and now I am going to Finland', for example?

This is a path. We are fortunately having more teachers, technicians, researchers and students involved in our activities. We already have several students who, for example, are part of the Student Advisory Board. It is a strategic advisory body of the European University, made up of students who have already had the opportunity to have immersion periods, as was the case of a Students Week in Ireland. These advanced short courses are currently being carried out with students from all seven universities in the six countries involved.

And those students, who are testing these pilot programmes, already feel like students at a European university. If one of our students is going to take a short advanced course that is, imagine, between the university of Finland and the university of Austria, the credits he takes there are recognised here. There is still a long way to go, but I would say that we already have some students who already feel this idea of being citizens of Europe and students at RUN-EU, led by Politécnico de Leiria.

How is the experience of leading such a diverse network like?

A huge challenge. When, about

three years ago, I challenged two international consultants to help Politécnico de Leiria building a network with the aim of running for European University, we were, to be honest, about eight months away from the deadline. The first impact was that we thought it would be impossible. But, in fact, we believed, we created a robust internal team and we started inviting these universities.

Some invitations generated curious stories. I remember going on a quick trip to Austria to convince them to be part of this European University. And they were waiting for me to convince me to accept them. I realised that in the first five minutes: the leader of the regional government, the dean, the president welcomed me, and I thought: 'it's done'.

There were some funny stories. We had some commitment and vision: the invitations we made were always for universities with a focus on regional development. This was our matrix, equally betting on small and medium-sized universities. in order to have a balance in the network. In addition to institutional commitments. we have a network in which the deans, the presidents, are already friends.

We have trust in each other. We know that we all want to build together this future that is for each one of our institutions, for the European University, and for Europe. We believe that we are adding value to the identity of European citizens, increasingly valuing freedom of thought, the idea of plurality,

multiculturalism, inclusion, supported by technical and scientific knowledge, but above all focused on students. So that they are better professionals, but also better citizens in the future

Could these values be a good response at a time when Europe is confronted with warlike languages?

No doubt about it. We will only find more solutions the more we invest in education, in common values in higher education, in health, so that the common citizen feels that the regions and institutions count on them and that they are part of the system. What we are doing is the vision of the European Commission, the vision of this commissioner, but which comes from Macron's presidency a few years ago, when he realised that the Erasmus programme had to go further and integrated this project of European universities within the Erasmus programme. We need to work more in a network and more together so that Europe and our regions can compete better with the United States, with the major Asian powers, such as China. We can only do it in collaborative networks. This war in Europe is actually [the result of] a lack of investment in higher education. in education, in some of those countries... When we see images of children celebrating Victory Day with weapons in their hands, with tanks... it's all education. There's a need to work on literacy. It's a never-ending mission, but we have to increase the investment.





Politécnico de Leiria

It started its activity in the 80s of the last century, in the district capital, Leiria. In four decades of activity, it has expanded the scope of training and the geographical range of its action. Politécnico de Leiria bets on the connection to the region's economic environment, characterised by business dynamics and exporting vein. It currently has five schools, located in the cities of Leiria (School of Education and Social Sciences, School of Technology and Management and School of Health Sciences), Caldas da Rainha (School of Arts and Design) and Peniche (School of Tourism and Maritime Technology).

14,000 students



EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY



76,500 STUDENTS

8,000 STAFF



53 FACULTIES

97
RESEARCH CENTRES
AND GROUPS



ASSOCIATED PARTNERS

17 REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

NATIONAL AUTHORITIES

CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

3 RESEARCH CENTRES

I INTERNATIONAL POLICY UNIT

3 NGOs

1

BUSINESS



14 RUN-EU students attended the European Student Assembly at the European Parliament, in Strasbourg, in March 2022, which gathered 275 students

WHAT IS A EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY?

It is a transnational consortium recognised and funded by the European Commission that aims to create the universities of the future. The European Universities promote the European values and identity by revolutionising the quality and competitiveness of higher education. Currently, there are 41 European Universities recognised as pioneering networks in the transformation of higher education in Europe.

MISSION

RUN-EU promotes functional, structural and sustainable collaboration between the seven member universities, through the development of:

FASA

FUTURE AND ADVANCED SKILLS ACADEMIES

FASA will support the development of innovative, flexible and practical teaching and learning activities, such as the SHORT ADVANCED PROGRAMMES (SAP) and the European double and joint degrees

FIH

EUROPEAN INNOVATION HUBS

EIH are centres of excellence that promote collaborative activities and projects in partnership with innovative regional ecosystems, in the following areas:

FUTURE INDUSTRIES AND SUSTAINABLE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

BIOECONOMY

SOCIAL INNOVATION

EMIC

EUROPEAN MOBILITY INNOVATION CENTRE

EMIC will promote innovative and inclusive physical and virtual mobility practices

OUR STUDENTS WILL INHERIT THE FUTURE

KEY GOALS

To develop and promote programmes focused on the future and advanced skills, such as the SHORT ADVANCED PROGRAMMES (SAP), research programmes, and the European double and joint degrees

2

To provide students and staff with inclusive and multicultural teaching, learning, research and professional development opportunities

3

To develop European R&D projects that foster knowledge co-creation and valorisation within the consortium, with European and regional partners

4

To promote inclusivity and economic, environmental, social and cultural development across the associated regions

5

To create joint governance and management systems with strong student representation, capable of sustaining the development of the European University



'This alliance is our most important activity'

Vincent Cunnane, the president of the Technological University of the Shannon, from Ireland, a newly created university, has, in the network chaired by Leiria, one of the most important, perhaps the most important, dossier of his presidency. 'This is an opportunity to work on a trans-European path that brings together regionally based universities, polytechnics, technology institutes, universities of applied sciences, technological universities, which

are so integrated and have an impact on their respective regions and in which regional development is a central focus', he says.

Therefore, the head of the newly created Irish institution states, 'we have seven institutions with similar mentalities, working together, to improve the results for their regions and, thus, also for the whole Europe'.

Vincent Cunnane does not mince words to define the potential of this network: 'there

are significant opportunities with this project'. This leader explains that 'unprecedented initiatives in Europe' are underway. In each of the regions that make up this network, 'we have innovation hubs and we are bringing them together, we constitute academies of the future and of advanced skills', he adds. The objective of these measures is to ensure that 'the talent necessary for the growth of the regions is present and so that we can help each other,



In the Regional European University (RUN-EU) we have with similar mindsets working together to improve the results for for the whole Europe'

Vincent Cunnane

adopting good practices from each of the partners'. Another of the vectors of this initiative involves the development of 'various mobility programmes'. With these, students and staff from the institutions 'can spend a few seasons in each of the participating entities', he explains. The intensive programmes, 'a way of generating new knowledge in a small format, in a short period of time and getting credit for it', are other innovations.

The Irish leader in this network recalls another aspect, which involves bringing together local players, including municipalities, regional business leaders and sectoral associations. 'They learn about the different regions, just like we do. We work on higher education, but all other activities work together and try to create what we call the European Zone of Interregional Development (EZ-ID)'. It is, he explains, 'a very innovative concept, because the institutions have aligned mentalities and the regions share many similarities'. In essence, 'we intend to make our regions as competitive as possible, attracting and retaining talent, ensuring that talent is available and working together to establish best practices that guarantee the sustainability of our regions'.

With a Europe facing new challenges, for this leader, the reinforcement of collaboration and common values is the appropriate path for a continent committed to development.





Technological University of the Shannon

Created in last October, this merger of two institutes: the Athlone Institute of Technology and the Limerick Institute of over six campuses, TUS gathers its activity and the institution and Midwest regions, located in the Center and Midwest of





INSTITUTO POLITÉCNICO DO CÁVADO E DO AVE

Polythecnic of Cávado and Ave

The main campus is in Barcelos, but the Polytechnic of Cávado and Ave is already rooted in four other municipalities: Famalicão, Guimarães, Braga and Esposende and next year it should arrive at Vila Verde. It is an institution that promotes strong connections to companies and other higher education institutions in the region. Management, accounting and taxation, technologies, artificial intelligence, design are some of the areas where it operates. The hospitality and tourism are also gaining momentum, with the implementation of a hotel-school, an investment of 13 million euros. The strategic partnership with local authorities in the region is another focus of the institution's dynamics.

5,700 students



'Together we are stronger'

'This network has come to transform our institutions', says Maria José Fernandes, president of the Polytechnic of Cávado and Ave (IPCA). This is the polytechnic that was born later, it has 25 years old, emphasises the president. However, its relative youth did not keep it away from new ambitions.

The European Network emerged as a challenge posed by the president of Politécnico de Leiria. There are, after all, some similarities between the two regions and the adventure in the

universe of European universities began there. 'It has allowed us, above all, to transform what we do, reinforcing its internationalisation, research and community service character', she explains. Furthermore, the network has been a source of 'exchange of experiences, above all changing the way of thinking about higher education, and that is what we intend to achieve'. The relationship between the institutions that constitute the RUN-EU has three years old, and it has established partners



in various parts of Europe and, when it started, 'we didn't know each other', recalls Maria José Fernandes.

But the network is there and the ties have been getting closer. The great advantage of the project is the European projection, the scale that is achieved and the know-how that is acquired, points out this leader. 'We learn from each other, although it is not always easy, as we are talking about countries with different realities and we have to reach an understanding about what

The Regional University Network -European University (RUN-EU) is one of the most challenging projects we currently have'

Maria José Fernandes President of the Polytechnic of Cávado and Ave (IPCA)

is strategic for our regions', she analyses.

The development of the regions in the network's focus is a goal whose achievement is equally leveraged by the experience of the different institutions. 'For IPCA, this is one of the most challenging projects we currently have', reveals the IPCA president. In a Europe that is being redefined, with the impact of the war amplifying the need to fine-tune partnerships, Maria José Fernandes has no doubt that this network assumes greater relevance in this type of scenarios. 'What is happening in Europe, makes us reflect: the European project has to be a project of peace, and a project in which we project ourselves better'. Maria José Fernandes recalls the role of the French leader, Emmanuel Macron, in launching the challenge for the emergence of these new entities, European universities. The result is Europe moving towards gaining dimension in higher education 'to compare ourselves with the United States and with Asians'. The lesson that this network provides is not new, but it is reinforced: 'together we are stronger', emphasises Maria José Fernandes, leader of the Polytechnic of Cávado and Ave (IPCA) and president of the Coordinating Council of Higher Polytechnic Institutes (CCISP). The soul of the Erasmus programme is present in this initiative. And in the same way that the skills that the exchange adds to the student who experiences it are precious, this network also creates a unique dynamic.



'This European University is not a project, it is an alliance'

Pertti Puusaari is the president of the <u>Häme University of Applied Sciences</u> (HAMK) in Finland. The Regional University Network – European University (RUN-EU) is faced with enthusiasm. How important is this project? 'It's a fantastic project. But I'm not talking about a project, but an alliance', says the head of this former higher education

institution in northern Europe. The institution has tradition and history and remains committed to follow a path towards the future. There is an objective set for HAMK, which is to achieve leadership in the country and achieve the goal of being the most 'useful' institution in Finland, on the path to development.

'We aim to be the most useful university in the country and this fits very well into our strategy. We wouldn't be able to do it alone, but together it's easier to be the most useful university', explains Pertti Puusaari.

The growth is intended not only at the level of research, but also by promoting



We aim to be the most useful university in the country and this fits very well into our strategy. Alone we would not be able to do it, but together it is easier to be the most useful university'

Pertti Puusaari President of Häme University of Applied Sciences (HAMK)

'projects that allow interaction with companies, so that our students can have stimulating workplaces', he reinforces. The goal is outlined and arises from the task set by the French leader Emmanuel Macron. In September 2017, in a speech at the Sorbonne, the French leader launched the idea, and made it a common challenge: to create universities with European DNA, uniting institutions in the adventure of teaching.

The European University, says Pertti Puusaari, 'is based on the initiative of President Macron. on the new type of universities that are competitive with North American and Asian universities'. For the head of the Häme University of Applied Sciences, this is exactly what 'we are building together'.

Union is a strong word these days. And alliances such as those forged by the Regional University Network – European University (RUN-EU) gain new importance.

Originating from the country with the longest border between the European Union and the Russian Federation - over 1,300 kilometers - Pertti Puusaari says that 'because of the war in Ukraine, Europe has become more united than it has been in decades'. This is a dynamic that needs to be explored further. It is 'very important to remember that Europe is our home and that we work together', he claims. In this chapter, this network of higher education institutions, led by Politécnico de Leiria, is also contributing, recalls the Finnish leader.



HÄME UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Häme **University** of Applied Sciences

Its roots go back to 1840, at a time when agriculturerelated education arrived on its campus. There are even indications about teaching linked to this activity that go back to the second half of the 16th century, explains Pertti Puusaari, the president of the Finnish institution. Specially dedicated to applied sciences, its training has an impact on the productive and economic environment. Spread over seven locations, HAMK has around 8,800 students, in addition to 750 staff members.



'Regions and students are very relevant to us'



University of Győr – Széchenyi István University

Engineering used to be the focus to SZE, but in recent years the diversity of study areas has widened. From music, management, economics or the environment, there are several areas in the institution's training offer. With approximately 13,000 students, created about half a century ago, SZE has many international students, coming mainly from Asia, South America and also from other parts of the world and Europe, including Portugal. It is located in Győr. Hungary.

13,000 students

Lívia Ablonczy-Mihályka evaluates very positively the participation of the Széchenyi István University (SZE) in this European university that embraces institutions from several European countries, 'This is a very good project,' she says. Leader of an institution that, in the heart of Europe, welcomes students from various parts of the globe, including Portugal, she has no doubts about the virtue of this kind of networks. 'I have been involved in many projects in my life and I only have positive experiences to point out, because, in fact, they result in a positive way', she reinforces. The fact that the Regional University Network – European University (RUN-EU) is especially devoted to students is one of the advantages that she identifies immediately. 'This is a student--oriented project, and it is very important that students are and will be involved in the future,' she says.

The network led by Leiria encompasses institutions that are intricate in the regional environment that surrounds them. And this is another positive item that deserves the praise of the Hungarian academic: 'one of the priorities of these projects refers to the regional impact. Regions and students are very relevant to us,' she emphasises. Spreading from west to east Europe, from north to south, the institutions involved share common characteristics that feed their cooperation. This is, she says, 'a great initiative because there are universities involved, originating from various parts of Europe and I think it is very important that the universities involved are not based in large cities. They are rooted in communities where regional development is of great importance', underlines Lívia Ablonczy-Mihályka. This leader of the SZE does not



This is a student--oriented project and it is very important that students are and will be involved in the

Lívia Ablonczy-Mihályka University (SZE)

forget the current situation in Europe, shaken by the conflict in Ukraine, Hungary's neighbouring country. And once again, here too, networks, like the one that supports RUN-EU, prove their effectiveness. 'I'm from Hungary, from the western part of the country, and Ukraine is not that close. However, at the beginning [of the war] around 12,000 foreign students came to various universities in Hungary from Ukraine,' she recalls. Many, she explains, were medical and pharmacology students, and some 'decided to study in Hungary because they probably won't be able to return to their home university in Kiev'. In short, institutional networked cooperation has proven to be effective. 'Networks like these. in times of war or conflict, work very well. We should have more networks in the future', she concludes.



'We want a great environment for our students'

'This network of universities is very important to us', says
Erica Schaper, head of the NHL
Stenden University of Applied
Sciences in the Netherlands.
It is a major initiative. It is, she confides, a major factor in the present objective of this university in the north of the Netherlands, which is to ensure 'students the opportunity to meet other students from

all over Europe and to share European values'.

In addition, on the other hand, the institution is committed to cause a positive impact in the region where it is located, through the research work it develops, explains Erica Schaper. 'We want to have an impact on our region and in this network we are all in a similar situation: we are, mostly, in regional areas

and not in large metropolises, we seek to learn from each other with the experiences coming from the ecosystems in which we are inserted and working'.

In fact, the conviction is that the result of the sum of the efforts of each of the partners in the network is superior to the simple addition of the parts. There is a shared knowledge



Our dream is that our students can carry out part of their studies in all the other universities that are part of the network and receive credits for that'

Erica Schaper President of NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences that adds development to the regions in which each institution operates. The president of the NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences recalls that the work developed covers not only the academic context, but also affects companies, public institutions and governments. And 'universities have a contribution to innovation, to solving problems of contemporary societies, such as sustainability issues, social innovation and several other issues, on which we can share knowledge at a European level'. The task is not modest, but this type of project has even more ambitious goals, says this leader. Erica Schaper reveals the dream she wants to see come true: 'our dream is that our students can carry out part of their studies in all the other universities that are part of the network and receive credits for that'. Currently, the legislation of the various countries makes it difficult to achieve this ambition, but 'this is what we want'. 'We want a great environment for our students, on a European scale, sharing European values', she reinforces. Specifically, in addition to all the learning that is expected from an education system, there is a framework of values that is dynamised. 'We want students to be open-minded, to get to know other people and cultures, to experience common values, and to live with diversity and not fear it', points out the academic

from the Netherlands.





university of applied science

NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences

Located in the north of the Netherlands, this institution focuses its action in several areas: economics, technical, education, tourism, public management, among others. The connection with the economic and social environment is highly valued. It emerged in 2008 as a result of the merger of Hogeschool Hogeschool Nederland. It has 25,000 students and is committed to the diversity of student experiences, in a plural aspect.

'By creating strong networks, we will be more competitive on a global scale'





FHVVorarlberg University
of Applied Sciences

Vorarlberg University of Applied Sciences

It's more than a project. It's a path. The Regional University Network - European University (RUN-EU) 'is a long-term vision. It is transforming and building a strong European university', mentions Stefan Fitz-Rankl, president of the Vorarlberg University of Applied Sciences. Stefan Fitz-Rankl points out its 'strong regional impacts', but also the shock waves that impacts on 'students, staff, and all our colleagues'. This telluric phenomenon that is replicated in the various partners is, he explains, 'a path of strategic development also for my university'.

One of the main advantages of RUN-EU is that 'by creating strong networks, we are more competitive on a global scale'. There is a privilege that is added to all the dynamics of this European university: that of

integrating a path only taken by a restricted number of institutions. After all, says the head of the Vorarlberg University of Applied Sciences, 'there are more than six thousand universities in Europe, and only a small handful have been selected to become a European university'. The network coordinated by

The network coordinated by Leiria houses a knowledge and development club. 'This more restricted circle of good universities, with a strong impact on their regions, is a strategic issue for me. We don't want to call it an elite club, but in a way, that's what it really is', assumes the Austrian leader.

In troubled times on the
European continent, Stefan
Fitz-Rankl sees in this initiative,
that integrates higher education
institutions from various corners
of the old continent, a strong sign
of a fundamental ingredient for

The Vorarlberg University of Applied Sciences is located in a heavily industrialised area of Austria. Mainly focused on economic and technical studies, the institution has several research institutes. The University of Applied Sciences in Vorarlberg has around 1,600 students in regular education, to which another 380 can be added. Relatively young, this university was born three decades ago and, as its president explains, was the first university of applied sciences in the country.

2,000 students





This more restricted circle of good universities, with a strong impact on their regions, is a strategic issue for me. We don't want to call it an elite club, but in a way, that's what it really is'

Stefan Fitz-Rankl President of Vorarlberg University of Applied Sciences

plural and democratic life. 'To be completely honest, I think having a strong and interconnected Europe is, nowadays, even more important than it used to be,' he says.

With the war entering the concerns of Europeans, 'strengthening these connections between countries, regions, and creating an entity, is a very strong signal that we send, showing that we remain together', he emphasises. The Austrian leader does not forget, still, that this process reveals that 'Europe, and European universities, are capable of competing at the highest level. And this is a strong sign, even in the times we live in'. In practice, are we fighting war with knowledge? 'Yes, and staying together. Exchanging ideas and creating a stronger entity', he summarises.

Alliance in the form of a university must be a reality 'in the next decade'

He was at the beginning of the Regional University Network – European University (RUN-EU) and it was his experience and knowledge that helped to create it. He makes a very positive assessment of the initiative and points out future paths

te connections between Ireland and Portugal, the Netherlands and Finland and other European countries. And in the context of Brexit, when it happened, that meant we had to find new friends and a new frontier in Europe,' he recalls. With neighbours leaving the European Union, it has become increasingly urgent to look for new 'neighbours', new connections.

On the other hand, as a member of the Portuguese Higher Education Coordinating Council, the competent Portuguese minister asked him to closely monitor the polytechnic institutions. And it was in this context, he says, that 'I met the president of Politécnico de Leiria and the president of IPCA. And they challenged me: as a counsellor, could I help

them to create this network with another colleague who was also a member of Coordinating Council of Higher Polytechnic Institutes (CCISP)'. And so it happened. The network has become a reality. 'We helped and it's great because we see the benefits for institutions, students and regions'. Watching the alliance take shape from the very beginning, Ruaidhri Neavyn sees a very remarkable evolution. Generally, he explains, 'Erasmus programmes connect one institution to another, and the exchange of teaching staff and students gets promoted. In alliances in the form of European universities, we are talking about multiple institutions in Europe that are willing to work together and collectively on common projects, to help create a trans-

Ruaidhri Neavyn is Irish, but he is a member of the Portuguese Higher Education Coordinating Council.

And he was at the genesis of this alliance of universities, led by Politécnico de Leiria.

As an advisor, he helped at the start of the project and has been accompanying it. He makes a very positive assessment of the path taken but sets much more ambitious goals for the next decade. He believes it is possible that this alliance can generate a true European university. And that will be a university of considerable size.

As an Irishman, with connections to his country's government, Ruaidhri Neavyn explains the equation that was put to Ireland. 'We saw the opportunity to crea-







In alliances in the form of European universities, we are talking about multiple institutions in Europe that are willing to work together and collectively on common projects, to help create a transnational campus'

Ruaidhri Neavyn

Member of the Portuguese **Higher Education** Coordinating Council

national campus where students can benefit from the existing opportunities on the different campuses that constitute the alliance. The difference is huge. Relevant training opportunities were created, in short-term programmes, created jointly, available to all students. Joint research, which works with technology 'in order to respond to the challenges that Europe faces', is another of the most visible aspects. There are currently 41 alliances similar to the one led by Politécnico de Leiria, in Europe. The trend will be for growth and to reach, soon, 60. But an important step is missing. Yes, the key question: when will we have the European university entity RUN-EU? 'We've created it as far as the current legislative boundaries allow',

explains this specialist. 'We need an agreement to find a common legal structure for these alliances of European Universities, but what we have already done was to create the conditions to manage the evolution of training and research opportunities', he adds. The next step, he explains, 'will be to create a legal identification of these new alliances as European universities as a whole, where it will be possible to obtain qualifications from RUN-EU'. Ruaidhri Neavyn estimates that this is something that 'will have to be a reality in the next decade'. And if it does, 'imagine the power of this: it will be the true unification of Europe, true mobility, and true joint learning'.



'We can learn a lot from each other'

Specialist in the field of Education, president of the General Council of Politécnico de Leiria, Pedro Lourtie has no doubts about the virtues of the regional universities' network

From a geographical point of view, the Regional University Network - European University (RUN-EU), led by Politécnico de Leiria, brings together institutions that are not located in the metropolitan centres of their respective countries. However, together, they gain a new centrality. Pedro Lourtie is currently president of the General Council of Politécnico de Leiria and has a vast curriculum in the field of Education. And, no less relevant, in its international component. How does this specialist see the RUN-EU? 'This European Commission initiative to create European universities is very welcome,' he says. He points out, however, that the spirit behind this initiative is not new. It is 'one of the great objectives from several years', like the example of the Bologna

process at the end of the nineties. In fact, Pedro Lourtie also has an extensive experience in this dossier, as he participated in the drafting of the Bologna Declaration (1999), for example. 'Since then, the idea is to allow institutions to work with each other and achieve common training and research projects'. And, in this specific case, this network of regional universities, 'has goals that fit very well with the strategic plans that have been developed for Politécnico de Leiria', points out the person in charge of the polytechnic governing body that, among other functions, is responsible for approving the institution's medium-term strategic plans and action plan. 'In the most recent strategic plan and in the previous one, this idea of working with the region in its

development was very much reflected, obviously from an industrial point of view, but also social, cultural, and not only', he refers.

Away from the major centres, the institutions that make up RUN-EU 'are in regions to closely connected, specifically, to the environment that surrounds them. It is a project that basically fits perfectly with the goals of Politécnico de Leiria, and that also fits the projects of these other institutions'.

In a universe of entities that work with teaching, learning with this experience is equally valued, 'We can learn a lot from each other', he considers, After all, 'we have problems that may have already been raised and solved in one of the other institutions. Let's take advantage of this mutual knowledge'. Pedro Lourtie also points out the possibility of developing research networks in areas that are important for the different regions that make up the network. 'We have molds and ceramics, for example. Perhaps, there is some research here that is important for Leiria. But there may be other institutions interested in this automated production: so, let's work together. Working together makes us stronger.' The network brings together institutions that seek answers for the regions where they are located, and 'from the point of view of Leiria's development, this is fundamental', he states.

Elvira Fortunato

'By working in a network, these institutions reinforce the quality and attractiveness of European higher education'

Scientist, professor, pioneer in European research on transparent electronics, the Minister of Science, Technology and Higher Education addresses the relevance of European universities

What role can European universities play in the development of higher education?

Alliances such as that of
European Universities are a
powerful accelerator for the
development of higher education
institutions themselves, thanks
to the exchange of professors,
researchers and students,
innovative methodologies and
training programmes oriented
to the development of the
advanced skills necessary for the
performance of the professions of
the future.

The schools that are part of the network share their best practices with each other, thus fine-tuning the strategy and enhancing its future development. This is one of the reasons why we defend the internationalisation of higher education institutions, namely through their insertion in transnational alliances, which share medium and long-term strategies. Currently, Portugal is part of ten European Alliances, three of which are coordinated by national institutions. A total of 11 national institutions are involved in these ten Alliances, since one of these networks includes two polytechnic institutes. In particular, the Regional University Network - European University (RUN-EU), an initiative

approved by the European Commission with the allocation of funding from the ERASMUS+ programme, constitutes an important transnational network of higher education institutions from all regions of Europe and with similar educational projects, coordinated by Politécnico de Leiria and also including the Polytechnic of Cávado and Ave.

Is this a relevant strategy in valuing the positioning of Portuguese and European higher education in the global context?

I always defend that we must cooperate and work as a team, because together we are



stronger. Several studies show that European higher education institutions cooperate more intensively compared to other regions and that those that work together with other institutions, companies and industries, governments, regional authorities or across borders, generally perform better than those that are less focused on cooperation. In particular, I consider that, by working in a network, these institutions enhance the quality and attractiveness of European higher education. On the other hand, these networks allow the sharing of best practices and, as such, the implementation of already tested instruments. Alliances like this, of European Universities, promote the accelerated internationalisation of national and European higher education institutions, establishing their position as quality higher education institutions, with educational

projects that respond to the current and future challenges of students trained by them and implementing cooperation projects within the scope of research and development. These networks positively influence the future strategies of each of the higher education institutions, but have a wider influence, namely on the development of the European Education Area, the European Commission's Higher Education Policy and the renewed EU agenda for higher education.

Like Leiria, RUN-EU brings together European partners that are based in regions that do not belong to the large metropolises of their respective countries: is this type of network an opportunity to generate new centralities in relatively peripheral regions?

The Government sees the qualification of the Portuguese as a fundamental condition for the economic development of the country as a whole. Along with the improvement of qualifications and training, higher education institutions are themselves also important poles of regional development and drivers of transformation of the communities in which they operate. It is known that the entire economic and social ecosystem benefits from the development created around higher education and polytechnic institutions located outside large urban centres, due to their collaborative nature and high impact of their performance, promoting regional innovation ecosystems. In particular, the European University consortium (RUN-EU) comprises seven higher education institutions from six countries and its mission is to promote the economic, social, cultural and sustainable development of the regions covered by the network, with training programmes that promote the necessary skills so that students, researchers and regional agents can successfully face the challenges of the future. It is an alliance that materialises in the reduction of regional disparities in Europe. It is also relevant and to praise the regional ties established between institutions within the same national territory, narrowing distances, discovering synergies and fostering partnerships with the business fabric and municipalities, as it happens with Politécnico de Leiria and the Polytechnic of Cávado and Ave.

At RUN-EU 'the future are the students'



João Rui Tanoeiro, Daniela Marques, Anmol Gupta and Pedro Perez, students from Politécnico de Leiria, selected to participate in the European Student Assembly, in Strasbourg, last March

Daniela Marques has already experienced a 'huge sense of belonging' to RUN-EU, the European university led by Politécnico de Leiria.

This young woman from Ourém has a degree in Graphic Design from the School of Arts and Design of Politécnico de Leiria (ESAD.CR) and is currently a master's student in Design for Health and Well-being, also at the school based in Caldas da Rainha. And, no less relevant, she leads the Leiria branch of the RUN-EU Student Advisory Board (SAB).

If for many, this network of higher education institutions can be seen as a virtual entity, still in an embryonic phase, for Daniela, it is something concrete, possible to be experienced. More: the European university is an institution that she feels she belongs to.

This sense of belonging results from the experience already developed in the context of exchanges, courses and relationships with students and other elements of this new teaching universe. A university that decided to escape the limitations of national borders. It all started with a simple email

message. Daniela Marques received an email from Politécnico de Leiria regarding the possibility of participating in the Student Advisory Board (SAB), an advisory body that brings together students from RUN-EU. She was one of the 32 selected in the various schools of Politécnico de Leiria and, at the beginning of this school year, she ended up being elected president of the advisory body at the Polytechnic. This was followed by meetings with other students with similar functions from other European university institutions. In November, a general assembly of SAB students, in Ireland, offered the opportunity to debate the new university that brings together institutions from the various corners of the old continent. And, mostly, students 'expect the possibility of contacting people outside their country and being related to multiculturalism and multilingualism', says Daniela Marques. In March, Daniela and other students from Politécnico de Leiria got back in

touch with other students from RUN-EU.

The strengthening of ties was evident. 'There was a huge feeling of belonging to RUN-EU, because as we had already had the meeting in November, in Ireland, it was clear that we already knew each other. We ended up becoming friends because we had a lot in common: we are people who study at universities or regional institutions, which despite being from different countries, are very alike', she says. For the young student from Ourém, the path taken by RUN-EU is bringing future opportunities. Daniela advocates that more students should get involved. As a student representative, member of the Student Advisory Board of RUN-EU, Daniela followed the work that, in May, in Leiria, brought together representatives of the various institutions. Because, she explains, at this university, 'the future are the students'.

Leaders of the European University institutions have discovered the region

Over 60 representatives of the seven higher education institutions that make up the Regional University Network – European University (RUN-EU) met in Leiria for three days. The activities started on 10 May with the aim of getting to know the region, Politécnico de Leiria and, not less important, discuss the future and the expansion strategy of the European University.













































