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MESSAGE FROM THE VICE-RECTOR



The University of Aveiro keeps reaffirming itself not only as one of the Portuguese research powerhouses, but as an important player within the international setting. The numbers are there to prove it in what comes to: the impact of research, as measured by citations and other research outcomes; the approval rate of projects within international, national and regional calls; or the capability to attract high quality faculty, researchers and PhD students, of diverse nationalities. Ever increasingly, the UA is responding to national and regional challenges, in a multitude of domains, requiring novel approaches and, particularly, new research team configurations and partnerships with companies, state organisations and third sector institutions.

These results are only made possible by the outstanding engagement of UA's community members – we all -, a shared belief in the importance of all domains of knowledge, and an ability and willingness to embrace new challenges and to reconfigure teams accordingly. All this is facilitated, better even, promoted, by our unique institutional organization, based on departments and schools, with all the research units within the University structure. And by the support personnel, either at central or unit level structures, ensuring a continuous support for the detection of new opportunities, training and information dissemination, proposal development and project management.

In 2019, we successfully embraced a new project, the ECIU European University, building upon two decades of institutional international collaboration with counterparts all across Europe. This initiative, launched by the European Commission, has the potential to lead to far-reaching impacts, both for the learning dimension of Universities in Europe and for the research and cooperation dimensions, as for, needless to say, our own University and our common future lying ahead. With a focus on challenge-based education and on Sustainable Development Goal 11 - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, it will require a deep commitment for the years to come.

2019 did not end without the emergence of a new threat that shaped 2020, so far, and the next few years, without a doubt: the coronavirus pandemic. Yet again, the UA Community excelled in its response. Firstly, by swiftly adopting the necessary prevention measures, safeguarding health and lives. Then, by adapting and preserving teaching, research and support activities, to the extent possible under new, unpredictable, and ever-changing circumstances. But, above all, through an active

engagement in the joint effort to tackle the pandemic, especially by partnering with regional and local health institutions, providing Covid testing, and distributing personal protective equipment. While at the same time, even with our researchers physically dispersed, preserving the capacity to submit innovative research proposals, again tapping our multidisciplinary pool of competences, in a response of a series of calls related to prevention, adaptation and mitigation to Covid and Covid-related effects.

This major disruptor, with a depth and scale beyond the financial crisis of a decade ago, is also the reason why the 2020 Research Summit will be held, not in a physical setting, but remotely. Nevertheless, the main structure of the event is maintained, bringing together international guests, UA's research and PhD presentations. In the year Portugal was scheduled to host the United Nations Ocean Conference, we will showcase our competences and diverse approaches to the theme Sea and Sustainability, faithful to our bonds with the Aveiro region and beyond, and underlining the national importance of sea-related features and activities.

Our track record within this subject includes, to name just a few: the participation in "Campus de Excelência Internacional Campus do Mar" and the doctoral program DO*MAR, in partnership with institutions from Galicia and Northern Portugal; the participation in Euromarine, the European Marine Research Network; the coordination of the Erasmus+ FISHAQU programme - Knowledge Exchange in sustainable Fisheries management and Aquaculture in the Mediterranean region; a new ERA Chair, BESIDE - Institutional, BEhavioural, critical and adaptive economics towards Sustainable Development, management of natural capital and circular Economy; the participation on the Collaborative Laboratory B2E – the Association for Blue Economy; the trailblazing ECOMARE project, the single Portuguese project to reach the prestigious European Regiostars Awards, in 2019; and the active role played within the preparatory meetings for the already above mentioned United Nations Ocean Conference.

The challenge that lies ahead is to build upon all the existing knowledge being developed, the partnerships established and the intertwining with the regions, to more effectively contribute to an even better understanding of our common seas, and how we affect them, and to foster a decisive use of science in decision-making!