

29<sup>th</sup> September, 2020

## **Vilnius University, one of the members of the Arqus Alliance, awards Emmanuel Macron the degree of Doctor Honoris Causa for his idea of creating the European Universities Initiative**

Vilnius University, one of the seven partner universities that form the Arqus Alliance, has awarded today the degree of Doctor Honoris Causa to His Excellency the President of France Emmanuel Macron, for his idea of creating the European university initiative, the origin of the Arqus European University Alliance.

**Vilnius, Lithuania. 29<sup>th</sup> September 2020.** Today, the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, visited Vilnius University (VU), where he was awarded the degree of Doctor Honoris Causa of VU at a solemn ceremony. During the visit, the French leader also took part in a discussion in which he discussed in detail the current issues of the European economy, relations with the world's major powers and shared insights on the future of global Europe.



## The goal is European integration

In an exclusive discussion with VU students, moderated by Assoc. Prof. Margarita Šešelgytė, Director at VU Institute of International Relations and Political Science, the President of France discussed Europe, its identity and future and the situation in Belarus, and emphasized the importance of European cooperation. While responding to students' questions, Mr Macron stressed the importance of unification at international and national levels, especially at such important moments as the coronavirus crisis.

"Young people are going through a very difficult period right now, we are asking for their help in protecting others, especially the elderly. I do not want us to forget in the future what we are asking of young people today. Some places, cafes, where young people often gather, are being closed, studies are continued remotely, which also causes some inconveniences, creates a completely different study atmosphere. Young people also have difficulty entering the labour market which is stagnant due to the pandemic. Of course, these solutions are necessary and important to protect the majority, but because of that we must feel the responsibility for everyone around us and we cannot leave future generations in an unstable Europe, debts or with the problems of global warming," said Emmanuel Macron during the discussion with students.

The French leader, in his support of a united Europe and the European university networks, emphasized the need for integration processes and investment in knowledge and education to achieve good results in the social and economic fields and to help solve problematic issues in all European states.

Emmanuel Macron's initiatives in the field of education and higher education have been praised not only by leaders of European universities but also by the European Commission (EC), which has provided funding for such a project. The French President was awarded the degree of Doctor Honoris Causa at VU for the idea of creating joint European university networks and expanding the Erasmus + exchange initiative, as well as for the constant promotion of innovations in the field of education.

"New opportunities for cooperation and integration between European higher education institutions have been made possible by your visionary initiative as President of France. For the first time in many years, the idea of university received new development at the political level. It is a solid basis and honour for Vilnius University to award you the degree of Doctor Honoris Causa for your contribution to the integration of European universities and the development of the idea of a modern university, while

expressing your commitment to the idea of European universities' cooperation and alliances," VU Rector Prof Rimvydas Petrauskas said.

### **The European universities initiative is a breakthrough in the field of higher education**

The initiative of the French President to create networks of European universities was first raised in September 2017, in Emmanuel Macron's famous Sorbonne speech. This speech formed the basis for the vision in the field of education and culture formulated at the European Union summit in Gothenburg. These proposals are now included in various European Union initiatives and programmes.

Emmanuel Macron proposed to set up networks of European universities, which should become centres of educational innovation and top competences and achieve a higher level of student exchanges by 2024, with half of European university students having to spend at least half a year in another European state. The French leader is also aiming for European students to be able to speak at least two foreign languages by 2024.

After the EC's first call for the creation and funding of European university networks was announced in 2018, 17 networks were selected already in 2019. Among them was VU, which together with 6 other European universities (Bergen, Granada, Graz, Leipzig, Lyon, Padua) set up the Arqus European University Alliance.

"Together, the seven universities are building a solid foundation for a new type of collaboration that will impact not only students but also staff development, research quality and integration with the social and economic structure of our regions. We are committed to achieving a systemic impact that implements a long-term vision, as well as to attracting the remaining national higher education systems to improve the quality of education, research and innovation," says Dorothy Kelly, the coordinator of the Arqus Alliance.

Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, a significant number of achievements has been reached on the Arqus path towards the construction of a truly European University Alliance. Good examples are the Arqus Open Mobility Agreement, that allows students to move freely between the seven institutions, the development of common institutional policies, joint degrees, or the successful application for Horizon 2020 funding to strengthen their joint research and innovation capacity.

The Arqus European University Alliance brings together seven longstanding prestigious universities who share the conviction that European cooperation is essential to the

global future of their institutions. Arqus, being a people-centred Alliance, aims to promote a multilingual, international, entrepreneurial and innovative approach in the provision of education, research and innovation.

This highest academic distinction for President Macron from Vilnius University is fitting recognition of his essential role in envisioning the European Universities initiative, and received the explicit support of the rectors of the other six partner universities in Arqus.

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### About Arqus

The **Arqus European University Alliance** brings together the universities of Bergen, Granada, Graz, Leipzig, Lyon, Padova and Vilnius, seven longstanding comprehensive research universities who share extensive experience in joint projects in many fields, and a common profile as internationalized institutions with deep regional engagement in medium-sized cities.

The Arqus European University Alliance aspires to build on the member universities' sound prior experience in cooperation in order to achieve a high level of integration in its members' policies and action plans in order to:

- enhance the education of critically engaged European and global citizens who are able and willing to contribute to a multicultural, multilingual and inclusive Europe which is open to the world;
- increase and improve the joint research capacity of the partner universities;
- better respond to the grand societal challenges of the 21st century in Europe and beyond.

The principal ambition of the Arqus Alliance is to act jointly as a laboratory for institutional learning from which to move forward in the design, testing and implementation of an innovative model for deep inter-university cooperation. The Alliance aims to consolidate a joint governance structure to facilitate the development of consensual joint policies and action plans, to consolidate participative structures to facilitate cross-cutting integration at all levels of the partner institutions, and to share its experience with other groupings in order to communicate the added value to be found in its model of integration.

The Arqus Alliance aims to centre its efforts on enabling people: enabling a widely diverse student body and enhancing their learning experience; enabling a similarly diverse staff community and promoting their individual and collective professional development; enabling society at large by opening our doors and fully responding to the mission it has entrusted us.

More information about Arqus on [arqus-alliance.eu](https://arqus-alliance.eu).

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