



Law

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Católica Law Community – Four Steps

1. The Portuguese Constitution was approved on April 2nd, 1976, and came into force on the 25th of April, two years after the democratic revolution. In this very year of 1976, in October, a young non state university – Universidade Católica Portuguesa (Católica), which had been born in 1967 – started its law community in Lisbon and enlarged this community two years after to Oporto, within the so-called Católica Humanities' School. At that time, only two other Portuguese universities – Coimbra and Lisbon – offered law courses. Due to the political, post-revolution atmosphere of the time, these latter universities were navigating through turbulent times.

The new Constitution grounds the Portuguese Republic on human dignity, grants human rights to every individual, following the International Declaration of Human Rights (1948), defines democratic and social principles, and establishes the principle of the rule of law. In the mind of the Constitutional lawmakers was a Portuguese law community very different from that of the State that came to an end with the democratic revolution. Portugal needed a strong and healthy law community to build the welfare state based on dignity, human rights and duties, and on social principles. Católica realized this was an historic opportunity and designed a broad and innovative law curriculum, with new pedagogical methods and centred on a close professor-student relation and a rigorous selection of professors. Unsurprisingly, the best students seeking a law university degree went to Católica. With no surprise, also, the first law alumni of Católica became academics, diplomats, first-tier lawyers, top members of political parties, and managers of emblematic enterprises.

2. In 1986, Portugal joined the EEC/UE. In 1989, a formally autonomous unity (the Law School) was created at Católica, with a particular focus: to build its own academic staff – trained and sharing the academic values of Católica. To that end, masters' and doctoral studies in Law were offered; and young scholars enjoyed the unique opportunity of studying and conducting their legal research abroad (particularly, in German Universities). The first PhDs at Católica Law School were defended in Lisbon (1991) and in Oporto (1993). In 1994, the first woman in Portugal to obtain a PhD in Public Law got it from Católica Law School.

Meanwhile, the higher education landscape in Portugal went through an impactful transformation, as several public and private universities were created in the 1990s, and therefore at the end of the 20th century, more than twenty LLB programmes in Law were offered in Portugal. Competition among institutions got stronger, particularly between private and public universities in Lisbon and Oporto, due to financial reasons (universities were on the same city and not far from one another, but students paid less fees in State universities). To offer a different and attractive programme, Católica Law School had to invest in quality – a very good law curriculum with attractive teaching methods, very good teachers and studying environments – and also give confidence to families and society in general through the principles that founded Católica since its very beginning. The Católica Law community worked hard and achieved this goal: Católica Law School was the first choice for best ranked high school students. This explains why, at the end of the programme, current alumni are revealed to be very well-prepared and strong simultaneously on private and public law.

When evaluation of law courses began, with national and foreign experts under the European Community principles – CNAVES was created in 1998 as the first independent Portuguese evaluation agency to ensure higher education quality, to which A3ES succeeded in 2007 – the Católica Law course was the first law course to be evaluated in Portugal and had a very good result. The Católica Law community could not have been happier.

A great number of Católica law alumni got their first job in prestigious law firms or, after a national and strict examination, were selected for a career as a judge. In the meanwhile, a dialogue between the Católica

law community and law firms became frequent, as law professors from Católica joined top tier law firms in Portugal.

But a giant step was about to be taken with the Declaration of Bologna signed in 1999, that initiated the so-called Bologna Process to create the European Higher Education Area. The idea of the Declaration of Bologna was to harmonize the different European university systems to ease student mobility and the recognition of qualifications, and to increase competitiveness for the sake of knowledge and innovation. The Católica law community had to be prepared for this new step. It had quality assurance and a three-cycle degree structure – Bachelors', Masters', and PhD – but a credit system (ECTS) had to be implemented. Moreover, the Católica law community had to foster lifelong learning and to invest in cross board cooperation.

3. Hence, the 21st century started with a profound transformation of the university system in Portugal. The Católica law community focused its work on the implementation of a credit system in a flexible and variable law curriculum, and managed to design an innovative curriculum with several strong mandatory courses, next to a set of elective courses that helped transform a five-years law degree into a better four-years one, in comparative terms with other law courses transformations. The possibility given to each student to draw their own law curriculum meant, on one hand, giving responsibility to students to choose their exclusive curriculum, and on the other hand, the responsibility of the Católica Law School, which had to provide experts for each new course. The Católica Law School offered this new curriculum in the year 2004/2005.

Cross-border cooperation and lifelong learning, also two goals of the Declaration of Bologna, came to the Católica law community in 2006, with the LLM in International Business Law, the first completely English-taught programme offered in Portugal, and designed for international students and national students that want to study abroad. In the same year, four other new and creative masters' programmes exclusively modelled for law professionals were created, whilst a new English-run LLM would soon be offered (Master in Global Legal Studies).

In 2009, the Católica Global School of Law, within the UCP Law School, was created and a new LLM with it (Law in a European and Global Context, also English-taught, with an academic faculty chosen among

the major worldwide experts). Between 2010 and 2016 all LLM's programmes of Católica Global School of Law were distinguished by the *Financial Times* as among the most innovative programmes in the world (*Financial Times Innovative Law Schools Report*).

4. In 2012, a new step for the Católica law community was taken: the Católica Research Centre for the Future of Law was born. Two years after, the Católica Research Centre was evaluated by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) with very good (2014). In 2014, an annual forum discussion on innovative law subjects began – International Graduate Legal Research Conference – with researchers from other universities, national and international, working on the same law subject for their PhDs. The aim of the discussion at this conference is to help scholars to better understand their problems and cross them over. Twelve Graduate Conferences took place from 2014 to 2025.

During this period, Católica also held the first defences in Portugal of a PhD in law written and discussed in English, and before an international jury. The first came in 2013 (European Law), the second in 2014 (Citizenship and Migration Law), the third in 2019 (Law of the Sea). Others followed suit.

In 2014, the Católica Research Centre for the Future of Law obtained, in Oporto, a Jean Monnet Chair – *Current and Future Challenges of European Integration* Project. At the same time, a Funding Platform created by the UCP Law Community, gathering a group of alumni, former and current professors, and law firms (named PAIDC), supported two multidisciplinary research projects with experts from all over the world, one on environmental law (Blue Planet Law, 2023) and another on law and artificial intelligence (Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Artificial Intelligence and the Law, 2024), both with peer review, printed by Springer, and open access available.

The Católica Research Centre for the Future of Law also created a noncomplex way of putting difficult law problems in discussion in an intergenerational scholars' environment: the *Católica Talks* take place once a month, in an informal brown bag lunch, but keeping high standards of academic discussion. They began in 2015 and became registered for history, as most of these presentations and discussions are now published as a book.

Meanwhile, in 2016, a five-year Double Degree in Law and Management, taught in Portuguese and in English, modelled by Católica Law School and Católica Porto Business School, successfully began in Oporto and continues to be unique in Portugal.

Between 2024 and 2025, the Católica Research Centre for the Future of Law was evaluated again by the FCT, this time being assessed as excellent.

In another perspective, from 2012 to 2025, the Católica law community knew other enlargements: Católica alumni went to law firms abroad and Católica Law Professors were chosen for the Constitutional Court (two were elected Vice-Presidents), the Supreme Court of Justice (one was also elected Vice-President) and the Administrative Supreme Court (one was also elected Vice-President). From 2012 to 2016, a UCP Law Professor was the Rector of Católica. Finally, since June 2025, the Prime-Minister and several Ministers of the Portuguese Government, including the Minister of Justice, belong to the Católica law community.