

# SCHOLARS AT RISK N E T W O R K

*Via email to:* info@emmi.gov.hu

Mr. Zoltán Balog  
Minister of Human Capacities  
1054 Budapest, Akadémia utca 3.  
Hungary

April 3, 2017

**Re: Central European University**

Dear Minister Balog:

I write on behalf of the Scholars at Risk Network to express concern over proposed legislative changes to Hungary's National Higher Education Act of 2011 and their impact on the Central European University (CEU). These changes threaten CEU's ability to continue operating and raise grave concerns about academic freedom and institutional autonomy in Hungary more broadly.

Scholars at Risk (SAR) is an international network of more than 450 universities and colleges in 35 countries (including CEU) dedicated to protecting the human rights of scholars around the world, and to raising awareness, understanding of, and respect for the principles of academic freedom and its constituent freedoms of expression, opinion, thought, association, and travel. In cases involving alleged infringement of these freedoms, Scholars at Risk investigates hoping to clarify and resolve matters favorably.

Established in 1991, CEU has built a reputation as an international leader in teaching, research, and scholarship in areas ranging from social sciences and humanities to cognitive science, with numerous departments that are consistently ranked among the top 50 in the world. Having been founded as a United States-accredited university, CEU was accredited under Hungarian law in 2004, through a joint declaration between the governments of Hungary and the State of New York. This is a common model, utilized by international universities all over the world; one that allows for significant scientific and academic exchange.

SAR understands that the proposed legislative changes to Hungary's National Higher Education Act of 2011 would directly impact CEU by, among other things, (i) mandating that CEU establish a new campus in the United States in order to continue operating and granting degrees accredited in Hungary and the US, (ii) mandating that CEU change the name under which it operates, (iii) and eliminating an agreement that allows faculty and staff from non-EU countries (including the US) to work at CEU without requiring work permits not required of EU residents working at other Hungarian higher education institutions. SAR understands that these measures would be administratively and financially prohibitive, threatening CEU's ability to continue operating.

SAR is especially concerned that the proposed legislative changes appear to impact only CEU in this dramatic and harmful way, raising concerns that the legislation is in fact intended to harm the institution. This concern is compounded by evidence presented by CEU that it has at all times operated in compliance with applicable laws, contrary to statements from public officials quoted

in the media, and by other public statements that suggest retaliation against CEU for the content of research, publications, and events supported by CEU faculty, staff, students, and alumni. Such retaliation would be in clear violation of the principles of academic freedom and institutional autonomy which are essential to top quality higher education institutions everywhere. Such retaliation would raise concerns not only about CEU, but about the ability of all Hungarian higher education institutions to operate freely and to engage with the global higher education community, undermining the quality of Hungarian higher education and its ability to fully serve the state and society.

We invite any additional or contrary information that may clarify our understanding. Absent this, we respectfully urge you to seek withdrawal or review of the proposed legislation to remove from it any damaging impacts on CEU and beyond. We further urge you to reaffirm publicly and in any private discussions Hungary's commitment to core higher education values, including academic freedom and institutional autonomy, and to ensure protection for these in any future legislative or policy proposals.

We thank you for your attention to this important matter, and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Robert Quinn  
Executive Director

CC:

The Honorable Viktor Orban  
Prime Minister of Hungary  
1357 Budapest, Pf. 6  
Budapest, Hungary  
Email: orbanviktor@orbanviktor.hu, erkeztetok@me.gov.hu, and titkarsag@me.gov.hu

Central European University  
Budapest, Nádor u. 9, 1051  
Budapest, Hungary  
Email: Support\_for\_CEU@ceu.edu

MEP Petra Kammerevert  
Culture and Education Committee Chairman, European Parliament  
Rue Wiertz, 60  
Altiero Spinelli 12G 165  
1047 Brussels  
Belgium  
Email: petra.kammerevert@europarl.europa.eu

The Honorable Frans Timmermans  
Vice President, European Commission  
European Commission  
Rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200  
1049 1049 Brussels  
Belgium  
Email: [frans-timmermans-contact@ec.europa.eu](mailto:frans-timmermans-contact@ec.europa.eu)

The Honorable Tibor Navracsics  
European Commissioner  
European Commission  
Rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200  
1049 1049 Brussels  
Belgium  
Email: [cab-navracsics-contact@ec.europa.eu](mailto:cab-navracsics-contact@ec.europa.eu)

The Honorable Rex W. Tillerson  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520  
USA

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo  
Governor of New York State  
NYS State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224  
USA  
Email: [gov.cuomo@chamber.state.ny.us](mailto:gov.cuomo@chamber.state.ny.us)