

THE SOCIETY FOR THE PROMOTION OF BYZANTINE STUDIES



From the Secretary: Tim Greenwood, Department of Mediaeval History, University of St Andrews,
71 South Street, St Andrews, Fife KY16 9QW Scotland
Tel: 01334 463301 Fax: 01334 463334 e-mail: twg3@st-andrews.ac.uk

April 6, 2017

His Excellency, Dr. Janos Ader, President of the Republic of Hungary
Office of the President of the Republic of Hungary
1536 Budapest, Pf. 227
Hungary

Dear HE President Ader,

As officers of the British National Committee of Byzantine Studies as well as citizens of Europe, we are writing to express solidarity with Central European University and our concern regarding Bill T/14686 amending the Hungarian Higher Education Act which was accepted by the Hungarian Parliament on April 4, 2017. The Bill renders CEU's continued operations in Budapest virtually impossible and strikes a severe blow against the academic freedom that enables all universities, including those in Hungary, to flourish. Further the bill raises significant legal and constitutional concerns.

As a result, we respectfully urge you to refrain from signing the Bill and to refer it to the Constitutional Court of Hungary on the following grounds, among others:

- **It limits the right to education and freedom of science, research, and academic life**
- **It discriminates by disproportionately targeting foreign higher education institutions** by requiring them to operate a campus in their country of origin.
- **It breaches law-making procedures.** The bill was adopted in an exceptional procedure and without consultation with the affected parties, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and the Hungarian Rectors' Conference, as entitled under law.

In twenty-five years, Central European University has established itself as a private international university with a global reputation for teaching and research in the social sciences and humanities. It attracts students from 117 countries and faculty from 40. Its contribution to the development of Byzantine and Medieval Studies has been highly significant, both through the training of graduate students and the publication of ground-breaking research. CEU has worldwide recognition in these fields and we view the threat to its continued operation with dismay. Academic excellence in Hungary and the global study of Byzantium will both be compromised by this Bill.

We note that the University as a whole is accredited by the US Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), and its masters and doctoral programs are registered by the New York State Education Department (NYSED). Its programs are also certified by appropriate Hungarian authorities and it has complied in full with all Hungarian laws.

Furthermore, this amendment curtails academic freedom in Hungary, which in turn will have negative consequences for investment and employment in Hungary. The cause of academic freedom has strong support from private citizens and institutions in Hungary and around the world. These include the distinguished Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Corvinus University, ELTE University, University of

Szeged, and many universities around the world—from Oxford and Cambridge to Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and scores of others. The European Commissioner for Education, Culture, and Sport, Tibor Navracsics; former President of the Republic of Hungary, Laszlo Solyom; German President, Frank-Walter Steinmeyer; former Governor of New York George Pataki; the U.S. Department of State, as well as 19 Nobel Laureates have also publicly voiced their concern. Additionally, over 47,000 petitioners and more than 1,400 individuals have written to Prime Minister Orban and Minister Balog in support of academic freedom and CEU.

We urge you to act on your Presidential prerogative and send the Bill to the Constitutional Court of Hungary where the above concerns regarding its legality and constitutionality can be appropriately reviewed to protect the proud tradition of Hungarian academic life and preserve its autonomy and freedom.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Elizabeth Jeffreys
Chair, SPBS
UK National Committee for Byzantine Studies

Dr Timothy Greenwood
Secretary, SPBS
UK National Committee for Byzantine Studies