

April 11, 2017

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

Dear Minister Balog,

We are writing to express our solidarity with Central European University and express our deep concern about proposed legislative changes to the status of Central European University (CEU) in Hungary. These changes would threaten the academic freedom both in teaching and research that is vital for CEU's continued operation in Budapest. It would strike a blow against the academic freedom that enables all universities, including those in Hungary, to flourish.

The Shoah Foundation – the Institute for Visual History and Education of the University of Southern California is an institute committed to fight against intolerance, bigotry and hatred through education. Central European University was the first partner institution for the USC Shoah Foundation in Central and Eastern Europe – the first academic institution that understood the need for academic cooperation and action in carrying out this mission. This partnership between two universities of academic excellence allowed us to work with a number of faculties, the library as well as individual professors and has seen the most innovative methods in education focusing on collaborative learning, multidisciplinary approaches, use of 21st century technology in education and gave us an insight into the high academic standards that characterizes the operation of Central European University. This is a partnership that we value highly.

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. In international rankings, some of CEU's departments are rated among the top 50 in the world. CEU is an institution with outstanding scholars who educate generations of future intellectuals both local and global to become active participants in building their own local countries and communities including the scholarly community of Hungary. This reputation is why we chose to partner with CEU and why we continue to do so today.

CEU is a respected and valued member of the international academic community and its presence in Hungary has added to the reputation of Hungarian academic life on the international stage. Our understanding of the proposed legislation in Hungary is that it would affect CEU's statute of operation in Hungary, with serious implications for the functioning of the university and for academic freedom on campus. Such measures would appear to violate Hungary's legal obligations to protect academic freedom, including under international covenants that Hungary has ratified.

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Absent any further information, we respectfully urge the government to ensure that students and scholars at CEU are able to pursue their teaching, research, studies and scholarship with the full support for protection of academic freedom that the university has historically experienced, including considering the withdrawal of any legislation that would undermine such academic freedom.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen D. Smith', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Stephen D. Smith
Viterbi Executive Director
USC Shoah Foundation
UNESCO Chair on Genocide Education
Adjunct Professor of Religion

CC: Viktor Orban, Prime Minister of Hungary;

Office of the Prime Minister;

Central European University