September 4, 2015

Dear Colleagues,

As all of you have seen in the news or witnessed yourselves, Budapest has become the epicenter of a mass influx of refugees from war-torn countries – a humanitarian crisis the likes of which we have not seen in decades. I want to first thank and applaud the efforts of so many of you who have donated your time, energy, and money - independently or as part of relief efforts organized by CEU this summer- or acted in other ways in support of fellow human beings. The people arriving here from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and other nations in conflict, have not only been forced from their homes under threat of death, but have endured unimaginable hardships on their journeys to Europe, only to face hostility and utter chaos when they arrive. Where inconsistent policies and procedures at the EU and national levels have failed them, you, together with other individuals and civil society organizations, have been their champions, and I salute you.

CEU is committed to promoting a society that protects and guarantees the dignity and value of all lives, irrespective of legal status, national origin, race, ethnicity, gender or religion. True to our mission and role, within the limits of our own material possibilities and in line with our profile as a higher education institution, CEU has been and will continue to support the refugees in many ways - humanitarian, academic, and in assisting with policy.

It is important to remember that our University has been concerned with providing assistance to refugees and migrants well before the current crisis. On the academic side, CEU has been:

- Putting our premises free of charge at the disposal of the NGO MigHelp for a computer literacy training program for documented migrants and refugees in Hungary.
- Taking steps to establish a Refugee Education Initiative (REI) offering targeted educational opportunities to refugees not just in Hungary, but throughout the region. This certificate program aims to assist those with university degrees who have been unable to continue their studies or work due to conflict in their home countries.
- Serving as host to a Syrian fellow in the Civil Society Leadership Program
- Convening and hosting Syrian fellows at the Center for Conflict Negotiation and Recovery working on plans for the reconstruction of Aleppo.
• Running a Passion Project at the School of Public Policy on issues related to the refugee crisis in Greece.
• Providing expert commentary to the media, with our faculty sharing insights to policymakers and the public on the current crisis. Among faculty, Maria Kovacs and Zoltan Miklosi were featured in National Public Radio reports this week, Prem Kumar Rajaram has also been cited in media outlets, and we are promoting our experts to journalists in the field. And these are only a few examples.
• I perhaps need not even mention that CEU's uniquely international nature means that through our usual or some special recruitment and admissions activities, we have students from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Pakistan, Sudan, and Syria this year.

In addition to the academic initiatives, CEU has been active on the humanitarian front as well, coordinating with local and international civil society entities. For the entire month of August, CEU donated space at Open Society Archives to serve as a collection point for Migration Aid, one of the most active civil initiatives addressing this crisis, and CEU staff, faculty and students took time out of their busy schedules or away from holidays to facilitate this important activity. OSA also hosted meetings for NGOs to meet to coordinate medical efforts, and separately, to discuss the challenges posed by Hungary's newest asylum laws. To address the immediate needs of refugees stranded in Budapest, OSA (with funding from CEU) bought and distributed medications on the ground.

We must and will do more. As I write this, the members of a special CEU Refugee Task Force I commissioned are at work organizing students and other volunteers and exploring more ways to help. Our Human Rights Initiative, together with students and alumni and staff, has begun to recruit volunteers for translation/interpretation (in the native languages of the refugees); to explore ways to provide psychological services to volunteers; to organize further donations of needed food and supplies; and to organize groups to provide activities for refugee children. Students will receive information on these volunteer opportunities upon their arrival and information sessions for interested volunteers will be held very soon.

On the academic side, CEU faculty members will host conferences on the topic in the coming weeks. We also hope to have a weekly series of informal talks for the University community, during which our academic experts will discuss the issues affecting the refugees in real time. Furthermore, following the example of Humboldt University in Berlin, CEU will open some courses to documented migrants in Hungary. A letter initiating this effort has been shared today with academic units.

One student-led initiative, a Facebook group called CEU Helps, has been serving as a key forum for sharing information about volunteer opportunities, donations, news and ideas regarding the crisis and are in contact with Migration Aid and other organizations. Alumni
are actively offering assistance and ideas for fundraising, humanitarian and scholarship aid.

As the situation changes from day to day, CEU will continue to seek ways to assist those most in need. Again, to those who have been dedicating their time to this cause, I thank you. I urge everyone in the CEU community to get involved.

For more information on the humanitarian aid side, such as in-kind donations, volunteering and translation opportunities, contact Simona Gamonte of HRSI. For more information about the academic side, such as opening classes and hosting events on the topic, please contact Eva Bognar of the Center for Media, Data and Society. We will be setting up a web page regarding our response and circulating more information in the coming days.

With regards,

John Shattuck