**Remarks at the Third International Conference of the Russian**

**Association of Higher Education Researchers**

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I was invited to speak today about Central European University, a graduate-level institution in Budapest founded 21 years ago in the heart of Central Europe. I’ve been associated with several leading universities in North America and Europe, including Harvard, Yale, Tufts, Princeton and Cambridge, so I have a pretty good idea about what makes a university distinctive. Central European University is an unusual institution. First, I will talk about its birth and the trajectory of its growth. Then I’ll elaborate on its mission and the qualities that make it distinctive.

CEU was conceived in 1991 by the new democratic leaders of Central Europe when revolutionary changes were transforming their countries. It was born from the interaction of an idea and a promise. The idea was that a privately-funded autonomous university could be a laboratory for exploring what makes an open society – what are the elements of freedom of speech and thought, equality of opportunity, democratic participation, the protection of minorities against discrimination, and why do these principles matter? The promise was that faculty and students could be recruited from many different countries to teach and study and build an entirely new, non-national university based on academic excellence and civic engagement.

For more than half of the 20th century Central Europe had been plagued by a dark political history. It was the only part of the world to have been subjugated sequentially by **both** fascism and communism. In reaction, the founders of CEU, led by George Soros, had a deep commitment to resist all forms of ideological and political tyranny. This is the legacy in which CEU’s values and mission are rooted.

The original vision that a university with a regional base and an international identity could be a center for the study of open society grew and became a reality. An endowment from George Soros allowed it to plan for growth at a time when other universities were tightening their belts.

CEU was the first university after the changes in Central and Eastern Europe to focus exclusively on the humanities, the social sciences and law at the graduate level. These academic and professional fields had been devastated by the ideological rigidity of the old regimes, and the new university offered a way to overcome this academic paralysis. In its first decade, CEU succeeded in establishing a university base for training liberal arts scholars and professionals in the region.

Today, CEU is a research-intensive university with deep regional roots and an increasingly global perspective. Its unique international character reflects three distinct identities: Hungarian, European and American. CEU is accredited by the higher education authorities of both Hungary and New York State, and through them it is eligible to participate in the higher education systems of the European Union and the U.S. This means our students can seek scholarship support from both the EU Erasmus Mundus and US student loan programs, and our faculty can compete for both EU and US research funding.

In its first academic year, the number of students enrolled at CEU was under 300, and it has grown since then to over 1600. The University now has students, faculty and staff from more than 100 countries, and attracts applicants from 149. Half of all CEU students come from the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, and the other half from Western Europe, North America, Asia and Africa. I’m pleased to say that one of our largest enrolments today are students from Russia. More than 750 Russian citizens have graduated with CEU master’s or doctoral degrees, and over 600 are now working and living in Russia. Today the top twenty countries of origin of CEU students are Hungary, Romania, the United States, Russia, Ukraine, Croatia, Germany, Georgia, Turkey, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Poland, Macedonia, China, India, the United Kingdom, Canada, Kyrgyzstan and France.

In recent years, CEU has become increasingly selective, and now admits only 14 per cent of the students who apply. 66 per cent of applicants who are offered admission accept the opportunity to enrol. Approximately 80 per cent of CEU students receive scholarship support from the university or from the European Union Erasmus Mundus programs.

The demand for CEU’s unique brand of international graduate education has steadily grown as the university has become increasingly visible and successful. The number of students applying to CEU from around the world has gone up every year for the last five years, and increased this year by 16 per cent. CEU is now experiencing a surge in applications from Africa and Asia, illustrating its increasingly global character.

What happens to CEU alumni after they graduate? After two decades, there are nearly 11,000 alumni with CEU degrees in 119 countries. Nearly 70 per cent eventually return home. 90 per cent are employed, while 10 per cent are continuing their studies. 40 per cent work in the private sector, 30 per cent in universities and educational institutions, 11 per cent in government, 10 per cent in international organizations, and 9 per cent in non-governmental organizations.

The profile of the CEU faculty is also very international. In the current academic year there are more than 300 full-time, part-time and visiting faculty from over 40 countries. In 1991 CEU started with only a few academic departments and a handful of programs. Today, there are 15 degree-granting units, including departments, programs and schools, and a broad array of research centers. Last year CEU faculty members received unprecedented levels of competitive research funding from the European Research Council and from European and North American research foundations. The total value of EU-research funds awarded last year was over €9 million, the largest amount received by any university in the region. CEU faculty are now involved in 25 European Union-funded collaborative research projects, as well as several with US-based research universities. In addition, the EU is supporting three CEU doctoral and post-doctoral training networks.

The CEU Library, which currently holds more than 250 thousand volumes, has the largest English-language collection of humanities and social science literature in Central Europe, and its unique collections, databases and state-of-the-art digital equipment draw thousands of researchers from throughout the region and beyond.

So, with this overview of CEU’s academic profile, let me turn now to the ingredients that have contributed to its rapid growth and success.

A key element is CEU’s mission -- the study of open society.

This requires working across disciplines and combining theory and analysis with practice and engagement. At CEU this is done by bringing together the intellectual assets of the University: the humanities, which focus on the cultural values and traditions of society; the social sciences, which analyze the interaction of political, economic and social structures; the law, which frames rules for the operation of society and the protection of individuals and groups; business, which helps organize and manage the enterprises that are essential to the economic development of an open society; and public policy, which studies institutions of governance, and trains public leaders.

Today, the whole idea of open society faces challenges throughout the region and across the globe. The economic crisis, the struggle over resources and the environment, pressures on democracy and human rights, the rise of a new authoritarianism, the dangerous appeal of xenophobia and aggressive nationalism – these are some of the threats that we can see around us. But there are also opportunities – popular movements for change, the growing availability of the internet, and communication across borders of an increasingly global civil society.

In this environment, it is remarkable and even counter-intuitive that a university committed to the study of open society could actually become a reality.

What are the characteristics of CEU that make this possible?

First, it has a dual geographic identity: Central European, with an increasingly global perspective. CEU is a "crossroads university" – located in Budapest, accessible to other parts of the world, rooted in the history and culture of its region, open to the history and culture of other regions, with no single dominant nationality. CEU’s embrace of the American approach to graduate education in a Central European context has created a unique academic atmosphere, with positive consequences for research and teaching, and for the institutional identity of the University.

Another distinctive quality is CEU’s commitment to the integration of theory and practice. Faculty and students are pursuing knowledge for its own sake, and knowledge to address societal problems. The study of public policy and business is where this integration is most pronounced, but many areas of social science also benefit from case studies, field work and interaction with practitioners. From climate change to financial crisis to global poverty, complex systemic issues are tackled by teams of specialists and generalists who combine scientific analysis with practical experience.

A third special quality of CEU is its commitment to cross-disciplinary teaching, study and research. Individual disciplines have their own integrity, but societal problems are most effectively studied across academic fields. Disciplines are essential to the critical analysis of social phenomena, but universities should also cast a critical eye toward the disciplines themselves, seeing them as evolving and dynamic, not settled and static.

A young university like CEU not immersed in academic turf wars can position itself to be a leader in interdisciplinary studies. In the past two years, for example, CEU has developed an outstanding program in cognitive science, focusing on the cognitive origins of social behavior and connecting in this way with all the social sciences. We have also created a new interdisciplinary specialization in network science, relating complex human networks to observable network patterns in the natural sciences.

To achieve these objectives a university must be intellectually agile. It must learn to take risks, to develop new programs, to combine or discontinue outmoded ones, to avoid the distraction of projects that consume resources without adding value. Because CEU is young and entrepreneurial, it can be organizationally nimble in developing new fields like Ottoman, Turkish and Eastern Mediterranean studies, and restructuring its business school while simultaneously launching a new school of public policy.

Finally, a mission-driven university is based on a set of values. CEU educates students to be citizens of the world, connected to their own communities, and engaged with others different from themselves. It seeks to maintain a commitment to the pursuit of truth, an honest relationship with history, an openness to new ideas, a respect for the autonomy of individuals and groups, a dedication to the rule of law, and a determination to resolve differences through discussion and debate.

These are the qualities that CEU strives for in pursuit of its mission.

To study what makes an open society, it is necessary to understand the dynamics of social, political and cultural change. There are important lessons to be learned in the transformations in Central and Eastern Europe that are still unfolding. Censorship, discrimination, limitations on democracy and pressures on the rule of law are evident across the region, as they are in many transitional societies. The contest over open society in Central Europe and beyond is accelerating even as CEU’s unique brand of international education is gaining prominence and visibility.

Today, the whole world is undergoing a rapid transition toward an uncertain future. The economic crisis has set back developed economies, while new economic powers like China, India, Brazil, Russia and South Africa have surged forward. Cracks are appearing in the consensus that supported European integration for decades, and doubts are arising about the future status of countries at Europe's southern and eastern rim. China is challenging the longstanding assumption that development and democracy go hand in hand. The US is preoccupied with its own foreign and domestic problems, and American hegemony is on the wane. A resource-rich and democractically challenged Russia is seeking to regain its influence. Asian and Latin American countries are increasingly active internationally. Africa is entering the world stage as a mixture of dynamic and failed states. The future is increasingly multipolar, and the future of open society is increasingly uncertain.

What does this mean for CEU? A university is a place of higher learning, not a center of political activism. A university must not dilute its commitment to scholarship, and it should not adjust its mission to reflect every change in the external environment. But a university like CEU should relate the core of its mission to the challenges of our time.

What does this mean? In pedagogical terms, it means the teaching of critical thinking. We live in an age of manipulative and instantaneous communication. Facts are often less respected than advocacy, analysis less understood than ideology, truth less apparent than prejudice. Students must learn to think for themselves, to seek, to analyze and to weigh information delivered by rapidly changing and increasingly sophisticated media. They must learn to guard against attractive falsehoods, to resist easy conclusions, and above all to exercise their own informed judgments. This is the heart of CEU's pedagogy, and it’s the intellectual attribute for which CEU graduates are known.

CEU is now engaged in a strategic planning process that will chart its course for the next decade. This process is focused on assessing current programs, and exploring new initiatives to implement the university's mission.

New or expanded programs on the agenda in the coming years include media and communication studies, education policy, public health policy, trans-national governance, international security studies, comparative religion, genocide studies, conflict mediation, entrepreneurship, and business and government integrity.

We will develop these programs by working across disciplines, partnering with other universities, recruiting international faculty, and raising additional funding from public and private sources.

I want to touch briefly on three of the areas where this strategic discussion is taking place.

The first is where theory and practice – the academic world and the real world – come together.

The second is where teaching and research compete and need to be brought into balance.

And the third is finding the right place for problem-oriented education in an academic environment organized around disciplines.

Each of these areas is central to CEU’s future development.

In the first area, connecting theory and practice, CEU is building a new School of Public Policy.

Today, the making of public policy is being transformed by globalization. Policy-making is no longer the exclusive domain of states, but is increasingly shaped by civil society actors competing for influence within and across national boundaries. The very nature of governance, which is the heart of public policy, is fiercely contested, as we know from dramatic and sometimes tragic events across the Arab world, and competing models of governance in countries with differing attitudes and approaches to democracy and human rights.

Our School of Public Policy will draw on the unique strengths of CEU -- our multi-disciplinary faculty, our expertise in Central and Eastern Europe and the European Union, and our relationship with the Open Society Foundations.

An interdisciplinary approach to international policy studies lies at the heart of this project, and brings together faculty engaged in policy-related studies from comparative politics, international relations, economics, law, environmental science, sociology, gender studies and other disciplines.

Building on CEU’s expertise in European politics and policy, we are in a unique position to provide students with tools for analyzing public policy in a broader global context.

CEU's relationship with the Open Society Foundations adds a strong civil society dimension that will make the School of Public Policy truly unique among comparable institutions. Most public policy schools, like Harvard's Kennedy School or the London School of Economics, focus primarily on government, and far less on civil society. The study of public policy at CEU will emphasize the opposite. In practical terms, the link with the Open Society Foundations will strengthen CEU’s focus on the role of civil society in influencing policy development.

A second area of strategic discussion is how to make sure that excellence in teaching remains at the center of the university.

CEU defines itself as a teaching and research institution. It seeks not only to produce new knowledge, but also to train active citizens who can think critically about the world around them and act responsibly in it. The trend across the world today is in another direction, shifting the focus of universities away from teaching toward research for economic development.

CEU is resisting this trend. We have placed teaching on an equal footing with research in terms of academic resources and faculty evaluations. We have established a CEU Center for Teaching and Learning to train doctoral students in teaching methods, to work with faculty to improve teaching at the university, to promote new pedagogical approaches such as role-playing, debate and the use of case studies to sharpen critical thinking skills, and to work with other universities to improve higher education policies and practices related to teaching.

A third area of strategic discussion is finding the right balance between education based in academic disciplines, and education that reaches across disciplines. Real-world problems like religious or ethnic conflict are simply too complex to be understood within the framework of a single academic discipline. When individual disciplines cannot adequately explain or address the emerging problems of society, a university must encourage interdisciplinary approaches, and support the emergence of new fields of inquiry. This is why CEU is creating new opportunities in cognitive science and network science that can illuminate complex issues across the social sciences.

Finally, CEU must strike a balance between maintaining its regional roots and expertise and fulfilling its global aspirations. As I said at the outset, we are a “crossroads” university, steeped in the culture of Central and Eastern Europe, and connected through our own diverse population of international students and faculty to the rest of the world. This dual identity is one of CEU’s greatest strengths. It allows us to look at global issues from a regional perspective, while also looking at developments in the region through a global lens.

Central European University is a grand experiment, and will face many challenges as it seeks to fulfill its mission as the original and now the leading university in the world dedicated explicitly to the study of what makes an open society. These challenges include the contest over the future of democracy, the debate about the role of universities in a rapidly changing world, and the effort to achieve high levels of academic excellence while engaging with real-world problems. Another practical challenge for CEU is how to broaden its financial base in order to achieve long-term sustainability while maintaining its academic and institutional autonomy. Despite these challenges – or, in fact, because of them – I am confident that CEU will continue to thrive in response to a growing global demand for its unique and compelling model of international education.