

University targeted in Hungary opens in Vienna

October 7 2019

An international university, which moved out from Hungary over fears for academic freedom, has opened its doors in Vienna to defend "free science and thought", its president said Monday.

The Central European University (CEU) announced last December that it was moving most of its programmes out of Budapest to Vienna saying it had been "forced" to so following a bitter legal battle with Prime Minister Viktor Orban's government.

Opening on the periphery of the Austrian capital to 600 students, CEU President Michael Ignatieff said being forced out of Budapest was costing the university, founded by Orban's bete-noire the liberal US-Hungarian billionaire George Soros, 200 million euros (\$219 million) between now and 2025.

"You cannot have democracy without free universities. You cannot have a free society unless you have free [science](#) and free thought... We have paid a huge price for the defence of those principles in Hungary," Ignatieff said.

Some of its 700 staff—more than half Hungarians—are moving. But many of the students and also professors are now commuting between the two capitals, which are about 240 kilometres (150 miles) apart.

Orban's critics say that since coming to power in 2010 he has tightened his power over most key institutions in Hungary, including public media,

the judiciary and the education sector.

The centre-right European People's Party (EPP)—which suspended Orban's Fidesz earlier this year—has asked the party to clarify "[pending legal issues](#)" over the CEU.

In June, Hungary's top scientific body, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA), warned that Orban's planned takeover of research institutes "threatens" academic freedom.

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