

Centre for Global Higher Education working paper series

Academic freedom and the future of Europe

Michael Ignatieff

Working paper no. 40
July 2018

Published by the Centre for Global Higher Education,
UCL Institute of Education, London WC1H 0AL

www.researchcghe.org

© the author 2018

ISSN 2398-564X

The Centre for Global Higher Education (CGHE) is a research partnership of international universities, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and based at the UCL Institute of Education.

CGHE's research is focused on higher education and its future development and aims to inform and improve higher education policy and practice. CGHE's three research programmes integrate local, national and global perspectives, and its researchers are based in nine countries across five continents: Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia and North America.

The support of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) is gratefully acknowledged.

Academic freedom and the future of Europe

(lecture transcript and Q&A discussion¹)

Michael Ignatieff

Michael Ignatieff is a university professor, writer and former politician. He is currently the Rector and President of Central European University in Budapest.

Abstract

Academy freedom and university autonomy are under attack these days as the privileges of a professorial elite, but they should be understood as ‘counter-majoritarian institutions’ – like a free press and an independent judiciary – an essential counterbalance to majority rule. Across Europe, counter-majoritarian institutions are under pressure from populist movements and parties seeking to mobilise ‘the people’ against the press, the courts – and universities too. How do universities defend themselves? What arguments will convince a sceptical public? How do universities rebuild the public support they need in order to sustain their role as counter-majoritarian institutions?

¹ This is a transcript of a keynote lecture by Professor Ignatieff at the third annual conference of the Centre for Global Higher Education at the UCL Institute of Education in London on 11 April 2018.

Lecture transcript

I want to tell you about the liberal story of the globalisation of higher education and about the authoritarian turn in higher education. Let me start with the liberal narrative. Between 1989 and 2015, there was a surge of globalisation in higher education, and America saw a surge in the creation of overseas campuses.

We globalised student recruitment in an astonishing way. When I walk through the halls of the Law School of the University of Toronto, where I graduated in 1965, I see in the 1965 graduation photographs white males, to an outstanding degree. Cut forward to 2015, and the same hallowed halls have a diversity which is an enormous human achievement and an enormous benefit. Globalisation meant we changed the composition of the student body and globalised student recruitment. The creation of multicultural societies in Canada, the United States and Europe depended on visa regimes which allowed universities to attract students from around the world.

While we globalised student recruitment, we also obviously globalised faculty recruitment. By 2015, you simply have the world teaching the world, in a way that seems an extraordinary social achievement. As a consequence, universities became among the most diverse, among the most multicultural and among the most plural of all the global communities. This is the liberal achievement in the globalisation of higher education.

It's worth noting that some of this was accompanied by a certain kind of pact with authoritarians that aroused discomfort at the time. For example, the Schwarzman Scholars programme at Tsinghua University in Beijing: you want to create a free scholarship programme for American and other students, and the Schwarzman students I've seen operate in a curious bubble in which they have free internet access, but the same Chinese students in the same classes do not have equal internet access. So globalisation involved getting into bed with certain regimes and making deals in which Western-style academic freedom met with a very adverse authoritarian context and tried to make a marriage that would work.

Beijing is one example, NYU in Abu Dhabi is another. NYU would tell you they are perfectly free to teach what they want in Abu Dhabi, although it seems a complicated story. A similar example is the European University in St Petersburg, which is also a creature of this liberal period of globalisation. The university set up in St Petersburg and found itself in a very uneasy relationship with the emerging authoritarianism of Yeltsin and Putin in the 1990s.

We thought, I believe, in each of these cases that a kind of liberal academic freedom could go into an authoritarian context and work something out, pushing and widening the scope of academic freedom in closed societies. Universities were therefore a kind of battering ram in which liberal democracy would implant itself in these societies and academic freedom would then play a part in opening them up. This may have been a deep illusion, but I think this was our idea at the time.

Let me give you the example of CEU (Central European University). CEU was founded in 1991 by a group of Hungarian and Eastern European academics in Budapest and Prague. The idea was to implant high quality, world class social

science and humanities teaching in university systems that had only known communist ideology. Universities were called Karl Marx University, and you can imagine their social science curriculum. So Central European University was created to teach Western social science and to train a cadre of people who would then spread the virtues of Western academic freedom to the whole of the post-communist world. Here you see academic freedom is playing a crucial role in the whole transition process, from communism to liberal market democracy. We were going to train the transition elite – that was what CEU was supposed to do. We're US and Hungarian accredited, with an open society mission. This mission wasn't about propaganda but it did mean open minds, open thinking – free minds, free institutions and free politics.

From 1991 perhaps until 2010, that mission seemed to us to be working, but it had some unexpected results which I should draw to your attention. One of the unexpected effects of mobility was that as soon as the four Eastern European countries got entry into the European Union, any bright Eastern European student who could went to London, or Paris or Berlin. Schengen and EU accession had an enormous brain drain effect on the local elite. We came to teach those elites the values of an open society and found that the elites had left to come and study here (in the UK), so we began to globalise our recruitment. We now recruit from 120 countries: the largest cohort in 2018 applications to CEU came from Pakistan and Ghana, not from the Czech Republic or Poland. The other fact about Eastern Europe is that the university eligible cohort for admission is falling rapidly in this part of the world and those who can learn are going west and not coming back. There's a complicated sense in which the mobility story that we're very proud of has had some perverse effects and may be triggering some of the resentment about the impact of university education on Eastern Europe that we need to think about.

I think another aspect of the liberal globalisation story is that we globalised our student recruitment and our faculty but we didn't globalise the curriculum. We basically taught Western North Atlantic social science to a lot of eager people from other societies. We taught human rights in Myanmar from the outside. Did we teach human rights in Myanmar from the Myanmar side of the story, as controversial and difficult as that is? Not so much. Globalisation was very much from here to there, and not in a pedagogical dialogue that would change our curriculums. I would say now that, as a university leader, that's one of the biggest challenges of globalisation. We've globalised faculty, we've globalised students, but we haven't even begun to think about what it would mean to have a global curriculum.

What we didn't see coming at CEU is that we trained the transition elite, a liberal democratic transition elite, but we trained the elite that lost politically. Post-1989, the transition elite, the liberal democratic elite, got pulverised in Hungary's election and a new centre right – conservative, religious, Christian, anti-migration – won. We are now facing all the consequences of having trained an elite that lost.

These are some of the unintended results of the liberal globalisation story. Let me now turn to the authoritarian turn in higher education and tell you a story about that, some of which will be very familiar to you. If you look at Russia, China, Turkey and Hungary, you begin to see a new pattern that we need to understand. In Russia, I mentioned the European University of St Petersburg, which is a very fine social

science and humanities university established, again, to train the liberal elite. It is now in a death spiral because of the pressure of the St Petersburg counter-elites, the people who want to get hold of the real estate. These people are the municipal officials who arrive in the middle of the afternoon, in the middle of classes and say, 'ah, I see you have a problem with your fire doors, we're going to have to close you for eight weeks while you get fire doors'. It's a true story.

This is how it gets done, this is how universities get closed. The counter-elites suddenly look around and discover they can invent a problem with a fire door that'll take eight weeks to fix, interrupt people's studies and make it impossible for them to have continuity in their academic performance. That is what's happening to European universities in St Petersburg. They don't actually close you down, they just chip away relentlessly at your capacity to operate at all. So, here's the paradox in Russia, where we appear to be reverting to a pattern which was discernible in Sakharov's time, in the Soviet time. Certain amounts of academic freedom and openness to the international scientific community exist for the natural sciences, but there is total control in social sciences and humanities.

Globalisation in China seems to me one of the most momentous stories in global higher education. The degree of ideological regimentation and control in social science and humanities in China is a sign of what Xi Jinping has in mind for the entire society. It seems to me the government has concluded it cannot afford free institutions teaching social sciences and humanities freely in China because it's essentially a regime threat. Ultimately, academic freedom is a regime threat.

I think the liberal transition story we believed was that we would move from liberalisation of the market to the inevitable liberalisation of thought to the inevitable liberalisation of politics. Xi Jinping's decision to become emperor for life is a clear signal right down the chain that academic life in China will be very heavily policed. The place where the Chinese community will have open access will be in the natural science domains crucial to economic growth and innovation. China will seek to keep the control – and whether this is a stable bargain, we don't know – with a limited opening in STEM subjects.

The other obvious country to mention is Turkey, and there it's brutal. We've had a surge of applicants from Turkey coming to CEU, simply because anybody who can get out of Turkish social science and humanities is doing so. We need to be aware this is happening a couple of hours' flying time away. Whole faculties are being dismissed, students of mine, students at Harvard who took my classes are being arrested as Gülenists and put on trial. This is one of the biggest scandals involving academic freedom in our part of the world. It's being sustained by something else that we need to face, which is that Europe is not engaging with Mr Erdogan on the issue of academic freedom because Mr Erdogan is controlling the taps on migration flows into Europe. It's an absolutely diabolic bargain, in which the freedom of Turkish institutions is being traded against migration control. This is one of the basic institutional political reasons why European leaders, European voices that could speak out, are notably silent about the restriction of academic freedom in Turkey.

If you look at the Turkish story, the Chinese story, the Russian story and the Hungarian story, I think what you see is a very clear emerging picture. Single party regimes are privileging control, because they see academic freedom as a regime threat. They're privileging control over academic quality and openness to international academic life. If they have to choose what they want, which is universities under their thumb or universities that actually open into the world, contribute academic knowledge, exchange freely and are integrated into wider networks, if they have to choose between having good universities and universities they control, they choose universities they control every time.

Let me now take you a little bit through the CEU story. It's an interesting story from which we can all learn some lessons. A year ago, without any consultation or warning, the Orbán government introduced new rules for higher education for international institutions in Hungary. These said institutions need an agreement with the government before they can operate: they need to have an agreement between the government and the state in which they originate, which is the United States in our case.

Secondly, they said you can't operate here unless you have a campus in the United States. For 25 years, we've been operating in Hungary without a campus in the United States. Some people find that odd, but in fact, there are 30 US institutions overseas that operate without a US campus – for example, the American University of Beirut, the American University in Cairo – and we're actually a typical member of a set. So suddenly, we had to have a campus, suddenly we had to have a new bilateral agreement with the government, suddenly we weren't allowed to have a dual legal and American identity. Basically, that meant we couldn't issue American accredited degrees in Hungary because the local Hungarian universities were jealous of the fact that we could award US Masters and PhDs. It's our competitive advantage and a national bourgeoisie, supported by the state, wants to 'level the playing field'. This is code for 'we want to remove your capacity to issue internationally accredited degrees'. So, this was the legislation dropped on us, without warning, without consultation, without precedent.

We said no. I think that's an important thing to say, particularly for members of the international audience who work in difficult contexts. One of the institutional dispositions of universities is to be very quiet, thoughtful, avoid conflict and avoid standing up. Our lesson is that sometimes you've got to fight, by which I mean you've got to raise the price for the other side. If they won't talk to you, if you can't engage in dialogue, if the quietly, quietly approach doesn't work, you'd better put some troops on the ground. So, we rallied our network (remember how networked universities are) – we have huge networks of alumni, we have huge networks of academic colleagues in every university in Europe, we have friends. We mobilised those networks: one student put a Facebook call out on a Friday afternoon and we had 75,000 people in the streets of Budapest chanting 'free universities in a free country!' You have to be made of stone not to be moved by that.

So, what's the message? Universities should not underestimate their public support, they should not underestimate the power of their networks and there are occasions, if you get really pushed by a government, when standing up can raise the price for the other side. This is politics, and we learnt that you sometimes have to fight a

political battle to defend academic freedom. The consequence was that the government then agreed, very reluctantly, to go into negotiations with the state of New York, where we're accredited.

By the end of last summer, we got a deal which would allow us to stay in Budapest, and in return, we would establish educational activities in the United States. It makes sense to compromise, so we compromised and for nine months we've been waiting for the government of Hungary to sign this agreement. Last Monday, as you know, they just won a thumping two thirds majority. Orbán now holds all the cards and I'm not able to tell you whether he will or will not sign the deal that would allow us to stay in Budapest. If we can't stay in Budapest, I will have to move an entire university across a European frontier to another European state.

And what about some of the more general lessons to draw from this? One key point to mention is that I never really thought that hard about academic freedom – I took it for granted. If you pressed me, I would have thought it's a type of privilege of professors – it just means they can't fire you. I mention this because I think a lot of people in the general public think of academic freedom that way: it's a privilege of professors, it's one of those little perks that middle class, educated people are able to have.

I mention this also because as people who love and care about higher education we need to be very clear about how we are seen. We need to turn the language of 'academic freedom is our privilege' into 'academic freedom is a right that protects us all'. It's the key move we all have to make if we're going to defend universities in the 21st century. We are not just fighting for a corporate privilege for ourselves, we are defending a counter-majoritarian institution whose function is to serve and protect and defend society's capacity to know anything at all. That's why academic freedom matters. If we defend it as a corporate privilege, we're done for.

We also need to understand the crucial way in which academic freedom is one element of a counter-majoritarian fabric that is integral to the health of a democratic society. If you're a university president you ask yourself: what do I need institutionally to make sure that academic freedom in my institution is secure? Here's a rough checklist: you need rule of law and constitutional review; you need independent accreditation bodies that can accredit a university without political pressure; you need self-governing professional associations and scientific bodies that are able to undertake independent peer review.

If you're a university, you need to have informal rights of consultation about pending legislation. You need to be able to take for granted as a university president that if they change the rules of the game, the educational authorities will tell you what they propose to do and ask what you think about it. We never think about that as crucial to academic freedom, but when you've been subjected to a legal process in which you had no rights of consultation, you appreciate how important these rights are. Parliamentary review of higher education legislation turns out to be critically important. The higher education law that is threatening us was put through parliament in six days and signed by the president in 12 days.

You also need a free press. At the moment, UK vice-chancellors are under fire for their expense accounts and salaries and the media runs stories about how privileged and entitled they are. They run stories about how ridiculous the pension disputes in universities are. Yet if you don't have a free press, you're in trouble, so people need to understand the deep integral relationship between a free press and academic freedom. Needless to say, you then have statutory guarantees of university autonomy and self-government.

Universities are among the oldest self-governing institutions in the world – like courts and parliament – charters of independence and autonomy. You need to have the capacity to set your own budgets independently and, above all, you need to be part of an international structure of independent scientific peer review. We've not thought about this in the liberal globalisation of higher education, but you need de-politicised visa access. Visa regimes are now the chief choke point in every Western democratic country, restricting the capacity of universities to freely choose who they want to admit to their programmes. This is a huge issue in the United States; it could be a huge issue in Britain. Oddly, it's not an issue in Hungary: we've got every problem in the world with the government, except for this. We haven't had the politicised, securitised visa control that could bedevil the future of higher education in Britain and is definitely bedevilling the future of higher education in the United States.

What we live in is a system in which there is not rule of law, but rule *by* law – the rule of constant changing administrative discretion of a highly political kind. We have a party state that controls accreditation; we have a party state that regulates scientific bodies and determines who receives scientific grants; we have a government that has just secured a super-majority and so that forecloses parliamentary scrutiny; we have a government-controlled media that drastically restricts our capacity to tell our story to the public.

Every Hungarian institution has intense budgetary control by the state through a chancellor system. One of the consequences is that Hungarian higher education, which has an extraordinarily important historic record – Hungary produces some of the greatest mathematicians and natural scientists in the world – is facing declining real levels of investment in the last four or five years. These regimes want to under-invest in higher education because higher education is the source of political challenge to the regime, so they'd rather starve these institutions than feed them. This is the real world of the authoritarian turn in higher education.

Regimes such as those in Turkey, China, Russia and Hungary are increasingly creating what they call 'national universities' to teach public administration. Instead of having your future bureaucracy trained in free institutions, you have them trained in administrative schools that tightly control and ideologically form the entire apparatus of the state. This is another challenge to academic freedom. Why does this strategy of national higher education, the authoritarian strategy in higher education, have any support? What I've learnt is that it has support from local universities who resent international competition. All these regimes are trying to create what used to be called a national bourgeoisie which is dependent on state subsidies. State support, state contracts, state education: these are regimes that use education to create a national bourgeoisie which will, in turn, support them to the degree that they depend on elections at all. This electoral base, certainly in Hungary, and potentially in

Poland, supports this kind of regime control because it's connected with migration control. They do not want a multicultural and pluralist demographic future. The control of universities is part of an attempt to re-engineer these societies and re-defend the mass, mono-ethnic societies controlled by their own state-supported national bourgeoisie.

So, where do we go from here? I once asked one of my old, good friends who survived the Holocaust in Hungary how he faced life. He said, 'some people believe in hope and redemption and optimism; I'm a pretty strong believer in brute reality'. I think that's my message: there's nothing inherently discouraging about this, provided you look it squarely in the eye and see what you're looking at and do not let yourself be deceived. I see academic freedom as a core European value. It's a core European value because universities need to think of themselves as counter-majoritarian institutions, as integral to the survival of free societies as a free press, an independent judiciary, and parliamentary review of legislation. We're part of an intricate structure of counter-majoritarian freedom.

Our political challenge is that during a period in which democracy is equated with majoritarianism, it's a very tough sell to tell people that your freedom as a people, as a nation, as a majority, absolutely depends on you having institutions that say you may be wrong. It's the toughest sell of all. Obviously, universities have to serve the publics that pay their bills and I think we do a pretty good job at serving those publics. The more difficult message we have to convey is that a free press keeps the channels of information open, so that citizens can deliberate. Courts make sure that legislation is consistent with constitutional and rights safeguards.

Universities exist to do the one thing they absolutely have to do, which is winnow the hard facts of knowledge from the chaff of opinion, rumour, fantasy, paranoia and the whole deluge of false information which makes it almost impossible for our societies to deliberate freely on the basis of what we actually know to be true. That's what universities are for. What they have to do is train students to appreciate that knowledge is extremely hard – it's a discipline you have to follow. Once you have knowledge, you have access to the most important thing a democratic system must have, which is the capacity to find out what is true and right. It's an unpopular job, it's a job with a message that people may not want to hear, but it is our job and we have to defend it with courage and without any embarrassment that sometimes this will be counter-majoritarian in its impact.

As I look at the future of CEU, I have a number of concerns. The UK is walking out of Europe. I would love to have much more support from British academic institutions, saying loud and clear that an attack on academic freedom anywhere in Europe is an attack on our academic freedom. I've had some magnificent support from UK universities, but I fear the inertial effect of Brexit is to make UK universities think 'we've got to cope with our own, our European duties of solidarity don't matter anymore'. Please don't think that. We really need to hear from the great universities that happen to be in the UK, a country with the best universities in Europe – please speak out if the government of Hungary decides to close us down.

People ask me, should we look to European institutions? The European Commission has been helpful, but I do not expect European institutions to raise the price of throwing us out so high that Orbán won't do it. I think it will turn on whether internally this turns out to be sufficiently unpopular inside his own party that he will turn back at the last moment. I'll do my best to make sure that this university remains in Budapest, because it focuses our vocation so clearly. If you're in the front line of a battle to defend any kind of liberal freedom in a place, it has the wonderful effect of reminding you of what universities are actually for. It's invigorating, it's challenging, it's slightly frightening, but I hope you feel more energised in your commitment to what you do, because this is a moment in which we really, really have to believe in what we do.

Q&A and discussion

Question: Another interpretation of the narrative you describe is that it's really about an academic elite who haven't engaged with the societies that their privileges are based upon. That separation of universities from the societies in which they work – and their need to make that knowledge more available to those societies – seems one of the lessons. One of the things to think about is not just what higher education needs from society, but actually what higher education does for society.

I agree with the first challenge and my sense is that British universities, under pressure from government and motivated also by the consciences of their staff, have made almost unlimited attempts to show British society how hard they work. Equally, some of your academics here have pointed out how incredibly unequal access to university education remains in the UK – how many British citizens of colour and citizens from lower social economic origins are simply not getting a chance. They point out that there is a flagrant contradiction between an egalitarian ideology and an extremely unequal practice. Universities are talking again, and somehow the transforming impact of university education still excludes lots of people. I believe universities are deeply conscious of that message and want to do more.

I'm trying to say something different. There are moments when we have to stand up and say that self-evidently we serve a society, self-evidently we have to make the prize of university education available to everybody, self-evidently we're failing, but let's also say something else. There are going to be times when our social science conclusions will contradict everything that certain media and politicians are saying. But that's our job as academics.

I'm putting an emphasis on pushing back to defend the counter-majoritarian space, which we need to do in order to serve society well. There's a danger in adopting an attitude that's too eager to serve and bowing down in front of the majoritarian turn in politics. It's even worse when universities do whatever the majority wants and funnel it through egalitarian language.

Universities also have to make clear it's their job to say things people might not want to hear. In the UK, look at the recent attacks on the courts: this is scandalous in a country that invented the independence of the judiciary. Universities should be proud of being the oldest self-governing institutions in the world. It's not about corporate privilege but about defending the pride of being counter-majoritarian institutions. I just think we as academics sometimes get trapped by our liberal egalitarian thinking which pressures us to be agreeable and helpful when sometimes you have to point out when things are wrong.

Question: Can you tell us a little bit more about what CEU won't and will be able to do from Vienna in terms of the mission that you were outlining? Obviously Vienna is not on the front line in terms of Hungarian politics so what would CEU's role be, if it were played from Vienna?

We've decided that we need a satellite campus in Vienna because there are things we could do in Vienna, which is a great international city, which we can't do in Budapest. I don't want to move the entire operation to Vienna at all: first, because it's a logistical nightmare, and second, because it's an admission of defeat. A university that is there to defend free minds and free institutions should not be pushed out of a country by a regime and so we're trying to find a way to stay. I think under any circumstances we'll continue to retain programmes and activity in Budapest, but I need to go to Vienna to, first, hedge my political risk, and, second, give students opportunities they wouldn't have in Budapest.

Question: You said that the one-party systems (e.g. in Turkey, China and Russia and Hungary) choose control of the institution over academic freedom. How did you come to this conclusion?

I'm trying to chart a moment, which I think has passed, in which every great university in the world in the liberal democratic West wanted to have a partnership in China, because you've got some great universities and fantastic students. I think we're discovering that the conditions of entry and the conditions of collaboration have more implications for academic freedom than we imagined.

I'm not saying this story is over, because the other part of the story I haven't mentioned at all is what happens to the many Chinese citizens studying in the United States when they go home to societies that are much more regulated than they have become accustomed to. This is an old story going back to the 19th century, when Russian students would come to the West, and it began a long process of fermentation that had ultimately destabilising effects on the authoritarian regimes of the 19th century. Will this happen in the Chinese case?

What I'm suggesting is a hypothesis that the regime bargain – whereby you can manage a limited opening in the natural sciences while clamping down on the social science and humanities, and have relationships with Western universities that you can control – is unstable. I just don't know whether the Chinese are going to be able to manage this into the future and then add onto it the number of international Chinese students coming home and, say, getting an academic job that is much more

constrained than the one they were used to in the West. This is an unstable set of problems: I don't underestimate the capacity of the Chinese regime to manage this successfully, but it's a challenge.

Chair: I'm going to comment on that last question, because I lived, between 2009 and 2013, in South Africa. I think that temptation of a party in power to equate democracy with majoritarianism is there everywhere, whether you come from a one-party state or whether you come from a liberation party background, like in South Africa, or, indeed, from a country with a predominantly two-party state like the UK. I watched that fight happening in South Africa and I think that the new president there probably signals a sense that the equation between democracy and majoritarianism is not fixed, that you can fight back, but it's a hard struggle.

Question: This is one plea and one question. The plea is that both myself and all my British colleagues take inspiration from your message. We are faced with regulation and different types of governance that we know are completely wrong, we know that it will actually erode equity and that it erodes quality and creates a very dysfunctional system of higher education. We write about it, we write critically about it, but we do very little else, so it's a plea to all of us to actually come together and to stand up and oppose some of the things that we know are clearly wrong in our own society. My question is as follows: I grew up in a generation which really valued academic freedom and fought for academic freedom. Young people now, this generation of university students, are very much engaged in no platform debates, where certain speakers who are fascists, who are right wing, are not allowed onto campus. I wonder if you could comment on that?

This may rile some of you but some of academic freedom's greatest beneficiaries do it enormous harm. I have a close friend who introduced a controversial speaker and was persecuted by her own students, while her fellow faculty members stood by and did nothing to stop it. I introduced a controversial speaker at CEU who has views on gay equality that I regard as mistaken, morally repellent, but he was entirely competent to speak about the subject I asked him to speak on. As soon as he stood up 25 of my students walked out of the hall, rather than listen to him, to express, which is their right, their moral rejection of his position on gay equality and gay identity. In my view, it was a mistake to walk out, but it's a free community. If they feel that their identity is so attacked, and that feeling prevails over their attachment to listening to what they don't want to hear, which seems to be a condition of academic freedom, they are free to publicly assert their identity by walking out.

This is a debate surging through campuses at the moment, but I don't think there's any question that refusing to platform controversial speakers is doing our institutions enormous political harm. I just think it produces a sense of us being a closed community that can only bear to listen to certain things.

I say that with care, because I've lived through the gay revolution and the civil rights revolution, I've lived through the ways in which society has moved painfully and slowly and after much resistance towards greater equality and decency. This is a huge human accomplishment, but it's very fragile – it could be reversed at any

moment. I understand how fragile and embattled people feel in their identities, I don't want to deny that either, but I will continue to invite people that my students and faculty don't want to hear. Sometimes it's political – sometimes I'm going to invite spokesmen from the Orbán Government, for example.

We've got to keep an open space and the difficulty for universities is that we need to understand that we are regarded as a validator, a legitimiser of positions. We don't merely provide a space, we validate the person who steps up. I have to explain that while I invite a person who has, in my view, repellent views on certain subjects, that does not constitute authorisation of those views. We need to be clear about this and tell the public what we're doing when we put someone on a platform. People will disagree with me about this but we've got to keep talking about it.

Question: I would like to pick up on what you've said about the ambition and the talent of universities in their societies. What are your thoughts about how much CEU actually looked at Hungarian society? I wonder how this body of international students and international academics actually manages to fight to establish facts and truth in this society. I know that some of your professors are excellent at that, but I wonder how much you as an institution commit to this and how you go about it?

One of the frustrations about being in Hungary is that we would like to be in close public policy dialogue with the government. We have knowledge about healthcare and the education system, and we'd like to sit down with the government bureaucracy and see whether we can help improve a terrible healthcare system and a failing education system. But we're seen as toxic at the moment so that is a real difficulty.

We teach with Hungarian universities, our PhD students teach in Hungarian universities, we share our library with Hungarian institutions and we undertake constant outreach in the Hungarian language. No matter how difficult, it's crucial to us, to our mission, to be reaching out to Hungarian communities as far as we can. The most important institutional support that we received in the CEU battle was not from Oxford, Cambridge and Harvard, it was from Corvinus, ELTE and the local institutes, including the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. We're incredibly grateful for the amount of support we've had institutionally from our own people, because they're under real pressure. Their budgets are written by the government, they have very little margin to manoeuvre, they have fewer resources than we do and yet they stood up for us, which is hugely important to the eventual outcome.

Question: One of the unassailable facts as a historian is that no totalitarian state has ever yet broken through to a modern condition of high income per capita, egalitarianism and freedom of speech. The reason for this, I suggest, is that there are two great momentums in society: one is innovativeness and the other is cooperativeness. Totalitarian states can handle innovativeness by stealing it and borrowing it, but they cannot handle cooperativeness. The job of higher education is to supply society with the catalysts it needs to foster high trust and high cooperativeness and for its institutions to foster the generation of a modern condition. I do not believe that the world generally

understands the significance of higher education's role in that developmental process and that much more needs to be coordinated, spoken and told to the world about all we do.

The thing that I find so interesting about Turkey, Russia, Hungary and China is that they're not only not totalitarian, but they're not closed societies. One of the most interesting aspects of all of these societies is the way in which they allow an exit. In China, if you're worried about the security of your assets, you offshore them in an apartment in Vancouver. If you've made a pact with the Putin regime but you're a little uncertain whether your property will be secure, you go to the London property market. We're just beginning to understand the degree to which open societies are collusive in the stabilisation of these societies. London is the classic example of that. If you don't have rule of law in Russia, you do have it in the British courts, so your assets are safe from seizure – and the Putin regime understands this deeply. British society is up to its neck in a collusive relationship with an authoritarian regime.

These authoritarian regimes are making the gamble that because they're not totalitarian, because they have just enough exit rights and just enough voice rights, they can innovate and produce the trust and cohesiveness that you describe. They've learned from the totalitarian example not to close, not to be autarkic, but to be open to the global capitalist economy. What they've then discovered is that it's a tremendous stabiliser. I don't predict any of these regimes are going to fall any time soon and one of the reasons is their support from, for example, London, Paris, Berlin and New York. We are collusive in the stabilisation of the authoritarian resurgence in the Western world.

Question: I would like to ask about the engagement of universities with society. You mentioned that our importance, our relevance in society is self-evident. I think for us it's self-evident but I disagree that it's self-evident for most of the population. I'm from Portugal and I remember for a long time during the financial crisis we didn't have a single academic explaining to the media what's going on and what we need to do. They were invited to speak but used jargon that probably 0.1% of the population actually understood. They failed to provide any hope or guidance for common citizens. Instead, they protected themselves by pointing out that the situation is very complex. So, how, for the common citizen, do you explain that universities matter if they fail to provide any propositions or help? There's just this academic discourse which is understood by our peers, so we're very good at that type of communication, but we're not good at civic communication. What is your take on that?

In terms of civic communication, it's worse than that we talk jargon. Very few academic economists predicted the crash. We have this highly mathematised academic profession, which is the most scientific of all our social sciences and, with some honourable exceptions, it didn't see the dashboard flashing yellow. It failed to convey the message to the policymakers, the policymakers didn't act and we went over the cliff. Ordinary citizens look at that and ask what's going on. What then follows is a good deal of well-earned humility about the predictive capacity of the social sciences.

I used to be on British television and I'm rather proud of the fact that I did programmes that had such low audiences you couldn't even measure them because they were broadcast at one in the morning. The point being that British television had a public education mandate that simply began to disappear in the mid-nineties and will never return, to the relief of many, but to the sadness of a few.

I learnt one lesson about civic communication which is that we must escape the jargon, but we have nothing but condescending ways of doing that. We talk down, we simplify. We need to rethink this and rethink ourselves along the lines of: 'I'm a citizen here, I know something, I don't know everything but I know something – here's the most important thing you need to know, from 25 years of scholarship and thinking'. So, rule one is to stop talking down, stop simplifying. Conceive yourself as a citizen trying to help other citizens in a situation of equality.

The second thing, which is a huge temptation for intellectuals in the media, is to allow your own expertise to be corrupted. You go into a television studio and you get lured into talking about stuff that you know nothing about. One of the things that produces huge popular resentment, which is entirely justified, is privileged academics talking down to people about their lives. A lot of it happened post-Brexit, when people trotted out their data on Sunderland to explain why the poor benighted people in Sunderland voted the way they did. It's not just about having humility but about having a sophisticated understanding of how the audience will think about what you're about to say and the limits of your expertise.

There are some wonderful communicators, let's not just focus on the negative. I could watch David Attenborough talk forever. He's the greatest public communicator ever because he only talks about what he knows. He listens carefully and respectfully to the natural scientists who work in this field and he delights in taking their knowledge out into the world, so there are some examples out there of great communicators. Yet overall we claim more than we should and we keep talking down, and this needs to stop. The point is that we don't merely embarrass ourselves but do our institutions enormous damage. We have an institutional responsibility not to make it worse for our colleagues and yet unfortunately we often do precisely this.

Question: At the beginning of your talk, you brought up a point about the need to globalise the curriculum. I completely agree with that, but I want to highlight one of the reasons I think that's been so difficult. It's largely because the voices we still listen to and the voices we still put on our curriculum come from certain countries and certain institutions within those countries. Although we have diversity within those institutions, there's still one intellectual tradition coming through. We're all complicit in that and I was struck by your comment about elites from Hungary coming to London, while, in fact, the elites from Ghana and Kenya are coming to Hungary, and universities that could have benefited from those students are struggling. My point is that in order to globalise the curriculum we're going to need to welcome intellectual traditions and thoughts from institutions that are not high up in the global hierarchy. Yet these are often from societies that don't have the characteristics that you're outlining. So what do we do when we feel that an institution is in a home that does not have academic freedom, that does not

have the benefits we think are necessary for good scholarship? How do we, as a global community, listen to individual voices from within those contexts that may be worth listening to, even when the institutional home is not what we might want it to be?

The globalisation of curriculum question is a wonderful question. I have two ways in which I've seen globalisation of curriculum occur. One of them is as a classroom teacher teaching human rights. Instead of teaching the human rights of gay equality, I had the four students in my class who happened to be from Jamaica teach the students exactly why gay equality is such a difficult issue in their country and why there is such resistance. There's religious resistance and there are cultures of masculinity that make the issue challenging in Jamaica. So you just flip it around, work with your students, get them to force a different perspective.

Many of us are globalising our curriculum every day, to the degree that we insist on group presentations by students and get them to take their Western social science approach and flip it and examine how it looks when it's coming from, say, Afghanistan. I've learned more from that than anything, but we've still got a long way to go because our syllabi are credentialled by the likes of Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, UCL etc.

I think a second thing that's going to happen in the next 15-20 years is we're going to develop partnerships with universities in the 'Global South'. For example, every month CEU goes to the University of Yangon in Myanmar, a new university that has been restarted after the transition, to help them write their statutes relating to academic freedom and university governance. Once we do that, we'll establish an undergraduate programme in partnership with them. We'll work on it together: they will bring what they have to teach in Myanmar, and we will bring what we can. Because of blended technologies all universities can start to network out. For example, we teach with the American University of Central Asia, which is a long term partner of ours, so you get the Kazak and Kyrgyz view of the world and it's very different.

Question: What do you think about the possibilities of China improving its political role in this century?

I think it follows what I said earlier, which is that Xi Jinping and the regime are making a bet that they can send hundreds of thousands of students overseas and have them come back to highly controlled environments. They think that their social model will continue to be attractive because of their economic growth, while their human model is basically repressive.

They're making a historic gamble that Africa, for example, will continue to be happy with what's happening there. The discourse is about equality rather than colonialism in the context of China building roads and extending government loans. But when African people ask, 'what about freedom of speech, what about freedom to publish, freedom to think, freedom to dissent?', the reply is that these things aren't needed. Is that going to be a plausible story in Africa in the 21st century? I think it rather condescends to Africa. I'm not sure this model is stable, and I'm not sure it's going to be persuasive.

Don't mishear me, one of my favourite remarks from Alexander Herzen, the 19th century socialist, is that history has no libretto. History is not the story of human freedom. I'm not telling you that story in disguised form and I don't know what will happen, but I think stories that justify tyranny and control of freedom of thought are not stories that are going to work. That's a hope, not a prediction.

Question: Thank you for an inspiring speech and for your responses to people's questions as well. I don't agree with everything but I felt your pain, and I also felt your spirit and determination. How can the different elements of the counter-majoritarian movement you outlined support each other, while also challenging the privilege that resides in those places?

I think one of the interesting things about counter-majoritarian institutions around Europe is that they are being attacked socially as bastions of privilege. An attack on the judges in Poland is an attack on the fact that these are very well-paid people who are not accountable to the majority will. There's an attack on experts, but just behind it is a not-so-coded resentment at social privilege, at elite privilege. We're going to have to flip this battle by doing two things. As I said earlier, academic freedom is not the privilege of tenured professors, it is a right that guarantees the capacity of a society to have any secure knowledge whatsoever. We have to make it clear that we're doing this for society, that what we do is integral to democratic freedom and is not about personal privilege as a closed professional cast.

We also have to criticise ourselves. It's clear that there are some privileges of academic life that may not be defensible indefinitely. I, for one, have never had tenure in my life. We've got to think through our hiring and retention policies and how we reconcile giving people the security they need to do great work, but without creating a sense to the outside world that we're defending an inexcusable kind of entitlement. Particularly in a world where the condition of most people's lives is deep economic insecurity. This, I think, is where we fail to make an argument about academic freedom.

Question: I wonder if we're putting a nominal value on what constitutes freedom based on a definition in the West, and then using that definition to explain what is wrong with the systems and higher education in countries like China, Hungary and Russia. Could you talk about the different degrees of freedom that exist? These depend on state ideologies but in an era of unlimited resources, there has to be some way that we – or the state – prioritise academic research.

We work with Myanmar which is not a free society. It's making a very difficult transition and so there's got to be give and take in how we conduct dialogue with Myanmar. We can't just give our criteria of academic freedom – there will be compromises that you make about freedom. But let's be careful. There is some moment at which the very meaning of the word 'freedom' cannot be qualified. You either have it or you don't: there's a binary on/off character to freedom which is just a stubborn fact about the idea of freedom itself. All of us make some compromises about our freedom.

At my university, I don't get up and use the university platform to abuse Viktor Orbán every day of the week. I moderate what I think and say about him. That's a compromise I make for the sake of an institution I'm trying to defend. So yes, there are compromises we make for the sake of institutions. There's going to be some moment as a researcher, as a thinker, where you think a thought that you want to express and begin to censor yourself. The moment you allow that censorship to happen you cease to become free in some way, and that will cost you and cost your society. So, yes, freedom depends on context; yes, you make compromises to safeguard institutions. But I think we all sense in our gut there's some moment when you cross a line and you know you've just surrendered your freedom. That we cannot do – that's what we live for in this place.

Thank you for listening.

Centre for Global Higher Education
UCL Institute of Education
London WC1H 0AL

www.researchcghe.org
[@ResearchCGHE](https://twitter.com/ResearchCGHE)

