The Central European University was founded in 1991 in response to the [fall of the Soviet Union and its alliance system](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolutions_of_1989). The founding vision was to create a university dedicated to examining the contemporary challenges of "[open societies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_society)"[[1]](#footnote-1) and [democratization](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratization). The initial aim of CEU was to create a [Western-modelled](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_world) yet distinctly Central European institution that would foster inter-regional cooperation and educate a new generation of regional leaders to help democratic transitions across the region. CEU was set up in Budapest, Prague, and Warsaw. It was originally located mostly in [Prague](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prague), but because of political and financial conflict between its founder and the Czech government, it was moved to [Budapest](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Budapest).

Entering into the details, CEU evolved from a series of lectures held at the [Inter-University C](http://www.iuc.hr/index.php)entre in [Dubrovnik](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dubrovnik), [Yugoslavia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yugoslavia) (now [Croatia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Croatia)). In 1989, as historical change was gathering momentum in the region, the need for a new, independent, international university emerged. The minutes of the gathering held in April 1989 records a discussion among scholars such as Rudolf Andorka, [Péter Hanák](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=P%C3%A9ter_Han%C3%A1k&action=edit&redlink=1), Márton Tardos, [István Teplán](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Istv%C3%A1n_Tepl%C3%A1n), [Tibor Vámos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tibor_V%C3%A1mos) and [Miklós Vásárhelyi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikl%C3%B3s_V%C3%A1s%C3%A1rhelyi) from Budapest; [William Newton-Smith](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Newton-Smith) and [Kathleen Wilkes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kathleen_Wilkes) from [Oxford](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Oxford); Jan Havranek, Michal Illner and Jiří Kořalka from Prague; Krzysztof Michalski and Włodzimierz Siwiński from Warsaw. George Soros liked the idea and undertook the financing of the new university.

In 1989–1990, a serious attempt was launched to establish a European University in the Slovak capital of [Bratislava](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bratislava), but it fell through, due to nationalist politicians' opposition. In the name of the “Štúr Society” 38 Slovak historians wrote an open letter in January 1990 and strongly opposed the use of the Slovak Parliament’s building for hosting the new university.

1. The term “open society” was introduced by the philosopher Karl Popper who deeply impressed at the London School of Economics one of his young students, an emigrated Hungarian G. Soros [↑](#footnote-ref-1)