

HUNGARY

University lies in legal limbo

Vote raises doubts about viability of Hungarian institution.

BY ALISON ABBOTT

The threatened Central European University (CEU) in Budapest has been dealt a blow in its efforts to avert possible closure.

On 17 October, Hungary's parliament voted to postpone for a year a decision that would allow the university to keep operating. At a press conference held by the university shortly after the vote, CEU rector Michael Ignatieff called the delay "unacceptable" and "unnecessary".

In April, the Hungarian government amended its higher-education law to require that all foreign-accredited universities there had to operate as higher-education institutes in their countries of origin by 1 January 2018.

The unexpected change drew protests and was widely believed to be politically motivated. Critics saw it as an attack on billionaire philanthropist George Soros, who founded the university in 1991 and has openly criticized Hungary's strict refugee policies.

The CEU took steps to comply with the new requirements and on 3 October sealed an agreement with Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, to provide educational activities there. Accredited courses run jointly by the universities would be launched next year, the CEU said. The agreement still needs to be signed by the Hungarian government and ratified by the country's parliament.

But on 16 October, the government proposed delaying the implementation of the amendmen until 1 January 2019, and the

parliament approved the delay the next day.

A government spokesperson told *Nature* that the purpose of the delay was to give other foreign higher-education institutions time to comply with the new requirements, adding that three institutions, including the CEU, are still in negotiation.

Zoltan Balogh, Hungary's minister for human capacity, suggested on 16 October that government sign-off of the CEU's agreement might have to wait for the new deadline.

"We are being deliberately kept in legal limbo," said Ignatieff, who fears the uncertainty will make it hard to retain faculty and recruit students. "We are being slowly strangled in this battle for academic freedom." ■

CORRECTION

The News story 'Japan faces science decline' (*Nature* **550**, 310–311; 2017) misspelt the name of the head of the Japan Science and Technology Agency. His name is Michinari Hamaguchi. Also, he is based in Tokyo, not in Kawaguchi.

And the News Feature 'The shape of work to come' (*Nature* **550**, 316–319; 2017) erroneously located the Human Computation Institute in Fairfax, Virginia. The institute is, in fact, in Ithaca, New York.