Welcome to Spotlight. I’m Bruce Gulland. And I’m Liz Waid. Spotlight uses a special English method of broadcasting. It is easier for people to understand, no matter where in the world they live. If you could change something about your country, what would it be? How would you try to change your country? A country’s past can influence its future. But many other things can influence the direction of a country too. Today’s Spotlight is on the Central European University. The CEU is trying to influence the countries of central Europe. It educates future world leaders. The early 1990s was a time of new beginning in Central and Eastern Europe. During the years after World War II, many countries in this area were communist. They were part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, or USSR. However, in the 1990s a lot of these countries became independent democracies. They planned to re-connect with democracies around the world. After the fall of the USSR, it was a time of celebration and hope. During this time of change, many people wanted to influence the direction of their countries. There were many different ideas about how to do this. Some people tried to influence the government. But other people chose to educate the next generation. They wanted to prepare for their country’s future, not just its present. This group started the CEU. A man named George Soros first had the idea for the CEU. This was in 1991. Soros chose Hungary’s capital, Budapest, to house the CEU. Budapest seemed like the perfect place for the University. The city is called the “crossroads of Europe”. It is in the center of Europe. Trains from all over the continent travel through the city. But Budapest was important for another reason: George Soros was born there. His parents were one of Budapest’s wealthy Jewish families. But Soros’ childhood was not easy. During World War II, Hungary and Nazi Germany were allies. But the Nazi government soon invaded and occupied the country. They wanted to destroy all Jewish people in the world. The Nazi government ordered Hungary’s government to help them. Soros spent over a year hiding. He and his family had to be very careful, or they could be captured and killed. A lot of Jewish people died this way. George Soros and his family were some of the few survivors. Soon after the war, they left the country. But Soros never forgot the pain that war and hatred bring. When George Soros started the University he hoped that it would give Hungary, and the rest of Central Europe, a new beginning. The University’s goal was to train the leaders of the future. Zbigniew Pelczybnski was a Polish teacher of politics at Oxford University. He helped plan the CEU with Soros. He believed it was the answer for a great need in the area. In a planning document for the University, he wrote: “Everyone in Central Europe today wants a high-quality Western education. The CEU will provide an education equal to the best Western Universities. It will be able to bring in the most intelligent students.” By training the best minds in the area, Soros believed he could help the countries of central Europe develop into more tolerant places. Students from many different countries would come together and learn. They would learn from teachers, and they would also learn from the other students. They would learn to respect and understand other people. In the future, they could lead their countries to do the same. Today, the Central European University teaches Master’s and Doctorate level courses in the Humanities. People from all around the world go there to receive degrees, just as planned. They study subjects like art, politics and history. But the CEU has always been more than a normal school. A lot of classes are designed with questions that affect real life, like the problem of global climate change. Students here do not just study the world: they learn to act in it. Some do so even while they are in school. Sean Coughlin of the BBC says: “The CEU also wants to put ideas into practice. There is a university access project for students from the Roma community. A digital learning project is opening up debates. Students discuss the idea of free speech with students at universities in Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, and Kazakhstan.” Teachers at CEU also encourage students to ask questions that make them think differently. Students still choose a traditional degree, but a lot of classes mix subjects. For example, the international relations and environmental science teachers created a class together. In the class, students explore conflicts over natural resources, like water and food. A problem like this does not have one solution. But by studying other subjects, students can prepare to deal with difficult issues outside of class. Central and Eastern Europe has changed a lot since George Soros started the CEU. Countries like Hungary left the USSR over 25 years ago. They have had to develop new governments, and economies. And a lot of people who started at the CEU led the way, as George Soros hoped. But not everyone is happy with the current situation. The great financial crisis in 2008 hurt a lot of people in the area. Some lost their homes, and do not have enough to survive. Many are wondering if becoming democratic was best for them. They wonder if co-operation between different countries and peoples was really worth it. The changes in Europe mean that the CEU must change too. But this does not mean that the CEU’s goals will change. CEU will continue to teach the next leaders of Central and Eastern Europe. The CEU will keep encouraging them to question, and learn from other people. But these leaders also must understand the future. In 2014, the school started a program called Frontiers of Democracy. The program brings together students to ask how the world has changed. They look at the best ways to lead and deal with issues. They attend lectures, talks by famous people, and try to discover the future for themselves. Together with their teachers, they are trying to answer questions that no one has asked in a very long time. Today, with the difficulties Europe faces, these questions are more important than ever. The writer of this program was Dan Christmann. The producer was Michio Ozaki. The voices you heard were from the United Kingdom and the United States. All quotes were adapted for this program and voiced by Spotlight. You can listen to this program again, and read it, on the internet at www.radioenglish.net. This program is called, ‘Education for the Future of Central Europe’. Tell us what you think about today’s program. You can leave a comment on our website. Or email us at radio@radioenglish.net. And find us on Facebook - just search for SpotlightRadio. We hope you can join us again for the next Spotlight program. Goodbye.