Business magnates George Soros and Richard Branson linked to Nick Clegg's drug research

By Ian Silvera

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George Soros and Richard Branson, two of the world's best-known liberal businessmen, have been revealed to have links with Nick Clegg's new research firm. The former deputy prime minister disclosed that organisations founded by the magnates gave his Open Reason Company £41,930 ($63,709) in 2015.

Virgin Group Holdings gave a £20,965 grant to support Open Reason's work on "international drug policy" and Open Society Institute-Budapest also gave the business £20,965 for the same reasons, according to the House of Commons' register of members' interest.

Elsewhere, the Resolution Trust, the body behind the Resolution Foundation think tank, gave Clegg's company a grant of £100,000 to help establish Open Reason. "Resolution Trust is providing some initial start-up support to Open Reason as its cross-party work on social policy issues such as mental health, prison reform and drugs policy reflect the trust's commitment to back new evidence-based research on long-term social and economic challenges facing the country," a spokesperson for the charity told IBTimes UK.

Clegg founded Open Reason in July alongside Innocent Drink's Richard Reed, Liberal Democrat peers Lord Rumi Verjee and Dame Pippa Harris as well as his former deputy chief of staff Tim Colbourne. A source close to the Sheffield Hallam MP told IBTimes UK that Open Reason will be supporting Clegg with work on drugs policy.
"Open Reason is a small, not-for-profit company set up to support Nick Clegg in his public role as a former deputy prime minister and to provide support for him to speak out on liberal issues that he cares about, such as drugs reform, Europe and social mobility," the source added.

The 48-year-old, who was appointed to the Global Commission on Drugs on 2 November, has been an advocate of drug law relaxation. Clegg appeared alongside Branson in the run-up to the general election in March to announce that, among other things, a Liberal Democrat government would move Whitehall policy on the issue to the Department of Health from the Home Office.

"Drug use is primarily a health issue," he said. "That's why, in our manifesto, the Liberal Democrats will commit to move the responsibility for drug policy from the Home Office to the Department of Health. Tackling supply is a matter for the police so that will stay with the Home Office. But reducing demand and minimising harm are questions of public health."

Open Society Institute–Budapest and the Open Society Foundations, which was established by Soros in 1993, had not responded to a request for comment at the time of publication. A Virgin Group spokeswoman said the company is not issuing any statement "at this point".