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# Whose Association Is It?

## Three MEFESZ in History of Hungary



### ABSTRACT

MEFESZ (Association of University and College Students, AHUCS), which is considered to have been the spark of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, was founded at the University of Szeged on 16 October 1956. The acronym (MEFESZ) appeared three times in the Hungarian history of the second half of the 20th century (in 1945, 1948, and 1956), and all three of them were youth and education organisations. The few years of the existence of each ‘MEFESZ’ has many lessons to teach.

The three organisations, abbreviated identically but different in long forms of their names, each had different objectives and roles. In this paper, we show that the 1956 AHUCS (the third MEFESZ) was not a successor to either of the earlier organisations: the first MEFESZ of the period of the “tentative democracy” (1945–1948) and the second MEFESZ (in the first period of the communist dictatorship, 1948–1950). The precursor of the 1956 revolution (MEFESZ<sub>3</sub>, AHUCS) was a new grassroots initiative, grounded in democratic principles in its aims, programs, and missions. The 1956 AHUCS organisation was not an umbrella organisation of student associations like the first MEFESZ organisation. The founders of the 1956 AHUCS were deliberate in not seeking to become the sole, unified organisation of university youth (like MEFESZ<sub>2</sub>).

### KEYWORDS

Hungarian history 1945–1957, 1956 Hungarian Revolution, MEFESZ, student organisation, student association, student movement

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## INTRODUCTION

MEFESZ<sub>3</sub>, which is considered to have been the spark of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, was founded in the Auditorium Maximum of the University of Szeged on 16 October 1956. The acronym (MEFESZ) appeared three times in Hungarian history in the second half of the 20th century (1945, 1948, 1956). In all three cases, the organisations were actors in the field of youth and education. The short course of their history and the short existence of each MEFESZ bears many lessons. They serve as a mirror to illustrate the social conditions of the time and, at the same time, provide us with a deeper understanding of the political context. The basis for writing this study was the fact that, after the publication of my recent papers on the Hungarian revolutionary youth of 1956, the question of the name, and more precisely, whether the 1956 MEFESZ was the successor or legal successor of the earlier MEFESZes, was raised repeatedly in professional circles and in letters to me from readers. In this paper, I would like to answer this question by presenting the history of the events and the histories of the organisations and by analysing the future orientation and mission of the 1956 university student organisation.

The literature on the 1956 MEFESZ paints a confused picture of the organisation's name. This may be partly due to the historical proximity and similar "profiles" of the two earlier MEFESZes, and partly to the specificities of mass communication in October 1956. This may have led to a "misunderstanding by implication" that the 1956 MEFESZ<sub>3</sub> was a reorganisation of the former MEFESZ<sub>1</sub>. Even the first newspaper report on the formation of the organisation on 18 October 1956 contained a misnomer: "As a result of the debate, a new youth organisation, the United Association of Hungarian University and College Students, was formed..."<sup>1</sup>

In 1967, after the revolution, in a work written under the Kádár dictatorship, János Molnár first described the organisation as a "recreation" of the youth organisation of the post-1945 coalition era.<sup>2</sup> This misstatement was reflected in the literature published in that era and in some of the literature written after the regime change.<sup>3</sup>

The following is a summary of the history of the three organisations. First, it should be noted that the abbreviation for the association formed in 1956 is MEFSZ. The second "e" is an inserted sound to ease pronunciation (MEFeSZ).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Délmagyarország, issue of 18 October, 1956.

<sup>2</sup> MOLNÁR 1967. 37.

<sup>3</sup> BERTÉNYI – GYAPAY 1992. 600., SZENTIRMAI – RÁCZNÉ 1999. 27., ROMSICS 1999. 385., MOLNÁR – KŐRÖSI – KELLER 2006. 372., SOMLAI 2016. 10.

<sup>4</sup> My statement that the second [e] sound – common in the Hungarian language – was included in the abbreviation to ease pronunciation was first published in our book Hungarian Association of University and College Students 1956 – Szeged, pp.159-168, based on our first interview with Tamás Kiss. "It was never, never the Me that was pushed to the foreground, but always the Us" (interview with Tamás Kiss), on pages 159-168 of the book, as note 4 on page 161. See KISS 2002. 161

## THE ALLIANCE OF HUNGARIAN UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE ASSOCIATIONS (1945–1948), THE FIRST MEFESZ (MEFESZ<sub>1</sub>)

The Alliance of Hungarian University and College Associations (AHUCA, Magyar Egyetemi és Főiskolai Egyesületek Szövetsége, MEFESZ<sub>1</sub>) was founded on 12 August 1945 at a youth conference held in Balatonlelle.<sup>5</sup> This umbrella organisation of student associations was established on the initiative of the Hungarian Democratic Youth Association (MADISZ).<sup>6</sup>

MADISZ was born in Debrecen on 7 December 1944. On 7 January 1945, it also started its activity in Szeged. The national leadership of MADISZ was established in Budapest on 23 April 1945. MADISZ was not only an organisation of higher education students. *“At that time, MADISZ was an independent, democratic youth organisation that did not belong to any political party, but the political influence of the MKP was strongly felt in its activities all along. [...] The political influence of the Communist Party was indirectly exerted through the communist youth and youth leaders working in the organisations: Ágnes Bakó, Jenő Hazai, András Hegedűs, Ervin Hollós<sup>7</sup>, István Kende, Béla Koós, György Nonn, Béla Szalai<sup>8</sup>, Hédi Vitéz, as well as through the communists working in the local organisations.”*<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See MICHELLER 1992 for more details.

<sup>6</sup> CSIKÓS 1979. 60.

<sup>7</sup> Ervin Hollós (originally: Holzschlag), (1923–2008), communist party worker. From 1938, he was secretary of the youth group of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party (MSZDP). Member of the illegal Communist Party. After completing six years of elementary school and then the party school in 1950-53, he was admitted to the Faculty of Humanities at ELTE, where he studied history. In the 1950s, he worked as a youth secretary of the MDP. From 1952 to 1956, he was secretary of the central leadership of DISZ. As a DISZ representative, he took part in the debates of the Petöfi Circle and took an extreme Stalinist position. During the 1956 revolution, he stayed in the Party House in Köztársaság Square and later in the Parliament. After 4 November, at the personal request of János Kádár, he was transferred to the Ministry of Interior. In 1956-1957 he worked at the Investigation Department of the political police in Gyorskocsi utca. He was a leading figure in the post-revolutionary repression. From June 1957, as a police lieutenant-colonel, he was deputy head of Department II/5 of the Ministry of Interior. In 1961, he was appointed head of the Ministry of Interior's Counter-Internal Reaction Department. From 1962, he was deputy head of the Marxism-Leninism Education Department of the Ministry of Education and a university lecturer at the Budapest University of Technology. His books on 1956 are today seen as examples of the falsification of history about the period. See HOLLÓS 1967 and HOLLÓS-LAJTAI 1986, and EÖRSI 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Béla István Szalai (1922–2008) communist politician, economist. He studied economics at the Technical University of Budapest. In 1943, he joined the Hungarian Peasant Association and became a member of the Community of Peasant College Students. In January 1945, he was elected head of the economic department of the Hungarian Democratic Youth Association (MADISZ). From then on, he was a member of the Hungarian Communist Party. He worked in the youth secretariat of the MKP and in the party's general secretariat. He graduated in 1946. In 1947–1948, he was President of the Association of Hungarian University and College Associations (MEFESZ1). In 1949, he was General Secretary and later Vice-President of the Hungarian Youth People's Association (MINSZ), the central youth organisation set up by the Communist dictatorship. In June 1953, he became a member of the MDP Central Executive Committee (KV) and an alternate member of the Political Committee (PB). He was the Minister of Light Industry from 30 October 1954 to 8 September 1955. He was a member of the anti-Imre Nagy party line. He played no part in the 1956 revolution.

<sup>9</sup> CSIKÓS 1979. 60.

The first president of the Alliance of Hungarian University and College Associations was Pál Jónás<sup>10</sup>, who believed that “after the clearing of the ruins and the reconstruction of the country, which had gone through so much suffering, a democratic, happy and balanced era was ahead”<sup>11</sup>, but soon the “destruction of the democratic, independent-minded young generation striving for revolutionary and social truths and social achievements began.”<sup>12</sup> On 22 November 1945, statutes of the Alliance of Hungarian University and College Associations were adopted in the second Student Parliament.

On May 28-29 1946, a national student leaders’ meeting was held in Szeged, organised by the Students of the University of Szeged (Szegedi Egyetemi és Főiskolai Ifjúság, SZEFI). The president of SZEFI was László Péter. The president of the national umbrella organisation, AHUCA (MEFESZ<sub>1</sub>), was Pál Jónás. Erik Molnár<sup>13</sup>, Minister of National Welfare and Dezső Keresztury<sup>14</sup>, Minister of Religion and Education also attended the meeting. In September 1946, in the first issue of the newspaper *University Life*, they published their position on the reorganisation of the national umbrella organisation, the Alliance of Hungarian University and College Associations (MEFESZ<sub>1</sub>):

1. *All university or college students automatically become members of the faculty or other unit organisations upon enrolment. Membership carries both rights and obligations.*
2. *2% of the tuition fees shall be transferred by the Minister of Culture to the faculty unit organisation.*
3. *Three unit organisations should be set up in Budapest: one at Pázmány Péter University, one made up of the faculty associations of the Technical University, and one of the colleges.*
4. *MEFESZ should be structured as follows: the Board should be elected by democratically elected representatives in proportion to the number of young people enrolled (one per 300) and sent to the Central Executive Committee (Központi Intéző Bizottság, KIB). In addition to the Board (which is the executive body), there is also a Co-Chairs’ Committee (Társelnöki Bizottság, TB), a decision-making body made up of the presidents of six unit organisations (Pázmány Péter University, Technical University, colleges, University of Pécs, University of*

<sup>10</sup> Pál Jónás (1922–1998) studied economics at Pázmány Péter University from 1940. In 1942, he joined the far-right Turul Alliance, later becoming its cultural vice-president. After the Arrow Cross coup d’état following the German occupation of Hungary on 20 December 1944, he was arrested by the Arrow Cross and handed over to the Gestapo, but managed to escape while being transported to prison. In January 1945, he helped found MADISZ. He was president of MEFESZ when he got interrogated by ÁVO in 1947 as they were preparing a show trial, after which he resigned. He was arrested in October 1948 and detained in Kistarcsa and then in Reesk until 1953. On 27 June 1956, he took part in the Petőfi Circle press debate. After the Soviet intervention, he left the country and settled in the United States and then in Mexico. See also. JÓNÁS 1971.

<sup>11</sup> BENKŐ 1964. 13–14.; JÓNÁS 1971.

<sup>12</sup> BENKŐ 1964. 13–14.

<sup>13</sup> Erik Molnár (1894–1966) was a historian, philosopher, economist, lawyer and politician, professor at ELTE. Between December 1944 and October 1956, he was involved in all Hungarian governments. From 1944 to September 1947, he was Minister of National Welfare. Minister of Justice from September 1947 to August 1948. President of the Supreme Court from 1953 to October 1956, Minister of Justice in October. After 1956, he was ousted from power.

<sup>14</sup> Dezső Keresztury (1904–1996) writer, poet, literary historian, critic, literary translator, university professor, member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He completed his university studies at the Eötvös College, and obtained his degree in Hungarian and German Studies in 1928. From 1945 to 1947, he was Minister of Religion and Education as a member of the National Peasant Party. Between 1945 and 1948, he was the principal of Eötvös College. From 1948 to 1950, he worked in the library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and from 1950 until his retirement, he worked in the National Széchényi Library.

*Debrecen, University of Szeged). Without the TB, important decisions (action before ministries, representation abroad, political position, etc.) cannot be taken. The Political Committee, consisting of two university or college students who are party delegates from each coalition party, also works alongside the Board as an advisory body with a political perspective.*

5. *There is no quorum in either the KIB or the TB meetings without a representative of the universities in the countryside. A KIB membership may be delegated to another person by written mandate on a case-by-case basis.*

6. *Universities in the countryside have only unit organisations: faculty organisations have a high degree of autonomy.*

7. *The sports clubs (BEAC, DEAC, PEAC, and SZEAC) function as sports departments of the unit organisations and have appropriate autonomy.*

8. *The press of MEFESZ is a weekly newspaper (four pages). Its editors shall be appointed by the TB as an editorial board on the proposal of the MEFESZ Board.”<sup>15</sup>*

The following year, a communist leadership took over the Federation of Hungarian University and College Associations. The leadership, which had been under constant pressure<sup>16</sup> (Secretary General Jenő Hám, Board Member László Németh, and President Pál Jónás) resigned, and Béla Szalai, who at the time was working in the Youth Secretariat of MKP, became President.<sup>17</sup> From 1947 onwards, the leadership of the Alliance of Hungarian University and College Associations moved away from the multiparty pluralism advocated when it was founded. From then on, it sought “unified communist leadership in the life of university and college student associations”<sup>18</sup>. From this point onwards, the diverse youth civil scene was in its final days. “Unity” became the keyword. In the process of building up the communist dictatorship, the creation of a “unified” (i.e. uniformly communist) university youth organisation entered its final phase. As a result, an event took place that symbolically expressed the fact that the organisation had become communist-led. On 20 January 1948, MEFESZ<sub>1</sub> removed the statues of István Werbőczy<sup>19</sup> and Maria Theresa<sup>20</sup> from the Pantheon in Szeged’s Dóm Square.<sup>21</sup> The event was portrayed in the press as an act of young people representing progressive ideas. This was the action of a small group of people. In the spring of 1948, the Szeged Unit of the Alliance of Hungarian University and College Associations had eight faculty groups with 20 active students (out of nearly 1,500 university and college students).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The document is published in HEGYI 1987. 315–316.

<sup>16</sup> President Pál Jónás was arrested in connection with the so-called anti-republican conspiracy and interrogated at 60 Andrassy utca. See also JÓNÁS 1971.

<sup>17</sup> SZALAI 1970.

<sup>18</sup> MICHELLER 1992. 139.

<sup>19</sup> István Werbőczy (1458–1541) Hungarian jurist, royal magistrate, royal personal representative, the governor of Hungary, author of the Tripartitum (1514). In these books the legal rules and customary laws of contemporary Hungary were written down.

<sup>20</sup> Maria II, full name in German: Maria Theresia Walburga Amalia Christina (1717–1780), Queen of Hungary from 1740 to 1780.

<sup>21</sup> *Szegedi Hírlap*. 21 January 1949

<sup>22</sup> László Perjés, Secretary of the Youth Executive Committee of the MKP in Szeged, reports to the Central Executive Committee of the MKP. 11 May 1948.

This period is well illustrated by the statement of Gyula Técsy, a law student and member of the board of the Alliance of Hungarian University and College Associations: *“We, university youths, are also trying to do our part in preparing the creation of youth unity, we are trying to raise from our ranks members who will be able to lead the united youth organisation, together with the young people of the working class and the working peasantry. Mátyás Rákosi<sup>23</sup> recently announced the need to review the leadership of mass organisations. This was also a topical political issue in Szeged, and following the criticism, an internal change took place, which brought MEFESZ closer to the youth organisation that was to be formed.”<sup>24</sup>*

From our overview of organisational history so far, the political-organisational tactics that the Communist Party preferred to use during the period of so-called “tentative democracy”<sup>25</sup> are clearly visible. The political organisers of the time held the view that whoever held the leadership of youth organisations represented the youth, and whoever represented the youth controlled the masses of youth. The attack to gain control of the youth took several directions.

One tactic was to gain control over youth and student organisations. This was done by the communist core, who became a stronger voice, more assertive in its leadership, and aggressive in its rhetoric. The close cooperation of this minority with the power structures of the emerging dictatorship made the leaders of the organisations representing the majority of young people more insecure and increasingly silent. At the same time, their withdrawal and resignation were accompanied by an increase in the number of communist sympathisers in the leadership. In this way, the “communist voice” in the leadership increasingly prevailed in decision-making.

The other tactic was to support the foundation of many organisations. In the struggle for youth leadership, as an increasing number of organisations were created, the boundaries that distinguish one organisation from another became blurred. Differences in ideology, social status, religion, and values have become indistinguishable and entangled. In this confusion, the disciplined and purposeful cooperation of communist youth organisers made their actions more effective. The voices of non-communist youth organisations were less visible in the communist-controlled mass media. For young people, this gave the impression that all the organisations were on the extreme left.

The third tactic, aimed at gaining youth representation, was to “create leadership”. More specifically, the idea was to create a top position in a reconstituted hierarchy with leadership functions and competencies. This was done in such a way that the organisations, already occupied by the communists themselves, requested, or even demanded, that a top organisation should be created to exercise control over the existing organisations. A so-called umbrella organisation was set up above and from outside all of the youth organisations. “From outside” in this case meant a political power outside the organisation, while “above” meant the creation of an apex organisation above the existing organisations.

*“From the autumn of 1946, the tone of the discourse on democracy became more and more strident, the stigmatizing exclusionary tendencies of the communist side intensified, while in*

<sup>23</sup> Mátyás Rákosi (until 1903 Mátyás Rosenfeld, 1892–1971) was the General Secretary and then First Secretary of the Hungarian Communist Party and the Hungarian Workers’ Party between 1945 and 1956, and also President of the Council of Ministers of the Hungarian People’s Republic in 1952–1953.

<sup>24</sup> *Délvidéki Hírlap* 24 March 1950

<sup>25</sup> The period from the end of World War II to the beginning of the establishment of the communist dictatorship in Hungary (1945–1948). See Botos et al 1988, Gyarmati 2011

*daily political practice the law enforcement agencies were increasingly active in providing constructed evidence on the mine-laying activities carried out by the enemies of the new social order. By 1947, it became clear that the communists believed that the right to politics did not apply to all actors, but only to those who respected the end they had set themselves; by 1949, they had come to openly admitting that popular democracy was essentially a form of communist dictatorship.*"<sup>26</sup>

In February 1948, the Political Committee (Politikai Bizottság, PB) of the Hungarian Communist Party (Magyar Kommunista Párt, MKP) decided to establish a unified youth organisation. With the establishment of the Hungarian Youth People's Association (MINSZ) in March 1948, "*the party struggle to win over the youth came to an end*".<sup>27</sup> The leaders of the organisation (György Nonn, president; Zsigmond S. Nagy and János Gosztonyi<sup>28</sup>, vice-presidents; Ervin Hollós, secretary general) held communist views.

## UNIFIED ORGANISATION OF HUNGARIAN UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE STUDENTS (1948–1950), THE SECOND MEFESZ (MEFESZ<sub>2</sub>)

From 1947 onwards, the communists began to seize power using the Stalinist model and tactics. Opposing leaders were ousted by the parties forming the governing coalition. In June 1948, the Hungarian Workers' Party (HWP, Magyar Dolgozók Pártja, MDP) was formed through a merger of the Social Democratic Party (Szociáldemokrata Párt, SZDP) and the Communist Party (Magyar Kommunista Párt, MKP). The party was under communist control. By this time, all the parties had been successfully "salami-sliced", and the leaders and prominent members of the parties that had been in operation since 1945 had, almost without exception, either already been arrested or forced into emigration or collaboration. On 1 February 1949, the former coalition parties (Independent Smallholders' Party, Független Kisgazdapárt, FKGP, Nemzeti Parasztpárt, National Peasants' Party, NPP), led by politicians willing to collaborate with the communists, were forced into a united front with MDP (and led by the communists) and the Hungarian Independence People's Front (Magyar Függetlenségi Népfront, Peoples' Front). The first one-party election was held in 1949. Only the candidates of the People's Front could be voted for. The list of candidates was drawn by the MDP.

<sup>26</sup> Kiss 2020. 151. For more details see: Medgyesi 2017.

<sup>27</sup> CSIKÓS 1979. 66.

<sup>28</sup> János Gosztonyi (1925–1985) was a politician. Graduated from high school in 1942, then studied economics at the Royal Hungarian József Nádor University of Technology and Economics in Budapest. Between 1943 and 1944, and again between 1946 and 1949, he lived in the Györfly Dormitory, where he became involved in youth movements. From 1945 he was an organiser of the Hungarian Democratic Youth Association in Celldömölk and an activist of the Hungarian Communist Party. From 1946 he was head of the organizational department of the People's Youth League (NISZ) and later deputy secretary general. Between 1946 and 1948 he represented the NISZ in the Association of Hungarian University and College Associations. In 1948 he joined the Hungarian Workers' Party. He was a member of the Presidential Council from 1953 to 1963.

The People's Front list received 95.6% of the votes. After the elections, the installation of communist dictatorship began. Under the 1949 Constitution, the Hungarian People's Republic was born. All aspects of the economy, society, education, science, and culture were nationalised. Planned economy was introduced and the council system was established following the Soviet model. "The autonomy of the branches of power and administration became a semblance. The MDP manually controlled the actual functioning of politics."<sup>29</sup>

The fifth Student Parliament of the Alliance of Hungarian University and College Associations (AHUCA, MEFESZ<sub>1</sub>) held in the spring of 1948 changed the name to Unified Organisation of Hungarian University and College Students (UOHUCS, Magyar Egyetemisták és Főiskolások Egységes Szervezete, MEFESZ<sub>2</sub>), following the example of the Stalinist monolithic system.<sup>30</sup> The acronym "MEFESZ" was retained.<sup>31</sup>

At this milestone, we must pause for a moment. As we shall see later, when we come to the history of the birth of AHUCS (Association of Hungarian University and College Students, Magyar Egyetemisták és Főiskolások Szövetsége, MEFESZ<sub>3</sub>) in 1956, despite the similarity of the organisational name, there are fundamental differences between the two earlier MEFESZes (AHUCA and UOHUCS) and the MEFESZ (AHUCS) born in 1956, which are the result of different conceptions of democracy.

Born in 1945, the MEFESZ<sub>1</sub> organisation was established as an umbrella organisation of the diverse scenario of university and college student associations, and then, in the transformation of 1948, MEFESZ<sub>2</sub> defined itself as a monolithic higher education student organisation. Instead of the former self-organising associations at the faculty or university level, from the autumn of 1948, students could only join this single, uniformed student organisation, seemingly by voluntary declaration of membership.

From 1948 onwards, the Hungarian Youth People's Association (HYPA, Magyar Ifjúság Népi Szövetsége, MINSZ) managed the Unified Organisation of Hungarian University and College Students (UOHUCS, MEFESZ<sub>2</sub>).<sup>32</sup> As a result, it played an inglorious role in the university "reform" from 1949 onwards, in the removal of lecturers and students by means of show hearings and disciplinary measures in the name of the fight against reaction. From the autumn of 1949 on, the leadership of the Unified Organisation of Hungarian University and College Students (UOHUCS), on the basis of MDP guidelines, advocated the creation of a unified youth organisation (and thus the abolition of the UOHUCS).<sup>33</sup>

This shows that by 1950, the communist dictatorship gradually eroded and dismantled former youth organisations.

It did so by channelling it into the HYPA (MINSZ), which then merged into the Union of Working Youth (UWJ, Dolgozó Ifjúság Szövetsége, DISZ) created on 18 June 1950. DISZ was the only centralised organisation for young people aged 14–26 (following the Soviet model).

<sup>29</sup> Kiss 2020. 153.

<sup>30</sup> The Soviet Komsomol, which served as the model, celebrated its 30th anniversary in 1948. See also. *Szabad Nép* 17 October 1948.

<sup>31</sup> A turnaround among young people. *Szabad Nép* 12 May 1948.

<sup>32</sup> The Hungarian Youth People's Association (MINSZ) was founded in Budapest on 22 March 1948, and the dissolution of MADISZ was declared.

<sup>33</sup> HOLLÓS 1949.

Lajos Szűcs was appointed to be the first secretary general of DISZ, and János Gosztonyi, István Kádas, and György Várhegyi became secretaries. János Gosztonyi, the secretary of the Central Executive Committee of DISZ, published his thoughts in the January 1956 issue of *University Youth*: “*We want a youth unity at the universities based on the world view of Marxism-Leninism and the unified pursuit of the policies of our party. It is therefore necessary that the dominant, leading role in the universities should be played by communist students. [...] But this [...] can only be worked out if we pursue a consistent class policy without wavering, which includes a majority of students of working class and peasant origin. The majority of students must come from the ranks of the working class and the working peasantry.*”<sup>34</sup>

Under the higher education admission system in effect from that time onwards, the proportion of students of non-working class or peasant origin (so-called “origin X”) could not exceed ten per cent of the total number of students admitted.

During the next five years (1950–1955), the leadership of DISZ became a part of the party nomenclature. In 1955, DISZ had seven hundred thousand members.<sup>35</sup>

## THE ASSOCIATION OF HUNGARIAN UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE STUDENTS (1956–1957) THE THIRD MEFESZ (MEFSZ, MEFESZ, MEFESZ<sub>3</sub>)

In the autumn of 1956, Hungary’s universities, especially in Budapest and Szeged were in ferment. The first event leading to this was the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) held on 14–25 February 1956.

In a four-hour speech at a closed session of the Congress, the party’s number one leader, Khrushchev<sup>36</sup>, “exposed” the crimes of Stalin and Stalinism. The manipulative purpose and Janus-faced nature of this “unmasking” is illustrated by the fact that the speech was not heard live by the foreign delegations attending the congress, and the party leaders of the socialist camp and the French and Italian communist leaders were not privy to the content of the secret speech until two days later. From the speech, the main elements of which had already been formulated at the meeting of the Central Committee of the USSR Communist Party held a week before the congress<sup>37</sup>, and from the press coverage in Hungary, which was based on the MTI reports<sup>38</sup>, could be interpreted by the citizens of the states under the Russian yoke as a kind of intention and aspiration for regime reform.<sup>39</sup> The 20<sup>th</sup> Congress had a strong impact on the countries of the Eastern Bloc, including Hungary. Among party members, questions of how the system could be repaired and mended

<sup>34</sup> *Egyetemi Ifjúság* 1956. január 11. 1.

<sup>35</sup> TÓTH 1984.

<sup>36</sup> Nikita Sergejevich Khrushchev (1894–1971) Russian-born Soviet communist politician. After Stalin’s death, 1953 from 1964 First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

<sup>37</sup> FURSZENKO 2004. See also: BARÁTH 2006.

<sup>38</sup> Hungarian Telegraphic Office (MTI) is the Hungarian National News Agency

<sup>39</sup> MTI international news 14-18 February 1956. 1.

(including the assertion of collective leadership, the rehabilitation of the victims of show trials, “anti-dogmatism” and “anti-Stalinism”) were raised.

Tamás Kiss, the compiler of the political programme of AHUCS (MEFESZ<sub>3</sub>) and the spokesman for the academic and political demands at the General Assembly on 20 October, talked about the “social climate change” of the early autumn of 1956 as follows. *“A year earlier, it was unheard of that students would talk about political issues among themselves, even in a corner, in a dormitory room, or in a private conversation. It was taboo. Simply no one dared to risk voicing an opinion even if they had one. By September 1956, it had become clear that something was about to change. Something was going to happen, something was happening around us.”*<sup>40</sup>

From the early autumn of 1956, discussions began between Tamás Kiss, András Lejtényi, Iván Abrudbányai, János Aszalós, Imre Tóth, Miklós Vető, and other students at the University of Szeged, about what courses of action could be considered to achieve a freer student life.

Between 10 and 13 October, a letter arrived in Szeged. The letter was sent to Helmut Alaksza, a second-year law student at the University of Szeged, by Károly Román, a humanities student in Budapest (ELTE). The letter, dated 10 October, was signed “From the students of humanities in Budapest”. It was unknown under what circumstances the letter was written. According to this letter, *“the spirit of Congress broke the shackles of ideas. Today, the concepts of democracy and socialism are beginning to take substance. [...] The aim of the demonstration of the students of Budapest on 6 October was to tear apart the fears that had been weighing on souls and to restore the right to free expression. This was our first step and the next step will be determined by the current political situation. However, while we give voice to the demands of the masses, we cannot disregard our own situation either. The current university education system is producing intellectual cripples, not knowledgeable professionals, and despite the fact that state leadership knows this as well as we do, no action has been taken to remedy the situation so far. We are forced to act! Our first step must be to make the Russian language optional. [...] Note that teaching the Russian language in this way is a consequence of Russian chauvinism, which was fed by Stalinism. We therefore call on you to join us in a united strike on 22 October 1956 for the Russian language to be made optional.”*<sup>41</sup>

In the first days of October, Kiss, Lejtényi, and Tóth visited the medical school dormitory and the liberal arts dormitory, and organised and presented their ideas for the creation of a new university student union. During these days, they spoke to the rector of the University of Szeged (Dezső Baróti), to whom they explained the need for the creation of an advocacy organisation and talked about the planned organisation’s structure and objectives. The university rector said that he would support the students’ association if it was established.

On the morning of 15 October, the draft of the organisational rules of the new association and the provisional name “Students’ Association” (Diákszövetség) were adopted at the University Students’ Club.

On 16 October, a meeting with DISZ took place at the student club. At the meeting, András Lejtényi and Tamás Kiss presented their positions on Russian language education and student representation to the participants. During the meeting, they stressed that they definitely wanted to create a new youth association.

<sup>40</sup> Kiss 2000. 53.

<sup>41</sup> Published in Kiss 2002. 175.

According to István Sipos, DISZ secretary, the MEFESZ<sub>3</sub> organisers set 5pm as the starting time for the student assembly. However, the DISZ leadership had previously been informed that because of the public mood in the student club, many students would turn up for the 5pm meeting and would “*declare DISZ dissolved*”<sup>42</sup>. Therefore, with the aim of disconnecting the crowd from the leaders, they organised a large rally in the university’s main lecture hall, the Auditorium Maximum<sup>43</sup> at the same time as the meeting, and advertised it on hand-drawn posters.

István Sipos recalled that “*Contrary to what had previously been announced, they refused to develop a common position with us and threatened to invoke the masses. Finally, Lejtényi and Tamás Kiss in particular interrupted further discussions, and the MEFESZ representatives present, upon Lejtényi’s words, “come on guys, the masses are waiting”, got up and left for the university building in Ady Square, where most of the youth were already together.*”<sup>44</sup>

From the student club, the organisers of the new student union and the leaders of DISZ started in two directions. Kiss, Lejtényi, and other students went to AudMax (to their fellow students), and the DISZ leaders went to the university party committee to ask for further guidance. However, they did not receive any guidance there, as the inertia of the “ancien régime” had already shown. “*By the time we got there (Sipos later said) the students had already started the meeting, and the crowd was so big that we could hardly get into the hall.*”<sup>45</sup>

On arrival at AudMax, Tamás Kiss and András Lejtényi stepped up to the podium and opened the meeting. Tamás Kiss greeted the audience and introduced his fellow students, and Lejtényi said that the attendees were patriots who had started a movement for students’ rights. Then the students formed a student union, the Hungarian Association of University and College Students (AHUCS, Magyar Egyetemisták és Főiskolások Szövetsége, MEFESZ<sub>3</sub>). In the first part of the meeting, the necessity, aims, principles, and organisational framework of the organisation were discussed. Then Tamás Kiss took the floor. He spoke about the fact that the association would also make academic and social demands, and that this would happen at the programme-forming meeting on 20 October, which was to take place after the faculty meetings where the faculty demands would be formulated. At that time, academic demands were raised. The atmosphere began to intensify. One participant, József Görög, a DISZ leader, recalled that “*before the meeting, several party members, and the DISZ functionaries agreed that they would try to move the meeting back on track by their comments. But they couldn’t, as some of their speakers were jeered and booed by the participants.*”<sup>46</sup> The mood of the meeting changed from minute to minute. In his speech, Tivadar Putnik, a humanities student, argued in favour of making political demands. Putnik’s proposal demanded the removal of the Russian troops. The AHUCS organisers then suggested that the issue of AHUCS (MEFSZ, MEFESZ<sub>3</sub>) demands should be closed now and that the formulation of demands should continue on the 20th. At the end of the meeting, it was decided that the Steering Committee of AHUCS should draw up the organisational rules and

<sup>42</sup> Testimony of István Sipos, 26 August 1957 CSML XXV. 9/b. Criminal Court records of Szeged County Court. B. 1249/1957

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup> *Service report 23 August 1957*. B.M. Csongrád County Police Headquarters Political Investigation Department, Szeged.

program and then resubmit them for adoption at the General Assembly on 20 October. Several demands were repeated and rewarded with enthusiastic applause. According to secretary László Székely, these were the main demands:

1. *Withdrawal of Soviet troops*
2. *Public hearing of Mihály Farkas*
3. *Imre Nagy to the leadership*
4. *Review of commercial contracts*
5. *Termination of the Warsaw Treaty and neutrality.*<sup>47</sup>

*“It was a noisy night. (Tamás Kiss told us in an interview with him) Although a few of us, Lejtényi, Gönczöl, myself, Imre Tóth, about six or eight of us, the most agile members of this group, walked over to one of the dorms. We drafted (on a little typewriter) a letter addressed to all the students in the country: Join us!”*<sup>48</sup> The text of the call was as follows:

*“Student Brothers! We, the students of the University of Szeged, the Medical University of Szeged, the College of Pedagogy of Szeged, and the College of Music Teacher Training formed our own university youth organisation on 16 October 1956, the Association of Hungarian University and College Students. Our aim is the freedom of thought so that we can brush off the burden forced on us by Stalin and Rákosi. We want to defend our special student interests, and we want to go on and develop free. DISZ – as we see it and as the leading board of DISZ also admits – has lost the confidence of the youth and is also lagging far behind the Party in its development. We cannot wait for it to catch up. We cannot wait until the house collapses upon us. That is why we, in the spirit of the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress, have formed a new, independent organisation which only represents the interests of the college and university students of today. We, the students of Szeged took the first step, we call you to join us!!!*

*Let’s expand MEFSZ into a nationwide organisation! Brothers of us! It is about you as well, Your interests are at stake. United we stand! Join MEFSZ! Szeged, 17 October 1956, The Szeged MEFSZ”*<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> László Székely’s interrogation report of 28 August 1957.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Tamás Kiss. Published in: Kiss 2002. 138.

<sup>49</sup> Published in Jancsák 2016. 221.

D I A K Ö S T V E R S E I N K E I

Mi, a Szegedi Tudományegyetem, a Szegedi Orvostudományegyetem, a Szegedi Pedagógiai Főiskola, a Szegedi Zenetanárképző hallgatói 1956 október 16-án létrehoztuk saját egyetemi ifjúsági szervezetünket a Magyar Egyetemisták és Főiskolások Szövetségét. Munkánk gondolatát a Sztralin és Hákosi által ránkényszerített szellemi iga lornássa. Mag akarjuk védeni hajtatos egyetemist érdekeinket, szabadon akarunk haladni, fejlődni.

A D I S Z - tapasztalatunk szerint, melyet maga a D I S Z Központi Vezetősége is beismer - elvezetette az ifjúság bizalmát, ezenkívül messze elmaradt fejlődésében a Párt mögött. Mi nem várhatjuk meg, míg utoléri JK Nem várhatunk, mert fejlünkre ég a ház. Észert, a XX. Kongresszus szellemében egy új, a D I S Z-től teljesen független ifjúsági szervezetet hoztunk létre, amely kizárólag a mi: egyetemisták és főiskolások érdekeit képviseli. Mi, a szegediek, megtettük az első lépést, felhívunk benneteket

C S A T L A K O Z Z A T O K !!!

Terjesszük ki országos méretűvé a MAFSZ-t!

Hektészvéri Bőlad is es. Vm, a Te érdekeid forogtak kockán. Egyedben az erő,

C S A T L A K O Z Z A M E F S Z -hez!!!

Szeged, 1956. október 17.

A szegedi MEFSZ.

The first proclamation of AHUCS (The Szeged MEFSZ), 17 October 1956

This meeting was reported in the 18 October issue of the daily Délmagyarország: “MEF-ESZ was formed, or rather, its Szeged branch, which operates alongside DISZ, and the inaugural meeting turned into a mass rally. The young people sharply criticised the present form and system of teaching foreign languages, Marxism-Leninism, and national defense, and also decided to address the country’s leaders with their the demands on certain issues of political life. They demand, among other things, the abolition of the death penalty, a public trial of those found guilty of wrongdoings – above all in the Rajk case – the equalisation of salaries, the settlement of salaries for the low-paid, an alliance with Yugoslavia, and the improvement of information.”<sup>50</sup> In this report, the paper did not give a full account of the students’ demands (e.g. the demand for democratic elections or the withdrawal of foreign troops was not reported).

In the following days, Szeged’s higher education institutions held faculty meetings and created demands reflecting the specificities of their faculties. During these days, Tamás Kiss and András Lejtényi (together with the students involved in the organisation of AHUCS<sup>51</sup>) held negotiations with DISZ. In these negotiations, the DISZ leaders focused on the need for AHUCS (MEFESZ<sub>3</sub>) to define itself not as an independent organisation, but as part of DISZ. During the days of 18-19 October, the AHUCS organisers agreed “that DISZ has been discredited and that the name of the new organisation should be AHUCS. [...] The position of AHUCS was that AHUCS should be independent of DISZ until the DISZ’s honour was restored.”<sup>52</sup> It was made clear to the DISZ leaders<sup>53</sup> that an independent and grassroots organisation would be set up as a student self-government representing the interests of a specific group of students. The minutes of the meeting on the AHUCS’s (MEFESZ<sub>3</sub>) statutes, held in the student club on 17 October, state: “We will operate independently of DISZ. [...] We distance ourselves from DISZ. If DISZ regains the lost confidence, we will not be needed anyway [...] We will not hand over power to DISZ. [...] The common, unifying organisation should not be called DISZ. Our relationship with the DISZ is clear; yesterday’s members’ meeting said so. The name of the comprehensive body should not be DISZ either.”<sup>54</sup>

The new organisation held its second general assembly on 20 October. The meeting was attended and recorded by György Garai, a correspondent of Hungarian Radio.<sup>55</sup> At this event, after the opening speech by Dezső Gönczöl, András Lejtényi took the floor and presented the draft Rules of Organisation and Operation (SZMSZ). After the adoption of the SZMSZ, Tamás

<sup>50</sup> Délmagyarország 1956. október 18.

<sup>51</sup> János Ambrus, Iván Abrudbányai, Vilmos Ács, Iván Csete, György Halász, Károly Hámori, Dezső Gönczöl, Tivadar Putnik, László Székely, Imre Tóth

<sup>52</sup> László Székely’s interrogation report of 28 August 1957.

<sup>53</sup> “The DISZ leaders sat at the long table, and we sat here. Not all 18 of us, but maybe 10 or so. Formally, the organisation was not established because it would have needed a permit, but we considered it formed and that was enough. For practically two days, we argued about whether we should stay within DISZ, so we should not do this separate organisation, but as DISZ members – because as many of us as there were, we were all DISZ members, and there were even DISZ leaders among us, although only group leaders, not senior leaders. So should we stay within DISZ and demand these rights there? But with the exception of maybe one or two people, the vast majority of this group of 18 and basically myself, András and Imre, we all said no way, we are not going to cooperate with DISZ, we are fed up with it, you have lied enough, you have fooled us enough. Now we will go through with it.” Kiss 2002. 140.

<sup>54</sup> The litigation of Tamás Kiss and his associates. CSML B.1249/1957.

<sup>55</sup> See JANCÁSÁK 2017 for more details.

Kiss took the floor to present the political program of AHUCS (MEFESZ<sub>3</sub>), which was drafted based on the proposals of the faculty meetings<sup>56</sup>. Tamás Kiss then first presented the academic demands and then the political demands, which were adopted by unanimous vote, with a few points added.

***The political claims of AHUCS (Szeged, 20 October 1956):***

1. *“We press for bringing those into justice who are responsible for the crimes of the last era and the trials should be public!*
2. *We press for the freedom of information! The press should comment everything in full details!*
3. *We press for reelecting Imre Nagy and György Lukács into the Central Leading Board!*
4. *We claim a salary reform! The upper limit of incomes coming from the state should be announced and the improvement of low salaries should be accelerated!*
5. *We press for abolishing death penalty concerning political crimes!*
6. *We press for a reestablished, free, democratic system of elections!*
7. *We claim that university youth should play a greater role in directing the political and other matters of the country!*
8. *The national celebration of 15 March should be restored!*
9. *Russian troops should be withdrawn!*
10. *The mandatory delivery of peasants’ surplus should be abolished!*
11. *Let there be university autonomy!*
12. *We press for the restoration of the 1848 Kossuth coat of arms!”*<sup>57</sup>

The following were the milestones in the birth of the student movement starting in Szeged and the development of their demands on a national scale:

- 16 October, University of Szeged (inauguration)
  - 20 October, University of Szeged (adoption of organisational rules, programme, academic and political demands)
  - student assemblies in Hungarian universities, where the Szeged delegates presented their demands:
- 21 October
- Pedagogical College of Eger (the delegate from Szeged was Sándor Szőke Sándor),
- 22 October
- Budapest Technical University of Construction and Transport (the delegates from Szeged were Tamás Kiss and András Lejtényi)
  - University of Debrecen (the delegates from Szeged were János Ambrus and Gábor Jancsó)
  - Gödöllő University of Agricultural Sciences (the delegates from Szeged were Tamás Kiss and András Lejtényi)

<sup>56</sup> Kiss stressed that the programme and the demands are the programme of the AHUCS in Szeged, the faculty demands are/was created by the faculty meetings. I note here that this statement already indicated that the new organisation will apply the principle of subsidiarity in all its elements, i.e. it will be a truly bottom-up organisation.

<sup>57</sup> Some parts of the political claims of AHUCS read up on 20 October can be heard here: <http://www.mefesz.hu/mefesz.php?oldal=doku>, the script of the tape record can be found here: <http://www.mefesz.hu/english.php?id=6>

- Miskolc University of Heavy Industry (the delegates from Szeged were Iván Csete and Károly Hámori)
- Pécs (the delegates from Szeged were Iván Abrudbányai Iván and Vilmos Ács)
- Veszprém University of Chemical Industry (the delegate from Szeged was Attila Kádár).

On 21-22 October, the students of higher education institutions joined the Szeged initiative, they formed their own AHUCS organisation, and joined the demands for democratic transformation, restoration of the country's independence (and national symbols), political and economic reforms, and personal and collective freedom. The student demonstrations emanating from these rallies fanned the flames of revolution the following day, 23 October.

AHUCS (MEFESZ<sub>3</sub>), born in Szeged, demanded a regime change. The demands for the restoration of national historical symbols and the independence of the state, as well as free and democratic elections, were demands for regime change in the direction of a sovereign Hungary with a multi-party system, and civil democracy.

## DEMOCRACY, SOLIDARITY, AUTONOMY IN RULES OF ORGANISATION AND OPERATION (SZMSZ) OF AHUCS

The Association of University and College Students (born on 16 October) was formally established at the general assembly held in the Auditorium Maximum of the University of Szeged on 20 October 1956 with the adoption of the Rules of Organisation and Operation.

The mission of the organisation is defined as: *“The aim of the alliance is that the youths leaving the universities and colleges who are dedicated to represent the mind of the nation should not be an indifferent, passive crowd, a layer of coward, supple and mean ones, but an army fighting bravely and soulfully for the nation, the country and for a merrier future. These people should not fear talking about the truth but should serve the nation and the country with their skills, knowledge, and ability.”* (Section 5 of the Rules of Organisation and Operation (SZMSZ) of the AHUCS)<sup>58</sup>

András Lejtényi explained the reasoning behind this point: *“The system of Stalin and Rákosi brought up intellectual cripples and sycophants. They used merciless and inhuman tools against those who dared to raise their voices in the name of rationality and humanity against their brutality and failures. They tried to teach us crude selfishness, unprincipledness, repression, and subservience with more or less success. They wanted to tread down the desire for freedom coming from our souls; they wanted to turn us into servants accepting their perfidies obediently. The spirit of the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress swept these intentions away. A free, fruitful atmosphere came into being, but the remains of the past hinder us from evolving. The aim of our youth organisation is to throw these remains out of our mind for the benefit of our nation, country, and ourselves.”*<sup>59</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Published by JANCSÁK 2016. 222-223.

<sup>59</sup> Published by JANCSÁK 2011. 93-94.

When MEFESZ was launched, there was an elementary demand that, since the world, interests, and goals of higher education students are characterised by specific individualities, their articulation and representation should be carried out by the students themselves. *“We know our interests best, it is our task to represent them and to defend them, if it is necessary. An organisation standing outside of us, with leaders who are not only our representatives, cannot represent our interests as strongly as we can. We are not children who cannot tell right and wrong apart. Our experience is that we can only reach what we fight for.”* (Section 2/c of the Rules of Organisation and Operation (SZMSZ) of the AHUCS) *“It is the duty of every AHUCS member to represent, defend, and fight for the interests of the university and college students on every forum and in any other organisation. AHUCS was founded to defend the interests of both university and college students. Every AHUCS member has to strive for – on the basis of rationality – defending these interests which are our own. Do not forget that we are all for one and one for all.”* (2nd article, Section 6 of the Rules of Organisation and Operation (SZMSZ) of the AHUCS)<sup>60</sup>

Disillusioned with DISZ, university students started to organise AHUCS as what they saw was that youth representatives, the DISZ leaders, were distanced from the students, were not credible, and did not represent university youth. However, there was another reason why the student organisation was created, namely that the representation of university youth in DISZ, which was centralised following the Soviet model, was not insufficient due to the internal hierarchy of the organisation and the control of the communist party. Moreover, resolving the problems of workers and peasants was always prioritised over students' issues and problems.

This exploration of values and articulation of interests, resulting from the specific life in higher education, became the driving force behind the student movement. In 1956, students recognised that the three main subsystems of higher education (administration, educational institutions, and student self-government) had a specific and common interest in efficiently functioning student representation. At the same time, it was also recognised that only a bottom-up, democratic approach could create a vibrant and functioning student representation.

The nature and mission of the association was defined as *“AHUCS is an organisation of the masses of university and college students which includes the whole number of youths participating in education.”* (1st article, Section 1 of the Rules of Organisation and Operation (SZMSZ) of the AHUCS)<sup>61</sup>

Membership is based on the free choice of the individual and his/her declaration of membership: *“Every university and college student who accepts the aims of AHUCS and considers the rules and regulations of AHUCS to be obligatory, and signs the admission form, becomes a member of AHUCS by their free will. The democratic way of operation of AHUCS requires people to consider the constitution and the rules and regulations of the association to be obligatory. However, we cannot force anyone to join us if they hold different views.”*<sup>62</sup>

The need to create a new and independent grassroots organisation was seen in the fact that there was no other organisation capable of doing so instead of or alongside MEFESZ,

<sup>60</sup> Published by JANCSÁK 2016. 224.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 227.

<sup>62</sup> Published by JANCSÁK 2011. 94.

which acted as a representative of student interests. *“We need a new organisation that only defends our particular interests. No other organisation is capable of it. In DISZ, not only the problems of university youth are at stake. For example, if a case of a young worker is more important, then it would be discussed first, not our case. We cannot wait on every occasion, if we feel that our case is urgent. Anyway, we lost confidence in DISZ, so the significance of the new organisation is clear.”* (Justification of Section 1/a of the Rules of Organisation and Operation (SZMSZ) of the AHUCS)<sup>63</sup>

The values of MEFESZ are well illustrated by the point that *“The members of AHUCS have the right to rely on the solidarity of AHUCS in a reasonable and justified case. One of the main duties of AHUCS is to protect the interests of students as much as possible. The association consists of all the individual members; therefore, a member should be able to rely on its solidarity in every case which concerns the interests and authority of the association. Without it, the members would not dare to submit proposals and claims which would be addressed to the leaders of the state or the party, for example, the recent question concerning the Russian language. AHUCS, of course, will not stand by anyone if the given person breaks the moral standard, law, or any kind of regulation.”* (2nd article, Section 5 of the Rules of Organisation and Operation (SZMSZ) of the AHUCS).<sup>64</sup>

The General Assembly (GA, Diáknagygyűlés) was identified as the association’s highest decision-making forum. The GA consisted of all university and college students in Szeged. The decisions of the GA were seen as an expression of common will and were therefore binding to all MEFESZ<sub>3</sub> members.<sup>65</sup>

The level below this was the Faculty Student Assembly (FSA, Kari Diákgyűlés), which had decision-making power. In terms of the Rules of Organisation and Operation (SZMSZ), the FSA allowed the students of the faculty to make specific decisions arising from the faculty’s specificities, but the binding decision of the Faculty Student Assembly could only be enforced at the faculty level and could not contradict a decision made by the General Assembly. The decision of the faculty students was binding on all members of MEFESZ<sub>3</sub>. The implementation of the decisions of the Faculty Student Assemblies was carried out by the Faculty Student Council, elected for each class. The class council implemented the decisions of the class assemblies, and the group representatives elected by the group implemented the decisions of the group assembly.<sup>66</sup> The University Student Council (USC, Egyetemi Diáktanács) represented the student body during the breaks between sessions of the General Assembly. USC (the so-called “18-member committee”) was composed of three representatives per faculty (Faculty of Law, Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Science, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Pharmacy, and Pedagogical College).

AHUCS was based on direct democratic principles and social values. They secured freedom of thought, opinion, and decision in the rules and regulations for its members. One-person leadership (“leadership cut off from the crowd”) was excluded in its constitution. *“AHUCS is an independent, free organisation. [...] The basic principle of the AHUCS is democracy, spreading*

<sup>63</sup> Published by JANCÁSÁK 2016. 219.

<sup>64</sup> Published by JANCÁSÁK 2016. 226.

<sup>65</sup> Published by JANCÁSÁK 2011. 96. (3 article Section 1)

<sup>66</sup> Published by JANCÁSÁK 2011. 96–97. (3 article Section 2)

*to the widest range of affairs. As a consequence, and in order to avoid one-person leadership, decisions can only be made by the majority of the members. So as to avoid the devastating system of instructions coming from above, decisions can only be made by the members.” (1st article, Section 2.a of the Rules of Organisation and Operation (SZMSZ) of AHUCS)*

[...]

“AHUCS is the organisation of university and college students. The right to debate must be secured and must be given to every student and every member of AHUCS, by which the issue of direct democracy is maintained. The right to vote is also concerned the same way. It was really problematic that the members did not dare to express their opinions. So it can be considered to be correct that let us have a public forum where everybody can tell their point of view without any restriction, without facing reprisal or pushback.” (2nd article, Section 3 of the Rules of Organisation and Operation (SZMSZ) of the AHUCS)

[...]

*“If a theory goes to the wall during a debate, it is obviously unfair. What is right, it is the interest of all. What is the interest of all of us, it is obligatory to fight for it. Our envoys should not be leaders (in the incorrect sense of the word), but the faithful and exact executors of the will of youth. The system of commands coming from up is theoretically full of mistakes and practically unjust.” (2nd article, Section 7 of the Rules of Organisation and Operation (SZMSZ) of the AHUCS)<sup>67</sup>*

All of this suggests that AHUCS (MEFESZ<sub>3</sub>) was a grassroots student self-government system based on democratic principles.

## THE NAME OF MEFESZ<sub>3</sub> IN CONTEMPORARY SOURCES

The first document announcing the founding of the organisation, the appeal entitled “Our Student Brothers!”, dated 17 October 1956 in Szeged, written by the founders of the organisation themselves, helps to decide on the name. It begins as follows: “*We, the students of the University of Szeged, the Medical University of Szeged, the Pedagogical College of Szeged and the Szeged Music Teacher Training College, founded our own university youth organisation, the Association of Hungarian University and College Students on 16 October 1956.*” On the typed appeal, made the night after the meeting on 16 October (dated 17 October), the acronym appears twice: “*Join MEFESZ.*” And the signature is “*The MEFESZ of Szeged.*” In the text of the leaflet, the abbreviation of the organisation’s name is thus given without the inserted “e” sound.

In the article “The Grand Assembly of Szeged University Students” published on the third page of the 18 October issue of the Szeged daily *Délmagyarország*, it is written that “*As a result of the debate, a new youth organisation, the Unified Association of Hungarian University and College Students, MEFESZ, was founded.*”

The following day, in an article published on 19 October in *Délmagyarország*, we read: “*It was this willingness to help, to criticise mistakes with courage and consistency that led to the establishment of MEFESZ, the United Association of University and College Students in Szeged*

<sup>67</sup> Published by JANCZÁK 2016. 226–227.

*[...] MEFESZ was founded in Szeged, in the auditorium of the University of Szeged, amidst stormy and courageous debates of principle. The rally's tone was set by criticism from the masses. They criticised the university education system, and the inaugural meeting turned into a mass meeting, where political issues were debated.*"<sup>68</sup>

The events in Szeged were also reported by Radio Free Europe (RFE, Szabad Európa Rádió, SZER). In the "News" starting at 1 p.m. on 20 October 1956, it said: *"According to a report in the Free Youth, 3,000 university students left the organisation and formed a new autonomous university youth organisation under the name of MEFOSZ [sic]. The students held meetings at the Faculty of Humanities in Szeged for days, demanding the creation of an autonomous university youth organisation, the rapid and decisive implementation of university reforms, and the translation of socialist democracy into action. They demanded general democratic elections in the youth organisations, the implementation of the Communist Party's intellectuals' resolution, and a reduction in the number of lectures on national defence and Marxism. In addition, the students of Szeged put forward other demands of a political nature. They demanded complete freedom of the press, the abolition of the death penalty, a cap on state salaries, and an increase in low wages. In their resolution, they stressed the need for certain personal changes and the punishment of the guilty. It was at these meetings that it was decided to set up MEFOSZ. The Minister of Education, Albert Kónya, promised to examine the demands. He announced that optional language teaching would be implemented. The resolution of the first meeting of the new university organisation, MEFOSZ, stresses that DISZ has failed to lead the students' movement and has not consistently fought for their justifiable demands."*<sup>69</sup> The RFE, declared by the communist dictatorship to be "the mouthpiece of American imperialism", was forbidden to listen to in Hungary at that time. Radio transmission was made difficult to hear with jamming towers. Thousands of Hungarians listened to news from the "free world", with the radio turned down and their ears glued to the loudspeaker so that it would not be heard in the next apartment. In many cases, the news from behind the Iron Curtain reached the SZER's editorial offices in snippets. Under these circumstances, it is understandable that the name of the organisation was mistakenly given as 'MEFOSZ' in the news reports.

On 20 October at 21:10 and 23:59, Imre Mikes (Gallicus) gave a commentary on the SZER's program "Reflektor":

*"There is a storm in Szeged, a destructive storm [...] Indeed, there is a storm in Szeged, not a storm of the forces of nature, but an elemental storm of the rebellion of young souls. But why is this storm called destructive? It may, and probably is, destructive to the system, but it may, and certainly is, equally purifying and edifying to the nation. After all, what are the young Hungarians of the University of Szeged demanding, and what are all young Hungarians demanding with them? Independence for themselves, autonomy for the college, people's rule for the nation, free elections, the suspension of the Hitlerian system of cadres by descent, a reduction in the number of so-called defense, party science (marxism), and Russian language classes, and they demand freedom of the press, the abolition of the death penalty, a cut in the exorbitant incomes of colonial governors, and an increase in the hunger wages of the millions of people who toil. [...] Would this storm be devastating? Not a destructive storm, but a creative storm, giving life to*

<sup>68</sup> Apór 1956

<sup>69</sup> <http://szer.oszk.hu/felvetel?i=776729324&n=13-00-ora-hirszolgalat> (2021.10.02.)

*those ideals which no shackles and no ropes could extirpate from the Hungarian soul. So there is a storm in Szeged, almost a revolutionary storm. Not only in words and not only in ideals, but also in deeds. For the young people who took to the intellectual barricades in the metropolis on the banks of the Tisza also took to the barricades from DISZ and immediately established and revived the Alliance of Hungarian University and College Associations [sic!]*<sup>70</sup> The name of the organisation in this radio note was the name of the former organisation.

The MEFESZ's programme-making general assembly on 20 October was reported in the Hungarian Monday News on 22 October: "...Long before four o'clock the auditorium was already packed to capacity. Almost two hours before the auditorium was already full. At exactly four o'clock, the presidency, four students, a female student, and the president of the assembly, József Perbíró, the deputy dean of the Faculty of Law, entered the room. They were greeted with a huge round of applause, which was loud when Rector Baróti and Professor Gábor Fodor, two-time Kossuth Prize-winning scientist and world-famous chemist, took their seats in the front row. At this point, the assembly began. The first task: to present and discuss the provisional organisational rules of the recently established MEFESZ (Association of Hungarian University and College Students)..."<sup>71</sup>

The last document to be presented in this paper on the birth of the organisation was written after the students' general assembly of the Technical University of Construction and Transport Engineering (Építőipari és Közlekedési Műszaki Egyetem, ÉKME) on 22 October<sup>72</sup>. It is one of the most famous leaflets of the 1956 revolution. At this assembly, the students of the ÉKME joined the proposal of Szeged students.<sup>73</sup> The document, stencilled typewritten proclamation No. 6330, containing the 14 points of demand, was written on 22 October and can be found in the archives of the National Széchényi Library (OSZK, Budapest). The first lines of the leaflet read: "*Manifesto. We join the proposal of the Szeged university students and formed the MEFESZ organisation of the Technical University of Construction and Transport. The students of the University of Technology [Műegyetem] and the College of Horticulture [Kertészeti Főiskola] joined the organisation. The task of the new MEFESZ will be to make the student body's position on serious political issues into a resolution and to resolve the current problems of university youth (defense education, canteen, student hostel, rail discount, free exams, and individual travel abroad). The MEFESZ organisation was unanimously formed by a spontaneous meeting of university youth attended by 4-5,000 people.*" Although the full name of the organisation is not given in this document, only the acronym MEFESZ, the adjective "new" ("the task of the new MEFESZ") emphasises the distance from the previous organisation with that name.

<sup>70</sup> <http://szer.oszk.hu/felvetel?i=664438590&n=reflektor> (2021.10.02.)

<sup>71</sup> HALÁSZ 1956

<sup>72</sup> *Jövő Mérnöke* 1956. október 23. For more details see: FRIVALDSZKY 2006., HORVÁTH 2006., LIPTÁK 2003.

<sup>73</sup> POGÁNY 1996. 14.

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6330

H a t á r o z a t .

Csatlakozunk a Szegedi Egyetemisták javaslatához és megalakítottuk az Építőipari és Közlekedési Műszaki Egyetem MEFESZ Szervezetét. A Szervezethez a Műegyetem és a Kertészeti Főiskola jelenlévő hallgatói is csatlakoztak. Az új MEFESZ feladata lesz a súlyos politikai kérdésekben a diákság állásfoglalását határozattá nyilvánítani és az egyetemi ifjúság jelenlegi megoldatlan problémáit /honvédelmi oktatás, menza, diakotthon, vasuti kedvezmény, szabad vizsga, külföldi ut egyénileg is/ lehetővé tételé. A MEFESZ Szervezetét az egyetemi ifjúság spontán gyűlésén 4-5000 fő jelenlétében egyhangúlag alkította meg.

- 1./ Az MDP kongresszus azonnali összehívása, alulról választott vezetőség, az új központi vezetőség megalakítása.
- 2./ A kormány alakuljon át Nagy Imre elvtárs vezetésével.
- 3./ Gazdaságilag és politikailag teljesen egyenrangú alapon és egymás belügyeibe való be nem avatkozás elvén álló magyar-szovjet és magyar-jugoszláv barátság megalakítása.
- 4./ Az összes szovjet csapatok kivonását Magyarországról a magyar békeszerződés értelmében.
- 5./ Általános, egyenlő, titkos választásokat több párt részvételével, új nemzetgyűlési képviselők választásával.
- 6./ A magyar gazdasági élet átszervezését szakemberek bevonásával és ennek keretében a magyar urinérc magyar felhasználásával. Hozzák nyilvánosságra a külkereskedelmi szerződéseket és vizsgálják felül a tervgazdaságon alapuló magyar gazdasági életet.
- 7./ Teljes ipari munkásság azonnali normarendezését a létminimum megállapítása alapján és a munkás autonómia, bevezetését az üzemekbe.
- 8./ A beszolgáltatási rendszer felülvizsgálatát és az egyénileg dolgozó parasztság támogatását.
- 9./ Az összes politikai és gazdasági perek felülvizsgálatát, az artatlanul elítélt politikai foglyok részére a teljes amnesztiát, ill. a hátrányba kerültek rehabilitálását.
- 10./ Egyen nyilvános tárgyalás Farkas Mihály úg. öben és Rákosi szerepének kivizsgálását, valamint az Oroszországban igazságtalanul elítélt és ottharott magyarok hazahozatalát.
- 11./ A néptől idegen címer helyett a régi Kossuth címer visszaállítását, a március 15-ét és október 6-át nyilvánítsuk nemzeti ünnepé és munkaszünetné. Új egyenruhát honvédségünknek.
- 12./ Teljes vélemény és sajtószabadság megvalósítása, rádiót is, és ennek keretében külön napilapot az új MEFESZ Szervezetnek. A régi kádereknak nyilvánosságra hozatalát és eltávolítását.
- 13./ A zsarnokság és az önkény jelképét, a Sztálin szobrot azonnal távolítsák el.
- 14./ Egymásért teljes szolidaritást vállalunk.

Az egyetemi ifjúság egyhangú lelkesedéssel nyilvánította ki szolidaritását a varsói munkásokkal és ifjúsággal, a lengyel függetlenségi mozgalommal.

Az Építőipari és Közlekedési Műszaki  
Egyetem  
Nagygyűlése. 1956. október 22.  
MEFESZ.





# JÖVŐ MÉRNÖKE

A BUDAPESTI MŰSZAKI EGYETEM ÉS AZ ÉPÍTŐIPARI MŰSZAKI EGYETEM LAPJA

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IV. ÉVFOLYAM, 18. SZÁM.
ÁRA 39 FILLER
1956. OKTÓBER 23.

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## Határozott, gyors tetteket!

Az Építőipari Egyetem ifjúságának nagygyűlése

1956. október 23. hajnalán.  
Az építész- és mérnökhallgatók alábbi felhívása országunk sorsdöntő kérdéseivel foglalkozik.

Jele annak, hogy az ifjúság teljes tisztulást követel.

A gyors, de megfontolt tettek ideje érkezett.

Ezért fontosnak tartjuk, hogy országunk vezetői megvizsgálják az ifjúság követeléseit és sürgősen döntsenek.

Az ifjúság számos, öt érintő kérdésben tájékozatlan. Ezért szocialista fejlődésünkért aggodva tör fel belőle a vágy és sürgeti a kérdések megoldását.

Az éjszakába nyúló tárgyaláson elemi erővel született meg a felhívás, amit a nagygyűlés határozata alapján jelentetünk meg.

A szerkesztő bizottságunk a nagygyűlés határozatait tárgyalási alapként bocsátja a közvélemény elé.

Vitákozunk tovább arról, mi helyes, mire nincs szükség, mit kell tennünk a hazáért, a népért, a szocializmus ügye érdekében.

**HATÁROZAT**

Csatlakozunk a szegedi egyetemisták javaslatához és megalkotjuk az Építőipari és Közlekedési Műszaki Egyetem MEFESZ szervezetét. A szervezethez a Műegyetem, Kertészeti Főiskola jelenlévő hallgatói is csatlakoztak.

Az új MEFESZ szervezet feladata lesz a súlyos politikai kérdésekben a diákság állásfoglalását határozottan nyilvánítni, és az egyetemi ifjúság jelenleg megoldatlan problémáit (honvédelmi oktatás, menza, diákközlő, vasúti kedvezmény, szabad vizsga, külföldi út egyénileg is) lehetővé tenni.

A MEFESZ szervezetet az egyetemi ifjúság spontán gyűlésén 4–5 ezer fő jelenlétében, egyhangúan alakította meg.

Az egyetem ifjúsága a következő pontokban foglalta össze politikai követeléseit:

1. Az MDP Központi Vezetősége azonnali összehívása, az időközben alulról megválasztott új pártvezetőségek által az új Központi Vezetőség megalakítása.
2. A kormány alakuljon át Nagy Imre elvtárs vezetésével.
3. Gazdaságilag és politikailag teljesen egyenrangú alapon és egymás belügyeibe való be nem avatkozás elvén álló magyar–szovjet és magyar–jugoszláv barátság megalakítása. Az összes szovjet csapatok azonnali kivonását Magyarországról a magyar békeszerződés értelmében.
4. Általános, egyenlő, titkos választásokat, több párt részvétellel, új nemzetgyűlési képviselők választásával.
5. A magyar gazdasági élet átszervezését, szakemberek bevonásával és ennek keretében a magyar uránérc leggazdaságosabb felhasználását. Hozzák nyilvánosságra a külkereskedelmi szerződéseket és vizsgálják felül a tervgazdaságon alapuló magyar gazdasági életet.
6. A teljes ipari munkásság azonnali normarendezését és a munkás autonómia bevezetését az üzemekben.
7. Beszolgáltatási rendszer felülvizsgálását és az egyéni, legelőzítő parasztság támogatását.
8. Az összes politikai és gazdasági perek felülvizsgálását, a politikai foglyok részére teljes amnesztiát, az ártatlanul elítélteket, ill. hátrányos helyzetbe kerültek rehabilitálását. Legyen nyilvános Farkas Mihály tárgyalása.
9. A néptől idegen címer helyett a régi Kossuth-címer visszaállítását; március 15-ét és október 6-át nyilvánítsák általános nemzeti ünneppé és munkaszüneti nappá.
10. Teljes vélemény és sajtószabadság megvalósítását (rádiót is) és ennek keretében külön napilapot az új MEFESZ szervezettek, a régi káderanyag nyilvánosságra hozatalát és megsemmisítését.

Az egyetemi ifjúság egyhangú lelkesedéssel nyilvánította ki szolidaritását a városi munkásokkal és fiatalokkal, a lenyugtelt nemzeti függetlenségi mozgalommal.

The manifesto of “Műegyetem MEFESZ” published on the cover page of the 23 October issue of the *Jövő Mérnök* [Engineer of the Future], the newspaper of Műegyetem (Budapest)

The founders of AHUCS told us during our interviews<sup>74</sup> that at the beginning, in the first weeks of October 1956, the initiators (Kiss and Lejtényi) referred to the organisation they wanted to found as “student association” during their smaller or bigger conversations with students. The documents of the time (documents of the general assemblies held at Hungarian universities between 21 and 23 October) and later recollections show a very polarised picture of the name of the organisation, with the terms “Alliance” (*Egyesületek* in Hungarian, so Alliance of Hungarian University and College Associations) or “Unified” (*Egységes* in Hungarian, so Unified Organisation of Hungarian University and College Students) sometimes appearing as a way of resolving the meaning of the second “e” (MEFeSZ).

This could be due to the exchange of information between the earlier and the 1956 generations of students (older brothers and sisters, etc.), and the fact that there were older students among the youth studying at the universities in 1956 (e.g. Tivadar Putnik<sup>75</sup> or József Kovács<sup>76</sup> in Szeged), who had a vivid picture of the earlier Alliance of Hungarian University and College Associations (1945–1948), or Unified Organisation of Hungarian University and College Students (1948–1950). However, among the mentor teachers and role models of the students, there were also some who, as university students or young teachers (e.g. László Péter in Szeged), were active participants in MEFESZ<sub>1</sub> (AHUCA), which was born in 1945. We can assume that there were some who may have considered this organisation to be a re-establishment of the former AHUCA. There may also have been members of the press who saw AHUCA as being reborn (because of the similarity of the acronym).

However, based on our interviews, we can say that the initiators and leaders of AHUCS (MEFESZ<sub>3</sub>) did not associate the word “unified” or “united” with the name of the nascent organisation. During our interview, Tamás Kiss clearly refuted that they would have been planning a “single” or “uniform” organisation.

It can be ruled out that they would have formed a union of associations because the founders in Szeged in 1956 created a civil association based on individual members joining voluntarily, not an umbrella organisation.

The issue of the inserted “e” sound to ease pronunciation has important symbolic value for sociology or history research. In our case, it is not “The thickness of a hair divides the two”<sup>77</sup>. As we have seen earlier, AHUCA (MEFESZ<sub>1</sub>), founded in 1945, was an umbrella organisation of higher education associations, and the name change in 1948, which changed the official name to the Unified Organisation of Hungarian University and College Students (MEFESZ<sub>2</sub>), leaving the acronym, was intended to give a foothold to the Stalinist unified (uniform) youth organisation, the Union of Working Youth (DISZ).

However, the period of the creation of this “unified” MEFESZ from December 1956 to February 1957 [please note that we are talking about a name change again!], which in fact meant the internal transformation of the revolutionary AHUCS (MEFESZ<sub>3</sub>), fits well into the process and logic of the Kádár takeover.

<sup>74</sup> JANCÁSÁK 2016b.

<sup>75</sup> For more details see Miklós 2017.

<sup>76</sup> For more details see BÁLINT 2004.

<sup>77</sup> Imre Madách: The Tragedy of (Man Scene 7) “Whatever seems ridiculous to others. / The thickness of a hair divides the two - / Only some inner voice can judge between them, / And this close magistrate is sympathy / Which sanctifies or murders with its mockery.” <http://mek.oszk.hu/00900/00918/html/madach7.htm> (2021.10.17.)

In the first months of 1957, the former initiators and founding fathers of AHUCS (MEFESZ<sub>3</sub>) were already in emigration (among the people of Szeged Vilmos Ács, János Ambrus, Iván Csete, György Halász, Károly Hámori, Attila Kádár, András Lejtényi, Tivadar Putnik, Tóth Adorján, Vető Miklólós, Vezényi Pál, or, for example, Alpár Bujdosó from Sopron and students from the Technological University (Béla Lipták, Gyula Várallyai) or were in hiding (Tamás Kiss) or had not yet been identified by the police (János Aszalós).

Meanwhile, the Association of Hungarian University and College Students underwent a change in image and preferred social values led by the Communist Party (the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, MSZMP<sup>78</sup>).

On 14 February and 16, 1957, the new secretariat of the association (by then the name had been changed to the Unified Association of Hungarian University and College Students, AHUCS, MEFESZ<sub>4</sub>) published a statement in which it expressed that *"The existence and activity of the class enemy requires the realisation of proletarian dictatorship in the realisation of socialism, but at the same time the working masses must be given a share in the exercise of power through democratic organisations. The leading force of the working masses, bearers, and developers of Marxism-Leninism in our country is the revolutionary party of the working class. Therefore, we recognise the leading role of the Marxist-Leninist party of the working class, the MSZMP, in the building of socialism."*<sup>79</sup> In the same document, it was also stated that *"we do not consider it right [...] that MEFESZ is an organisation independent of party and government. This declaration of independence has given and may give rise to certain harmful oppositional attitudes [...] Membership of MEFESZ is open to those university and college students and young academics who accept the present declaration of the Secretariat and wish to work in its spirit"*<sup>80</sup>.

On 11 April 1957, the National Secretariat of AHUCS (MEFESZ<sub>4</sub>) announced that it would stop the recruiting activities of MEFESZ and would seek to dissolve the organisation this semester, and expressed its joy that *"the MSZMP Provisional Central Committee in its February and March resolutions had concluded that the forces loyal to socialism had triumphed over the forces of counter-revolution in youth organisations"*<sup>81</sup>.

In the months of March and April 1957, the same thing happened as in the years 1945-49 when youth organisations were destroyed. In accordance with the communist tactics that were then being used again, MEFESZ<sub>4</sub> was occupied by trusted people and thus came under the direct control of the communist party (Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt, MSZMP)<sup>82</sup>, which was then merged in April into the new mass youth organisation,

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<sup>78</sup> The Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP) was founded on 31 October 1956 after the dissolution of the Hungarian Workers' Party. The party operated under the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The MSZMP exercised power in Hungary as a state party under the one-party system between the suppression of the 1956 revolution and October 1989.

<sup>79</sup> Published by SZÉKELYHIDI 2011. 45.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid

<sup>81</sup> Ibid 51.

<sup>82</sup> In Szeged "In January or February, communist youths took over the leadership. Imre Pásztor, József Zsuró and a few others, and the development took the right direction." Top Secret Classified Memorandum to the Political Investigation Department dated 8 June 1957. ÁBTL 0-12770

the Hungarian Communist Youth League (Magyar Kommunista Ifjúsági Szövetség, KISZ)<sup>83</sup>, which was founded on 21 March.

### *MEFESZ organisations*

the names of the organizations in chronological order	the time of existence	The name of the organization in Hungarian	The abbreviated name of the organization in Hungarian	The name of the organization in English	The abbreviated name of the organization in English
MEFESZ <sub>1</sub>	1945–1948	Magyar Egyetemi és Főiskolai Egyesületek Szövetsége	MEFESZ	Alliance of Hungarian University and College Associations	AHUCA
MEFESZ <sub>2</sub>	1948–1950	Magyar Egyetemi és Főiskolai Hallgatók Egységes Szervezete	MEFESZ	Unified Organization of Hungarian University and College Students	UOHUCS
MEFESZ <sub>3</sub>	1956–1957	Magyar Egyetemisták és Főiskolások Szövetsége	MEFSZ* MEFESZ**	Association of Hungarian University and College Students	AHUCS
MEFESZ <sub>4</sub>	1957 Spring	Magyar Egyetemisták és Főiskolások Egységes Szövetsége	MEFESZ	Unified Association of Hungarian University and College Students	UAHUCS

\* 17. October 1956. Proclamation of AHUCS (signature: MEFSZ)

\*\* The second “e” character designated an inserted phoneme ([e]) to ease the pronunciation of the word MEFESZ

## SUMMARY

The Spark of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution (AHUCS, MEFESZ<sub>3</sub>) was a new grassroots initiative. It was founded on 16 October 1956 at the University of Szeged.

The 1956 organisation was not an umbrella organisation for student associations (like AHUCA, MEFESZ<sub>1</sub>, which was founded in 1945 and abbreviated by the same acronym).

The founders of AHUCS (MEFESZ<sub>3</sub>) in 1956 were deliberate in not seeking to become the sole, unified organisation of university youth. This was due to disappointment with the previous unified organisation (UWY, DISZ).

According to the organisational rules, adopted on 20 October 1956, membership was based on a personal decision to join. The organisation defined itself as a representative body of higher

<sup>83</sup> The Hungarian Communist Youth League (KISZ) was under the control of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP) and operated as a youth organisation of the MSZMP between 1957 and 1989.

education students, i.e. a student's self-government. AHUCS was founded on democratic principles, autonomy, and subsidiarity in its aims, program, and mission. This commitment to democratic social values was reflected in both organisational rules and political demands.

The political demands of 20 October became the demands of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution.

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