

Commemoration of the
Hungarian Student Revolt of 1956
Leuven, Collegium Falconis, 14 November 2016

Address by prof. L. Waelkens, Faculty of law

Your Excellency and dear Hungarian guests,
Mister Rector, Mister Vice-rector,
Mister Dean and dear colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Isten hozott Lövenbe. This was the greeting every Leuven student memorised in 1956, in case they met a Hungarian student on the streets or in our college rooms. Let us repeat it today. Isten hozott Lövenbe.

As you already heard, the 1956 uprising in Budapest started on the 23rd of October. On the 29th the Leuven counsel of students, the league of the faculty student unions, adopted a resolution in which it condemned the repression of the Hungarian student actions by the socialist government. That night, our student leaders discussed what to do for their Budapest fellows. In the first place they would try to establish contact with the Pötöfi-Club. However, the situation in Budapest deteriorated very quickly and distant contacts became impossible. They had to travel to Budapest. The first Leuven student to take action was Vic Anciaux, a later Belgian minister, who was doing an internship in the university hospital at the time. He gathered medical material, found a car and on 1 November he left Leuven in order to procure medical assistance to the students in Budapest. The next day he was stopped at

the Austro-Hungarian border in Nickelsdorf, where he lost every hope of reaching Budapest. The Red Army, which had withdrawn from the streets of Budapest, blocked the western border crossings and the road to Budapest. They stood at 500m from the customs house. There were, however, refugees coming over through the woods and crossing the border. Vic Anciaux helped the Austrian Red Cross emergency teams to take care of exhausted and wounded refugees. The next day a student delegation of Leuven arrived at Nickelsdorf and was also halted. They were at the border when on 4 November the Soviets returned to Budapest. Our students left Nickelsdorf and visited the refugee houses in Vienna, looking for students. After some days they met Hungarian student Annemäry, who became an icon of the student revolt for them. In Budapest she had operated a machine gun and fired thousands of rounds. She lost her boyfriend when he tried to neutralise a tank and saw her brother shot down. When the situation became desperate, she fled to the west with a dozen of fellow students. They carried the brother and another wounded student through woods and villages and miraculously reached Nickelsdorf. The Leuven students organised for Annemäry and her companions to come to Leuven.

From dramatic, the situation became overwhelming. To say it with the oldest words known in Hungarian, the *Omagyar Mária-Siralom*, which could be found in a manuscript of our Central Library [next to the Hungarian College] in 1956:

Volék siroilm indotlon
Siroilmol sepedik,
Buol oszuk, epedek.

I did not know the lament yet,
Now laments gashes,
Ache lacerates, languishes.

In our Leuveni Codex, St Mary's lament expressed the dismay of the Hungarian people.

In Vienna our students contacted their Hungarian colleagues in the refugee centres and exchanged addresses. Others in Leuven organised a whip-round on 5 November to help the wounded students and refugees. The Red Cross needed blood urgently, and so the student convent house and the hall of both university hospitals were transformed in what students call vampire centres. The Catholic student union was scandalised that only... 2400 students came by to donate blood. But, a sign of another era, the unions also collected 330 thousand cigarettes for the Hungarian students – and a lot of money. The haulage to the east was done by Oostpriesterhulp, the work of Father Werenfried van Straten, from the nearby abbey of Tongerlo, who never abandoned the Hungarian priests. A week after their collection, the student unions organised a demonstration in Brussels, in front of the Red Flag, the siege of the Communist Party, a demonstration which was unauthorised and which ended in street violence. Our students also went to the refugee camps in East Belgium and met 17 Hungarian students in Spa, 19 in Saive and the same numbers in Seilles, Tongeren and Verviers. In Leuven they would plead for their registration at the university. One of the then leaders of the Flemish Catholic Student Union was Wilfried Martens, who died in 2013 as president of the European Popular Party. During his

last visit to our faculty, on the Kortrijk Campus, he told me that his marked sympathy for the Hungarian Christian democracy had its roots in his contacts of 1956. – Smashing the windows of the Red Flag in Brussels was a spectacular way for the students to show their solidarity. Let's also mention that they celebrated Mass and prayed for Hungary. For a long time there were student masses with Magyar intentions every Wednesday in the chapel of the Bellarmino College: at 7 o'clock for Germania, at 7.30 for Themis, at 8 for Politica and at 8.30 for the Psychological Circle. Apparently, already in the fifties the psys were the last ones to get up in the morning.

In the same days a much bigger machinery started in Leuven, conducted by the rector, Mgr. Van Waeyenbergh, and the chaplain of the Hungarian students, István Muszlay, whose name would change twice afterwards: once into Stefan Muselay when he was naturalised as a Belgian citizen and then into Stefan baron Muselay when King Baldwin elevated him to peerage because of his actions for the Hungarian refugees. István Muszlay was a Hungarian Jesuit who left his country in 1947, when his order was in trouble – it was dissolved in 1948. He was ordained by the bishop of Roermond in 1951 and got a PhD in Economics in Tilburg. Afterwards he also obtained a PhD in Sociology in Leuven. In 1955, father Muszlay became chaplain for our Hungarian students, who had a niche in the Mindszenty House on the Kapucijnenvoer. He moved their housing to the Blijde Inkomststraat 18, to the house where the actual Collegium Hungaricum is. Shortly after his arrival, father Muszlay taught Hungarian at our CLT-language institute. After the crisis, in 1961, he would become a professor of

economics and Hungarian literature. In 1994 pope John Paul II asked him to join – as a founding member – the Papal Academy for social sciences. He died in the Jesuit house of Heverlee in 2007.

But back to the fifties. Since 1948 all Hungarian refugee students had been registered at the university for free. In November 1956 the rector confirmed the decision for newly arrived Hungarian students and youngsters. Still in the academic year 56-57, 105 Hungarian students were registered, 17 in the Dutch courses, 88 in the French courses. The next year we had 165 Hungarian students, in 58-59 their number fell back to 137 and in 59-60 it was further reduced and returned to 105. Our new companions worked desperately hard. Already in the first year 70 students who had arrived in November without knowledge of French nor Dutch, passed the exams in July and September, matching the scores of Belgian students. 10 of those 500 refugee students finished as university professors in Belgium, France and Canada. Father Muszlay, however, did not limit his actions to university students. He also gave a place to hundreds of youngsters in high schools and technical schools and coached many young Hungarians for whom the best solution was to start their new life as company workers and employees.

As the Hungarian College was no longer large enough – it only has 16 student rooms – father Muszlay obtained this Falcon College from the rector. In 1955 the university had bought it back from the Army, which for a century and a half kept a military hospital in the building. It was destined to house the law faculty, but as the building was graded, it would take

years to obtain plans and permits and in the meantime it was available. In March 1957 the Falcon became the heart of the Hungarian youth in Leuven. Father Muszlay adapted it with his Hungarian workforce. With wooden walls they made 40 individual student rooms in both side aisles along the frontcourt. They did not need more, because most Hungarians students stayed in the city, with Belgian families who freed rooms for them. But for students who were lodged outside its walls, the Falcon College also became a little Erszébetváros. Downstairs in the main building there was the old kitchen of the hospital, behind the two windows that I can see from here, and next to it the students made a dining hall, which was behind where you are now sitting. It had a view of the garden in which this auditorium block has been built. Many Hungarian students came to the Falcon College for lunch and for dinner. In the then decrepit college the dining room was their Karpatia. Next to it, and also with view of the garden, there was a sitting room, which was a meeting place for evenings. The Flemish television company, which had existed for three years, donated a television set for it, but you never see them watch Flemish television on old pictures. This auditorium was part of a neglected garden, which was reshaped into a Szimpla Kert, embellished mainly by the heart-warming Hungarian sociability, which is the envy of all Belgians. The Hungarian college choir, the Bartok Béla Choir, was the best choir in Leuven and performed also on radio and television. Here behind the wall, at the end of the garden, the students converted a shelter into a beautiful and artfully built chapel, which was dedicated to Saint István. It was removed in the sixties when a fire brigade access had to be built, but I am sure that by the force of divine media-

tion it played a role in the relieving of the regime of Kádár János.

Father Muszlay had his office on the first floor, behind the second window from the right. He lodged in the Hungarian College, but during the day he was available for his students in the Falcon College. He pushed them to learn languages and motivated them for their studies. From here he also intervened for young Hungarians in the whole country of Belgium. In Kadoc, the Catholic Documentation Centre, we have thousands of carbon copies of his letters, which were long and literary documents, composed in perfect Dutch and perfect French, and we have many memos written in his elegant handwriting. He wrote to everyone in Belgian society. Industrialists for instance asked for recommendations for young refugees who looked for jobs in the industry. Father Muszlay never recommended without investigation. He also felt responsible for the employers. He was asked by high schools and technical schools how to integrate refugees. He answered these questions extensively. In the archives there is a letter from a social visitor of the Bruges prison. One day she discovered that one of the inmates was a Hungarian student refugee, who did not speak a holy word that could be understood in Bruges. The police had picked him up in the streets and brought him to the prison, because there he would find a bed and he would be nourished. The visitor contacted father Muszlay and asked him to intervene to free the student, but in the meantime the latter had been moved to the prison of Mons. Some weeks and some letters afterwards he was here in the college and starting to learn French.

Most of the Muszlay letters were begging-letters and messages of acknowledgment to benefactors. At the beginning of his campaign he addressed social and political instances, but after some practice he knew all convents and rich widows of Belgium. He never asked for help without first establishing a social and cultural contact. His letters were never impersonal. In each of it he enclosed some bit of his soul. What patience, what personal engagement and what a respect for the slightest gifts. The average gift was the equivalent of 500 euro today, but he also wrote long letters of thanks – which were a kind of pastoral letters as well – for gifts of 5 euro. Father Muszlay needed much money, piles and packets, but he collected a fortune. In 1959, when the costs of the refugees became surveyable and were no longer beyond mending, he was able to buy the house of the Hungarian College, which up to that date had been rented.

István Muszlay, however, was not confined to his social work. Here in the Falcon College he was a real college headmaster. In 1957 he wrote one of his masterpieces, *Menselijke verhoudingen*, human relations, which was published in Bussum in the Netherlands, but which he practiced here. Upstairs he also started the Hungarian library, which would become the Central European Research Institute, later transferred to the Hungarian College. Since then, it has been merged with the Leuven Institute for Central and East European Studies. We consider this institute to be an expression of the mentality of our Hungarian refugees. They did not come to complain, but to study and to work – and in this old university town, they planted an important cultural tree, which is still growing.

In 1960-61 the Hungarian students left the Falcon College. Most had come to Leuven to finish their studies, there were no new arrivals and many left for other European countries and for Canada. In 1964 the Falcon became the *sedes* of the law faculty and of the faculty of canon law. It has since been visited by Hungarian scholars again. Let me mention two of them I met here personally. As a canonist dr. Erdő was here more than once when he was still Peter. Unfortunately, he did not come back after he had become your cardinal and archbishop. The late Zlinszky János, the first dean of the law faculty of the Pázmány Peter Katolikus Egyetem, also enjoyed his stays in the Falcon College. He knew the Hungarian story of the building. Young Zlinszky studied the prohibited bourgeois Roman law and in the fifties, as a dangerous Magyar nobleman, he was sent to work in a wood factory in the north. Some time later, due to his exemplary work, he moved from the factory to the polytechnic school of Miskolc. After a couple of years he became involved in its direction and founded a faculty of administration. He strove to upgrade the college to University of Miskolc and the faculty of administration became a law faculty, where professor Zlinszky finally taught... Roman law. After the liberalisation he was a reputed judge for us in your constitutional court and when retired, an exemplary dean of the Pázmány sister faculty – and an exemplary grandfather who taught Latin to his grandchildren. When present in this building, he understood and explained that the uprising of 1956 was the beginning of the rise of a fallen people.

Father Muszlay stayed in Leuven as a professor of economics. In 1964, when the university was split up into a Flemish and a French-speaking university, although he belonged to the Flemish province of the Jesuits, he opted for the French university. In the division of the library... the Leuveni Codex Omagyar Mária-Siralom was allocated to the UCL. In 1982, still under the communist regime, the wonderful István Muszlay succeeded in bringing the Maria Lament back to Hungary, to the Széchényi library in Budapest. In Leuven's donation of the oldest manuscript in Hungarian, you could see the ultimate expression of Muszlay's capacity to convince. In reality, the return of the manuscript was an expression of the friendship between Leuven and the Hungarian academic world, which had so intensely met in this college.

As a Law Faculty, we are honoured and happy that these great years in the fifties – they were in black and white, but nevertheless great years – are commemorated today and will be perpetuated by a mindful artwork in our entrance hall. May it inspire us in our reflection about refugees and common values.

Köszönöm. God save Hungary. Isten áldd meg a magyart!