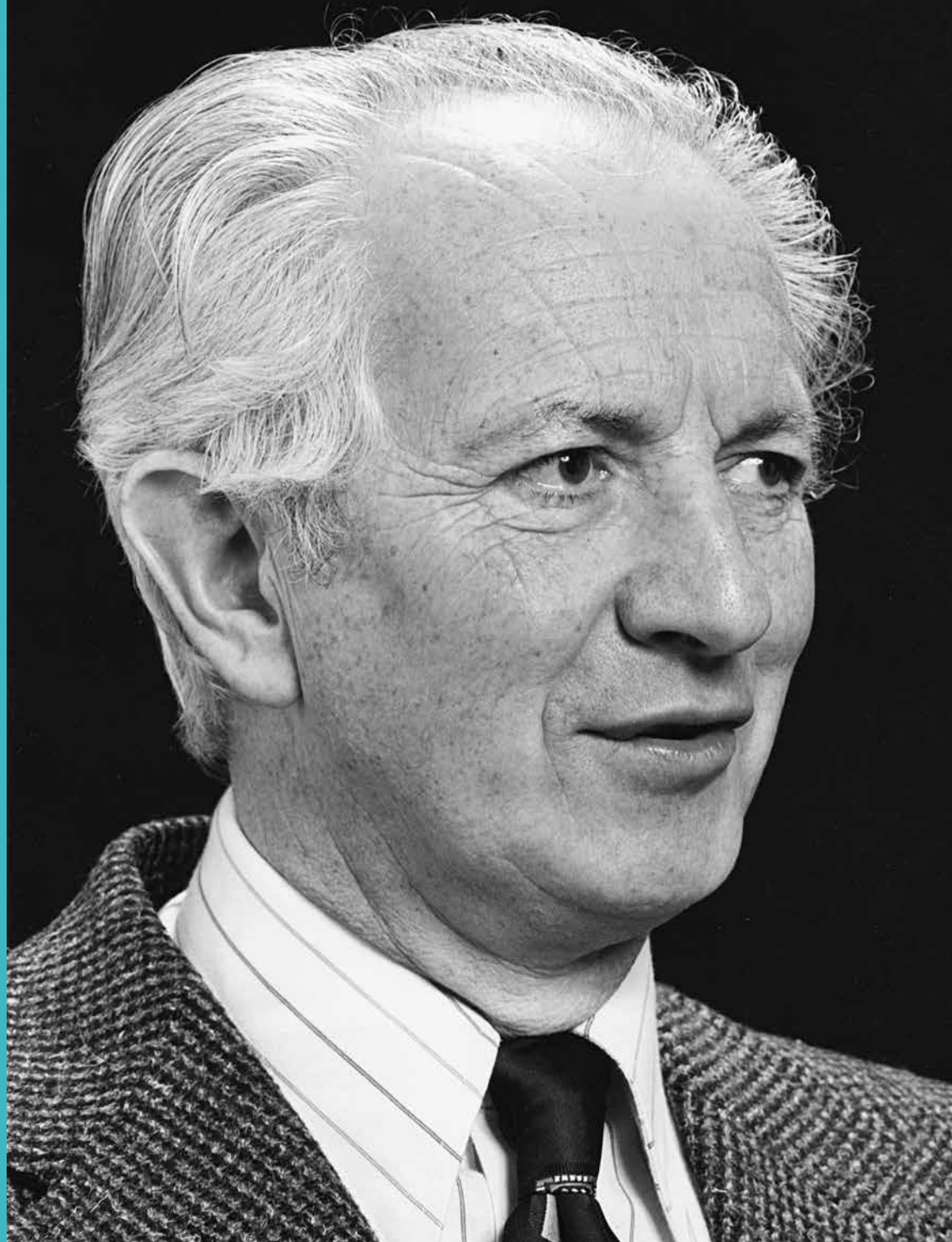


POLITICAL LIVES
#01

MAURITS COPPIETERS

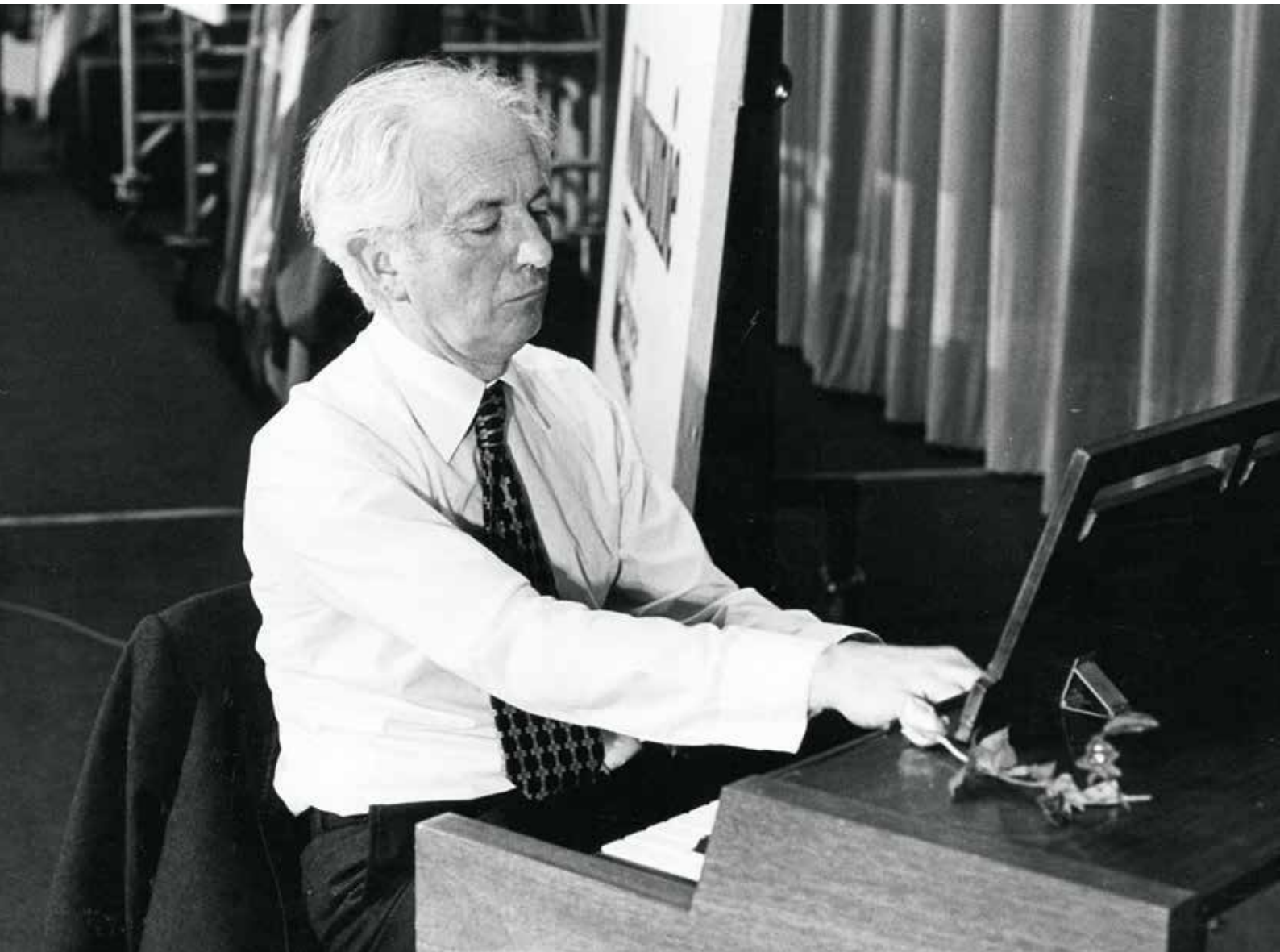
1920 • 2005



Circa 1980

Maurits Coppieters playing an electric organ at a break of a Volksunie gathering.

DANN / ADVN | ARCHIEF VOOR NATIONALE BEWEGINGEN



THE MANY LIVES OF MAURITS COPPIETERS

1920-2005

What follows is a short biography of Maurits Coppieters, a **politician who gained recognition in the post-war Flemish movement**. A teacher by training and a youth leader at heart, for most of his life Coppieters was active in Flemish national politics and was deeply involved in the social and cultural life of the Flemish community, where the recurring themes of **his work were social justice and pacifism**.

Coppieters, the unreserved scout who took the slogan "be prepared" to heart, developed his political career in the Flemish nationalist party **People's Union (Volksunie, VU)**. To a considerable extent, he contributed to the party's ideological expansion and was the pioneer of progressive thought. He was elected as a **representative**, and later, as a **senator**. Coppieters was also a champion for the party in his own native region, the Waasland. However, his progressive and utopian ideas clashed with those of other senior politicians on many occasions. On the international political scene, he remained unscathed as a **European parliamentarian**. **The founding of the European Free Alliance (EFA)** party was also his brainchild. EFA paid homage to him by naming its European political foundation and research centre after him.

EDITOR JOSEP VALL

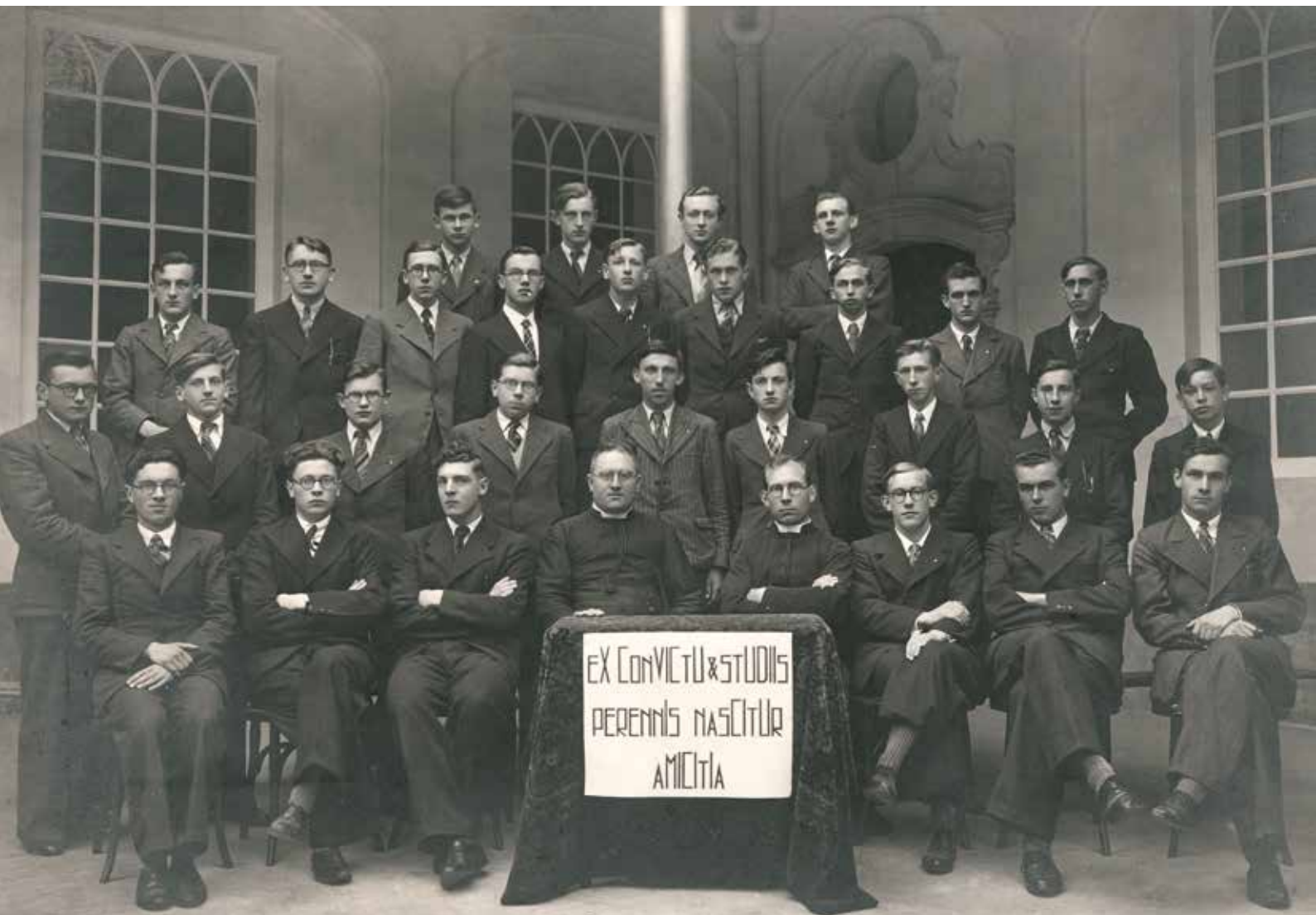
HISTORICAL CONSULTANT SOPHIE GYSELINCK

ENGLISH VERSION EURIDEAS & IVA PETKOVIC

Sint-Niklaas, 1938

Rhetoric faculty 1937-1938 at Sint-Jozef-Klein-Seminarie school.
Maurits Coppieeters is on the second row, fourth from the right.

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THE EARLY YEARS

1920-1944

Maurits Coppieters was born soon after World War I on **14 May 1920 in the provincial city of Sint-Niklaas** in the Waasland region. He was named after his uncle who had died on the Yser front. He was the seventh and last child in his family. His father, a sole breadwinner, was highly active in local associations and cultivated his musical talent as a conductor and music teacher. The young Coppieters **studied in a strict and Catholic education system**, where faith and discipline had the upper hand. He studied Greek and Latin at Sint-Jozef-Klein-Seminaire in Sint-Niklaas and was a singer and organist in the school choir. During his adolescence, Coppieters was influenced by priest-teachers and scout chaplains. Although he remained faithful to his Christian beliefs throughout his life, that conviction did not mean unconditional loyalty to the Church.

Although Coppieters was not pro-Flemish at the beginning of his studies, he was **strongly influenced by his fellow students and humanities classes**. His school-mate Cyriel Coupé, later the poet Anton Van Wilderode, opened Coppieters' eyes to Flemish national literature written by the likes of Albrecht Rodenbach and Wies Moens. However, Flemish national politics would remain far from his interests for quite a while.

In 1938, Coppieters went to **Ghent University to study history**. He took his final exam in the first month of the occupation (June 1940) and obtained his degree

when Belgium was still fully active in World War II. In 1942, he started to work as a teacher in the free education system. **During the war**, Coppieters distanced himself as much as possible from collaboration. To avoid obligatory employment in a Potsdam metal company, he went into **hiding in the final months of the occupation at a farm in the Dutch village of Nieuw-Namen**, just across the border.

Circa 1950

Maurits Coppieters as a boy scout leader.

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ONCE A SCOUT, ALWAYS A SCOUT

1945-1955

Nothing influenced Maurits Coppieters' personality and lifestyle more heavily than scouting. During his time **in the scouts, he learned about social engagement, having an open mind, and taking responsibility.** He followed these principles fully throughout his professional career. A scout's life was, in a sense, fertile ground for shaping ideas and insights that Coppieters would apply later on in his life.

Coppieters joined the scouts when he was twelve years old. In the Sint-Niklaas branch, he became a patrol and assistant leader. **He became an inspiring youth leader due to his eloquence and commitment,** which ensured that shortly after World War II, he became active in the national administration of the Flemish Association of Catholic Scouts (Vlaamsch Verbond der Katholieke Scouts, VVKS). Initially, in 1946, he was appointed deputy to the Flemish scout leader Maurits Van Haegendoren. In 1948, when Van Haegendoren's controversial conduct during the war was called into question, Coppieters was appointed acting commissioner. Shortly after, he was officially elected as VVKS commissioner.

In the Flemish Scouts, **Coppieters emerged as a pioneer of new educational ideas.** As scout commissioner, Coppieters had the opportunity to develop his own progressive Flemish vision of scouting, away from the Church's authority. Under his leadership, scout troops

were updated and divided into two age groups: cub scouts (11-14 years old) and boy scouts (14-17 years old). In addition, in 1950, the traditional target group was enlarged to include people with disabilities or different abilities.

He took an innovative, Flemish, and family-oriented course. He allowed the VVKS to participate in annual Flemish events, such as the Yser Pilgrimage and the National Singing Festival. VVKS's participation in these events, as well as his young idealistic vision, led to internal disagreements and infighting, prompting Coppieters **to leave the scouts movement in 1955.**

Diksmuide, August 22nd, 1954

Maurits Coppieters giving a speech during the 27th Yser Pilgrimage.

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A YOUNG TEACHER, INSPIRING SPEAKER AND SOCIAL WORKER 1945-1964

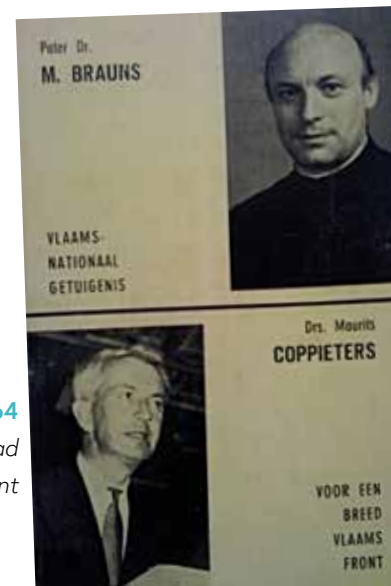
After the war, Maurits Coppieters became a **teacher in the state education system**. It was during this period that he met his life partner, Marie (or Miet) Van Boven. They married on July 25th, 1946, and had three children: Annemie, Kris, and Lieven. In 1948, Coppieters was taken on as a history teacher at the Vocational School in Gent, a state technical institution. He was highly regarded and became the **Deputy Headmaster of the school ten years later**. When the school needed a new headmaster, Coppieters was disappointed that he was overlooked as a candidate. He ended his educational career when the newly appointed headmaster restricted his freedom of movement and creativity. He resolutely entered politics in 1964.

Between 1950 and 1965, he worked as an apprentice at cultural institutions, student associations, youth movements, and educational institutions. During the 1950s, Coppieters was **one of the most popular speakers in Flanders**. His speeches frequently focused on socio-economic and Christian-inspired themes. Coppieters felt at home on the podium, and was a talented orator. He captivated his audiences in a dazzling flow of well-crafted thoughts and unexpected approaches.

At the same time, Coppieters became increasingly **prominent as a spokesperson for the Flemish movement**, which he hoped to relaunch after the difficult period of war, occupation, collaboration, and repressi-

on. He spoke passionately about the spiritual emancipation of Flanders at conventions or celebrations, such as the Yser Pilgrimages (IJzerbedevaart) or the Flemish national holiday.

In addition to his talent for public speaking, Coppieters also played a **pioneering role in developing education in Flanders as a social worker**. One of his first initiatives was the establishment of the Young Families Campaign, which was taken on by the Union of Large Families (Bond der Kroostrijke Gezinnen), and was specifically aimed at young married couples and the social challenges they face.



1964
For a broad
Flemish front

Turnhout, circa 1960

Maurits Coppieters
at a VVB gathering.

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NATIONALE BEWEGINGEN



IN THE FLEMISH NATIONAL MOVEMENT

1950-1963

Coppieters' affection for Flemish culture had an appealing authenticity. His convictions did not arise from his personal background, but had been shaped and cultivated by his academic education, professional experiences and his careful attention to social developments. He positioned the Flemish national movement in the historical context of post-war Belgium. **He believed in a Europe of integration and peace, in which Flemish and Dutch-speaking culture could flourish.**

Starting in the mid-1950s, Coppieters frequently and openly **advocated amnesty for Flemish nationalists convicted of collaboration during World War II**, since many Flemings believed that they had been excessively or disproportionately punished. In his speeches, Coppieters introduced a nuanced understanding of collaboration and repression into an otherwise black-and-white thinking. He attended several amnesty meetings as a speaker on behalf of the Flemish Resistance Alliance.

In 1956, Coppieters **relaunched the Flemish People's Movement (Vlaamse Volksbeweging, VVB)**. The movement quickly formulated a clear and urgent program, listing various demands to be featured high on the political agenda in the 1960s. As VVB chairman, Coppieters advocated for: improving language laws, establishing a linguistic border, guaranteeing bilingual status for Brussels, increasing the prominence of

Flemish in the private sector, and instituting cultural autonomy for Flanders. He took to his role as chairman like a duck takes to water. His eloquence uniquely qualified him to reconcile conflicting viewpoints with compassion and nuance, as well as to present radical points of view in a clear and comprehensible manner. **He oversaw the VVB's success until 1963 when it became more resolutely in favour of federalism.**

May 30th, 1965

March in honor of the electoral victory on May 23rd.
Maurits Coppieters and Frans Van der Elst (back left).

ADVJ | ARCHIEF VOOR NATIONALE BEWEGINGEN



JOINING THE PEOPLE'S UNION

1964-1965

The year 1964 was a turning point in Maurits Coppieters' life. He said his final good-bye to his career in education and **began his political journey**. From the outset, his sole political preference was the **VU, the Flemish nationalist party in Flanders called the People's Union**. He did not join the Catholic party, even though he had good relations with young Christian Democrats up until that moment.

Coppieters' first political mandate was on the local level. In the summer of 1964, he was a top candidate on the electoral list of the VU, representing innovative and socially progressive candidates in the **sub-municipality of Sint-Amandsberg in Ghent**. Coppieters **was elected as a member of the Municipal Council** and focused on family policy, education, and culture.

For Coppieters, this position was a stepping stone to national party politics. Less than a year later, Coppieters led the VU electoral list for federal parliamentary elections, winning a triumphant majority in May 1965. His involvement in politics and his work as a **member of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives**, brought tens of thousands of new voters to the burgeoning VU.

However, Coppieters' political mandate also had a downside. Catholic schools, organisations, and institutions suddenly closed their doors to him. This meant that he could no longer give speeches or carry out

educational activities in cooperation with Church authorities. It surprised and embittered Coppieters that Catholic parochial organisations were still so segregated. His bitterness was evident in his anti-clerical plea for a Flemish university in Leuven, as opposed to a bilingual one, giving him a bad name in religious circles. This led to his **permanent loss of support from the Catholic Church**.

Gent, circa 1975

Volksunie day for activists and members.

From left to right: Huguette De Bleecker-Ingelaere, Maurits Coppieters, Hugo Schiltz, unknown and Oswald Van Ooteghem.

DANN / ADVN | ARCHIEF VOOR NATIONALE BEWEGINGEN



IN THE PEOPLE'S UNION

1965-1979

During the 1960s and 1970s, the People's Union grew from a national movement into a fully-fledged political party. Its ideology was formulated at conventions where party members approved political positions, and Coppieters was undoubtedly the main driving force behind these conventions. In preparation for these meetings, he **drafted intellectually refined papers, inspiring many of his friends and acquaintances,** suggested new talking points and themes for the party, and mobilized party members to get involved.

After 1971, Coppieters' contribution to VU conventions declined as he was focused on developing the **Dosfel Institute**. Founded in 1967, the institute was responsible for making politics more accessible by providing information and educational courses, including to party leaders and politicians. Inspired by Coppieters, the institute **organised numerous discussion evenings, colloquia, seminars, and weekend workshops.** In addition to all his political work, he returned to university to study law as he had previously promised the party. In 1970, Coppieters **earned the title of Doctor of Law and enrolled at the Bar.**

Relations between Coppieters and other politicians in the party, including its leadership, were not always cordial. For example, the relationship between Coppieters and the party founder and chairman, Frans Van der Elst, was particularly tense. Coppieters, who **belonged**

to the left-wing of the party, criticised him for his conservative views and attitude. Disagreements arose between the two wings concerning the expansion of the party programme and the ultimate political goal of the party: Flemish autonomy.

Coppieters showed appreciation for new progressive pioneers, and had, for instance, considerable respect for Hugo Schiltz, an Antwerp lawyer, who, in 1975, was appointed party chairman. Nevertheless, relations between these two progressives would also sour over time due to a clash of personalities. On several occasions during his career, Coppieters would also be **at loggerheads with the party itself, leading him to resign twice.**

Vienna, July 28th, 1978

Maurits Coppieters and Bert Van Woensel during the 15th Europeade.

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A HARD-WORKING MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

1965-1979

Coppieters was a member of the **Belgian Chamber of Representatives until 1971**, when he joined the Senate. He worked as a **senator until 1979**. He fulfilled his mandate with enthusiasm and dedication, taking the floor in every major debate and voicing the views of his political group and supporters. **His parliamentary interventions were well-structured speeches**, punctured with highly relevant and pointed questions, always with touching delivery. Speaking about language issues, education, culture, health care, development assistance, human rights, and European integration, he was one of the few speakers in parliament whose words unfailingly attracted attention.

Coppieters was a specialist on the subject of education and participated in education committee meetings and public assemblies. He focused considerable attention on **educational reforms in the 1970s**, and strongly criticised appointed ministers for their lack of vision. He received harsh opposition from the Catholic camp and his own ranks when he wanted to modernise the traditional Belgian school system.

In 1971, Maurits Coppieters was appointed member of VU wing of the Culture Council for the Dutch Culture Community, the predecessor to the current Flemish Parliament. He **advocated for greater autonomy for Flanders**, while emphasising and broadening the powers of the Culture Council in the fields of cultural

policy, education, tourism, and scientific research. He chaired the Culture Council between 1977 and 1978.

Brussels, May 12th, 1977

Inauguration of Maurits Coppieters as chairman of the Culture Council for the Dutch Culture Community.

BELGA / ADVN | ARCHIEF VOOR NATIONALE BEWEGINGEN



AT THE CULTURE COUNCIL 1977-1978

Coppieters was very briefly the **chairman of the Culture Council for the Dutch Culture Community**. He was appointed after the Egmont Pact was signed on June 14th, 1977, although he left in October 1978 shortly after the Prime Minister dismissed his government. All members and senators of the Culture Council were Flemish speakers, and dealt with matters relating to language policy, education policy, cultural matters, and inter-cultural cooperation. Coppieters **considered the community pact to be a definitive recognition of Flemish nationhood**, since it provided for the expansion of powers of the Culture Council.

During his chairmanship, Coppieters pursued education, language, and cultural dossiers dynamically and decisively. He insisted that the Culture Council should be recognised and given the honour it deserved. As chairman, he took his role as the **protector of the Flemish cultural and language community** very seriously, turning his office into a meeting place for activists in the Flemish movement or the cultural sector.

He introduced the 11th of July celebrations in Brussels and started the tradition of giving an honorary medal to deserving Flemish individuals. In hindsight, **Coppieters referred to his time in the Culture Council as the most rewarding period of his political career**. On **January 30th, 1991**, Coppieters **was awarded the title of honorary chairman**.

Sint-Niklaas, circa 1975

Maurits Coppieters, Nelly Maes and Gerard De Paep.

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POLITICS IN HIS NATIVE REGION

1965-1984

At the end of the 1960s and early 1970s, the People's Union obtained an impressively high number of votes in the Sint-Niklaas district election. The party largely owed its success in Waasland to a popular pre-war political anchor, **Dr Gerard De Paep**, and much-liked young novice politician **Maurits Coppieters**. **Nelly Maes** joined the party in 1968, and two years later, the trio jointly participated in elections under the motto: **"three generations, one goal"**.

Coppieters inspired and protected Maes. In fact, she entered the Chamber of Representatives in 1971 once he agreed to move to the Senate as a provincial senator. Since they **shared many political views and both steered clear from dogmatism, they regularly paired up as a political duo.** Regardless, they also differed in character. While the "rebellious" Maes repeatedly provoked heated discussions, Coppieters managed to express his views more diplomatically.

Since Coppieters was a well-liked and **active politician known for prioritizing regional problems**, at the 1970 municipal elections, his electoral list managed to acquire five seats. Six years later, he doubled this result and won ten seats. He led street campaigns, engaged in canvassing tours with the weekly party magazine *Wij (We)*, and spoke to voters during election campaigns in village squares.

However, the VU in Sint-Niklaas was dealt a severe blow in the municipal elections of October 1982, with the party falling from ten to six seats. Nevertheless, Coppieters managed to form a majority government with the Catholic group. Since he was approaching the age of 65, he decided to say good-bye to municipal politics in 1984. Coppieters **had been the leading figure of the Waasland VU for around 20 years.**

THE EGMONT PACT

1977

In 1977, the People's Union was one of the parties in Belgium negotiating the Egmont Pact. The pact was an **ambitious plan to transform Belgium into a federal state and regulate relations between the language communities** in the country. The unwillingness of the VU to compromise during negotiations caused a surge in party rankings. Coppieters also expressed a growing sense of frustration with the discussions and responded by offering to resign from party leadership.

When **VU leadership signed the pact on May 24th, 1977**, Coppieters was persuaded that the agreement did not represent a break with the party programme. From that point forward, he defended the pact in various forums, although his many concerns and criticisms of certain elements of the pact. However, despite his oratory skills, Coppieters started to make careless mistakes at numerous meetings and party gatherings, and it became clear that **his heart was not fully in it**. For the first time in his life, Coppieters' backing of the Egmont Pact exposed him to criticism from his own supporters and the wider Flemish movement. As many as a third of VU members had no confidence in party leadership at the time. Coppieters found this a strange and **painful experience** that was difficult for him to put into perspective. This change likely reinforced his **intention to leave politics**.

The agreement was ultimately never finalised due to sustained protests by the Flemish group in the Anti-Egmont Committee, but the pact had inflicted deep wounds. It led to the **collapse of the government** in October 1978, and at the **next elections, Coppieters lost his seat**. Eventually, he was appointed provincial senator for East Flanders.

Strasbourg, July 9th, 1981

Foundation of European Free Alliance with nine partners.

From left to right: standing, Roger Ramírez (Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya, observer), Roelof Falkena (Fryske Nasjonale Partij), Mr. Palm and Josef Dries (Partei der Deutschsprachigen Belgier), Fernand Lebrat (Occitania, observer), Ferdinand Moschenross (Elsass-Lothringischer Volksbund), Yann Fouéré (Strollad ar Vro), Herman Verheirstraeten and Francesc Xavier Vela (Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya, observer); seating, Lucien Felli (Unione di Populu Corsu), Roser Vela (Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya, observer), and Jaak Vandemeulebroucke and Maurits Coppieters (Volksunie).

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THE ROAD TO EUROPE

1979-1981

The first European Parliamentary elections were held in 1979. Coppieters had his doubts about participating, but was persuaded to compile an electoral list for the People's Union. He crafted the slogan: "We want the United States of Europe". On June 10th, 1979, he was **elected as a Member of the European Parliament (MEP).**

In Strasbourg, Coppieters joined the technical coordination group that brought together independent groups and members. After the troubled Egmont period, this was the crowning achievement of his political career. However, he again faced some difficult periods when as a member of a small party in the European Parliament, he tried to take on political giants. As an MEP he **raised a remarkable number of environmental issues**, such as the issue of nuclear energy. He also addressed more **ethical and humanitarian issues**, such as the arms trade, the famine in Africa, and European prosperity in economic, social, and cultural terms.

Coppieters' ideas about Flemish history, culture and nationhood inspired his solidarity with all oppressed peoples of the world. He succeeded in **bringing the idea of a "Europe of Nations"** to the attention of European parliamentarians. He developed initiatives that supported the rights of Basques, Bretons, and Corsicans on the European level. He also worked on fostering political ties between autonomous and federalist

parties in Europe. As a result, several parties **signed a European Charter for Peoples without a State**, which would later become the European Free Alliance.

On February 12th, 1981, Coppieters **resigned from his European role and returned to Sint-Niklaas.** There were several reasons for his sudden departure. Above all, he had become discouraged by his experience at the European Parliament. In his 20 months as an MEP and a promoter of a "Europe of the Regions", Coppieters **had repeatedly irritated state nationalists** and crossed swords with members from the Christian-Democrats group, the European People's Party, for not wanting to join their group.

At the same time, his efforts and interventions at the European Parliament, particularly on regional issues, sparked the idea of developing an umbrella organisation of minority, autonomist, regional, and national parties. Coppieters helped lay the foundations for establishing the **European Free Alliance (EFA) as a political party in 1981.** Years later, as a co-founder and honorary chairman, he helped to develop EFA further.

Laken, October 17th, 1986

Celebration of 20 years of NCOS in Stuyvenberg Castle.

From left to right: Julius Nyerere, Bert Cleymans and Maurits Coppieters.

MAPEZ AGENCY / ADVN | ARCHIEF VOOR NATIONALE BEWEGINGEN



RETIREMENT

1981-2001

Coppieters took a well-deserved rest following his resignation from the European Parliament in 1981. He moved to Sint-Martens-Latem (near Ghent) and spend time with his family. He took the **opportunity to travel, meet with friends, and play music.** The historian in him was reawakened, and he worked on a four-part series of political, literary and autobiographical essays. The first part in the series, *Het jaar van de klaproos (The Year of the Poppy, 1987)*, was awarded the Joseph Versou Prize. He was also one of the **founders and the first chairman of the ADVN archive** and research centre in Antwerp, which has since grown into an international archive of national movements.

Coppieters continued to be **active on the international level** on issues like peace, development, human rights, and poverty reduction. He was committed to the **Flemish International Centre**, and became the vice-chairman of the **International Peace Centre** in Antwerp (1980), **Pax Christi Flanders** (1981-1984), and the **National Centre for Development Cooperation** (Nationaal Centrum voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, NCOS), for eight years, which later became known as the **11.11.11 campaign**, a coalition of NGOs, unions, social movements, and various solidarity groups in Flanders working to create a fair world without poverty.

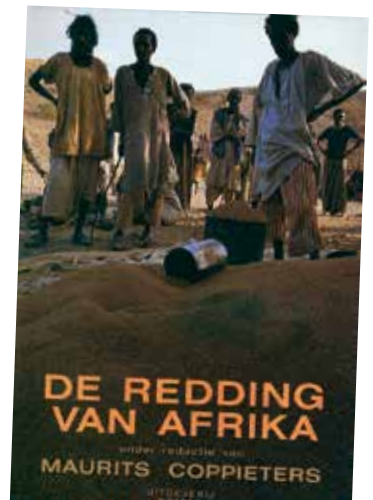
Although Coppieters finished his last political mandate in 1984, he did not disappear from party politics enti-

rely. He was committed to the VU and closely followed planned state reforms. He expressed his disagreement with certain issues at the end of the 1980s in a pointed letter addressed to the VU. He criticised the slowness of state reforms, and **became convinced that the VU had ceased to be a Flemish nationalist party, and therefore, no longer had any reason to exist.** It was at this point that Coppieters offered his resignation for the second time, although he ultimately stayed in the party.

In 2001, a schism formed in the VU between the traditionalists and the progressives, and the party was split in two. Coppieters, decided not to join either of the newly formed parties.

1988

Saving
Africa





Circa 2000

Maurits Coppieters,
always courageous,
despite health problems,
remained active
until the end of his life.

MICHEL HENDRYCKX
/ WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

FINAL YEARS

1996-2005

In 1996, Coppieters was once again in the spotlight. Together with the socialist Norbert De Batselier, he published *Het Sienjaal (The signal)*, a thought piece on political renewal across party boundaries. The book was the result of in-depth discussions with some forty Flemish academics from different disciplines, and was specifically aimed at the Socialist Party, the Green Ecological Party, the VU, and various social movements. The publication **provoked some discussions, primarily in left-wing circles**, but public interest in the document quickly vanished, to the disappointment of the writers.

In the summer of 1997, **Coppieters' health took a turn for the worse**, and he was fighting severe throat cancer. He had an operation, followed by radiotherapy. The treatment lasted four months, but the recovery period took much longer. **His experience with this disease changed him profoundly**. He brought tenderness to all his relationships. His final book, entitled *Het vuur in de verte (The fire in the distance)*, on utopian ideals, hope, and permanent revolution was published at the end of 1999. It was a perfect representation of who Coppieters was and what he stood for.

Coppieters **passed away at the Sint-Vincentius Hospital in Deinze on November 11th, 2005**. A few days later, acquaintances and friends said their final good-byes at an ecumenical service in Sint-Niklaas. Although

no politician spoke at the funeral, many guests seated in the pews remembered the unusual, yet influential role Maurits Coppieters played in Flemish politics.



**Brussels,
December 14th, 2016**

Xabier Macías,
president of Centre
Maurits Coppieters
presents the first
Coppieters Award
to Alex Salmond,
former First Minister
of Scotland,
for his work
on the referendum
of self-determination
in his nation.

GABRIEL LELIÈVRE
/ COPPIETERS FOUNDATION



HIS LEGACY: THE BELOVED POLITICIAN FROM FLANDERS FOR A EUROPE OF THE PEOPLES 2005-2018

Coppieters started his journey shortly after World War II, when he quickly emerged as a leading figure in the early years of the Flemish People's Movement. He worked tirelessly **to re-interpret the traumas and hopes of the Flemings**, to reconstruct the Flemish cultural and national movement, and to give voice to widespread regional complaints. The **charismatic speaker** had the unique skill of articulating emotions that many of his supporters felt, and he carried this torch on his long journey of political projects, commitments and mandates until his final days.

In the People's Union, Coppieters was a **champion of progressive values** and contributed to the party's ideological expansion. He **promoted the idea of federalism** and laid the foundation for the framework of communities and regions we see today in Belgium.

As a senator and MEP, the beloved politician focused on issues like social justice, pacifism, human rights, environment, and development aid and cooperation — values he cherished throughout his long life. His **hope in a just world** undoubtedly left a mark on Flanders, and eventually gave life to new social movements.

Coppieters, the idealist and optimist, was a **fervent supporter of political pluralism**, and on various occasions he attempted to unite different movements behind common humanist causes.

Coppieters was **one of the founding fathers of EFA**, a European political party that brings together more than forty parties of stateless nations, regions and national minorities seeking cultural recognition, political autonomy and self-determination.

Following his death, in 2007, **EFA paid homage to him by naming its political think tank** Centre Maurits Coppieters, which created, in 2016, the **Coppieters Award** to honor individuals and organizations that, like Maurits Coppieters himself, stand out in defense of the right of self-determination of peoples, cultural and linguistic diversity, intercultural dialogue, peace, minority rights, democracy and a united Europe.

2009

The last year of the poppy
an homage book about Maurits Coppieters legacy,
edited by ADVN.



"For me, Maurits Coppieters represents the discovery of youthful and fresh idealism. With him, I was able to calmly delve into the heart of Flemish problems. His answers were perfect! He spoke with youthful enthusiasm about the causes he defended and loved. As an unspoilt politician, Coppieters can easily be called a phenomenon. This is why, out of all those prominent people I've spoken with, I find him the most appealing in Flanders."

Godfried Bomans

Dutch writer and columnist

