

EDITORIAL

- *Bruno De Wever, Chantal Kesteloot & Nico Wouters* -
Chief-Editors

In this final issue of 2015 we present three articles that, as always, show the great methodological and thematic diversity of scholarship in Belgian contemporary history.

The first article by *UGent* historian Stefan Huygebaert looks at the actions of the 19th century Belgian state to re-affirm and reinforce its constitutional system after the urgent wake-up call of the 1848 wave of European revolutions. Huygebaert analyses the visual imagery and iconography of the diverse forms through which Belgian regime tried to reinforce popular identification with the constitution, the monarchy, and, ultimately, with the Belgian state. As such, this is an interesting contribution to the larger scholarly debate on the role of state institutions in the ultimate failure of the Belgian nation and unitary state in the 20th century.

The article by *KU Leuven* historians Karel Van Nieuwenhuyse and Kaat Wils tackles an entirely different subject, namely the impact of history

education on young Flemish adults or, rather, the way these young adults process narratives about the national past. Both authors conclude that a supranational identification with Western 'enlightened civilisation' is far more important than any national identification (Belgian or Flemish); supranational narratives that might be promoted by history education in Flanders.

Finally, the article by *UGent* historians Isabelle Devos and Tina Van Rossem is firmly steeped in historical demography and tackles an ambitious research question, namely the impact of urban environments on life expectancies in Belgium between 1846 and 1910. Not only does the article contain new data and insights, it also shows that urban mortality rates were not univocal or straightforward and that we must instead look at a more complex combination of variables at work in urban environments.

As always, the English issue contains the list of reviews published in

the double issue (3/4) of 2015 with some additional reviews in English. We also offer a summary of all recent doctoral theses defended in Belgian university departments of contemporary history or directly related to Belgian contemporary history.

The most important announcement of this editorial is that this last issue of 2015 is also the final issue under our editorial supervision. The three of us took up this task in 2012, with the launch of the new *Journal of Belgian History* (*JBH*) which merged the *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis* / *Revue Belge de l'Histoire Contemporaine* (1969-2011) and the *Bijdragen tot de Eigentijdse Geschiedenis* / *Cahiers d'Histoire du Temps présent* (1996-2011). In 2012 the renewed *Journal of Belgian History* received a new look and website, as well as one English issue each year. Now that we have successfully bridged the four-year transitional period, we, as editors in chief, pass the torch on to a new streamlined and younger editorial board, as well as two (rather than three) editors in chief. To ensure continuity Nico Wouters (CegeSoma, Ghent University) will continue as editor in chief, while Catherine Lanneau of the University of Liège will join him from 2016. Both will present the names of the new editorial board as well as some concrete future perspectives for the *Journal of Belgian History* in the first editorial of 2016.

As far as the 'old' editorial leadership is concerned, we hope you have enjoyed the high quality as well as diversity of the

articles we were able to present over these last four years and we have every confidence that the *Journal* will continue as the main platform for new scholarly research in Belgian contemporary history.