

## Editorial

Dear reader

2011 is an interesting year for Africa. It also promises to become a historic year.

In 1884-5 the Berlin conference defined 'for once and for all' (sic) the division of Africa among the big colonial blocks, effectively drawing the internal borders between countries on the African continent. Now for the first time since that historical event, the borders between a number of African countries appear unstable and might well change in the near future. The January 2011 Sudan referendum saw the country's southern region vote in favour of secession. Socio-religious and, perhaps even more importantly, economic reasons help us to understand and even explain the result of the referendum. However one might wonder why this process was successful in Sudan, when similar pushes for secession in a number of other countries (Senegal, for instance) met with failure.

While secession and dissent might be more of a Sub-Saharan African problem, northern Africa is also undergoing fundamental change. Large sections of populations have risen against their often self-proclaimed 'leaders' who had always claimed the support of the masses to legitimate their dictatorial systems. The way in which Mouamar Khadafi has acted and continues to act against his own people, the speed with which Ben Ali and Mubarak were ousted, show how weak their claims are, and how fragile their power base. Again socio-economic factors can help explain why such a groundswell of protest.

Ivory Coast offers another interesting case of a divided country where civil war had to 'sanction' the election results – much to the dismay of the international world.

Scientific research and analysis will soon provide authoritative accounts and explanations of these and other historical events. It would take nothing short of a crystal ball, however, to be able to forecast where these countries, and their growing populations, will be in a number of years.

We hope this new number of Afrika Focus finds you all well. May I, in your name, thank our past chief editor, dr. Karel Arnaut, for his years' long support to our journal: *vade valeque*, Karel, and that your 'next' life may be as challenging and rewarding as this one.

Patrick Van Damme  
Editor-in-Chief