

Trugarez, merci ha Bevet Breizh Dieub

Mr President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am the president of the ANH, the Association of the Nations of France. I will start with the case of Brittany, which perfectly exemplifies the difficulties the French State has in managing its minorities.

There is such a thing as Breton language, which is a Celtic language. Unlike French, it is not a Romance language. There is such a thing as a Breton culture, with its literature written in Latin, Breton, and French. The first text fragments in Breton are older than the first texts written in French. Celtic epics and popular traditions are still very much alive and reveal close ties between Brittany and the British Isles.

Brittany was a sovereign State until 1532 when the Treaty Uniting Brittany to France was signed. From then on, up until 1789, Brittany was a “foreign province” and had similar rights to those granted to national minorities, rights that have constantly been demanded. They are still being demanded today through popular uprisings like the revolt of the “Red Caps” in 2013.

The geographic location of the Breton peninsula, in the West of Europe, led to the creation of a living community with its economic interests that adds to the historic, linguistic, and cultural community.

France considers to have invented Human Rights. You might know that in France individual rights have become fossilised. They are used as a shield against collective rights. The unity of the French Republic, inscribed in its constitution and political culture, leads to a difficult, unfair, sometimes catastrophic management of diversity and of the recognition of minorities.

Brittany perfectly complies with the international definition of “national minority”. As long as France refuses to recognise the existence of the Breton national minority, fundamental rights will not apply there. Rights such as, within a legal framework, the right to testify, plead and judge in Breton. Within an education framework, the right of children to know about their history, that is different and has long been separated from the history of France. In the political field, the recognition of a specific representation to other nations. In the economic sphere, the recognition of collective interests.

The struggle of national minorities in France will not stop. On the contrary. France's obstination to uniformise its population with a common citizenship that is awarded by a centralised state does not work any more. It only exacerbates identity claims and chosen solidarities. The demand of this people goes in the same direction as the relentless work of the UN for a world united in the respect of diversities.

Stéphane Domagala,

President of the Association of the Nations of France