

Breton and the ECRML

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I thought we could look at the position of Breton vis-à-vis the charter, as we tend to look to Breton a lot as Cornish speakers. Major difference: the charter was signed by France in 1999, but not ratified, so they're under no obligation to implement any of its provisions.

“La langue de la République est le français.”

from Article 2 of the constitution of the Republic of France

It was blocked because of this sentence in the constitution: the language of the republic is French. There've been several attempts to ratify the Charter: Hollande said he would and didn't, and they're trying to get it ratified at the moment as well. So let's run through the parts of article 7 part 1 which are the provisions that are supposed to apply to Cornish, and see where Breton stands in relation.

a. The recognition of the regional or minority languages as an expression of cultural wealth

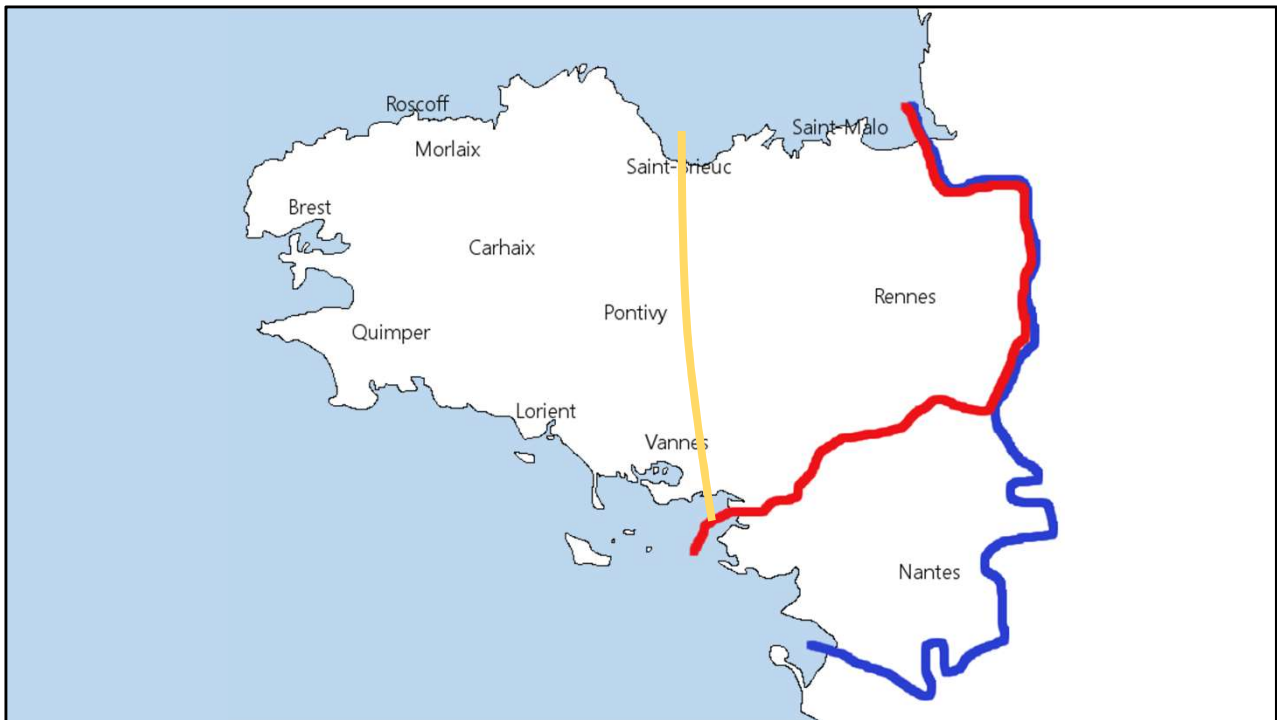
Article 75-1: “Les langues régionales appartiennent au patrimoine de la France”

The first one: recognising Breton as an expression of cultural wealth.

This is in fact the case: the French constitution was modified in 2008 and it now says that regional languages are part of the heritage of France. So the national government has recognised this.

b. The respect of the geographical area of each regional or minority language in order to ensure that existing or new administrative divisions do not constitute an obstacle to the promotion of the regional or minority language in question

Next: respecting the geographical area with regard to administrative divisions.



We can see that this isn't really the case: the blue line marks the historical region of Brittany, the red line marks the administrative region of Brittany, so this area here is culturally Breton but not politically and there've been a lot of protests about that. West of the yellow line is where Breton was spoken into the 20th century, but it's now spoken to the east as well.

c. The need for resolute action to promote regional or minority languages in order to safeguard them



The need for resolute action: this sounds a bit vague.

If we take it to mean language policy, there is a lot of this, the regional government has produced a lot of detailed policy over the last 10 years or so. This one is nearly 200 pages long. So not at a national level, but everywhere underneath that, there is detailed policy.

d. The facilitation and/or encouragement of the use of regional or minority languages, in speech and writing, in public and private life

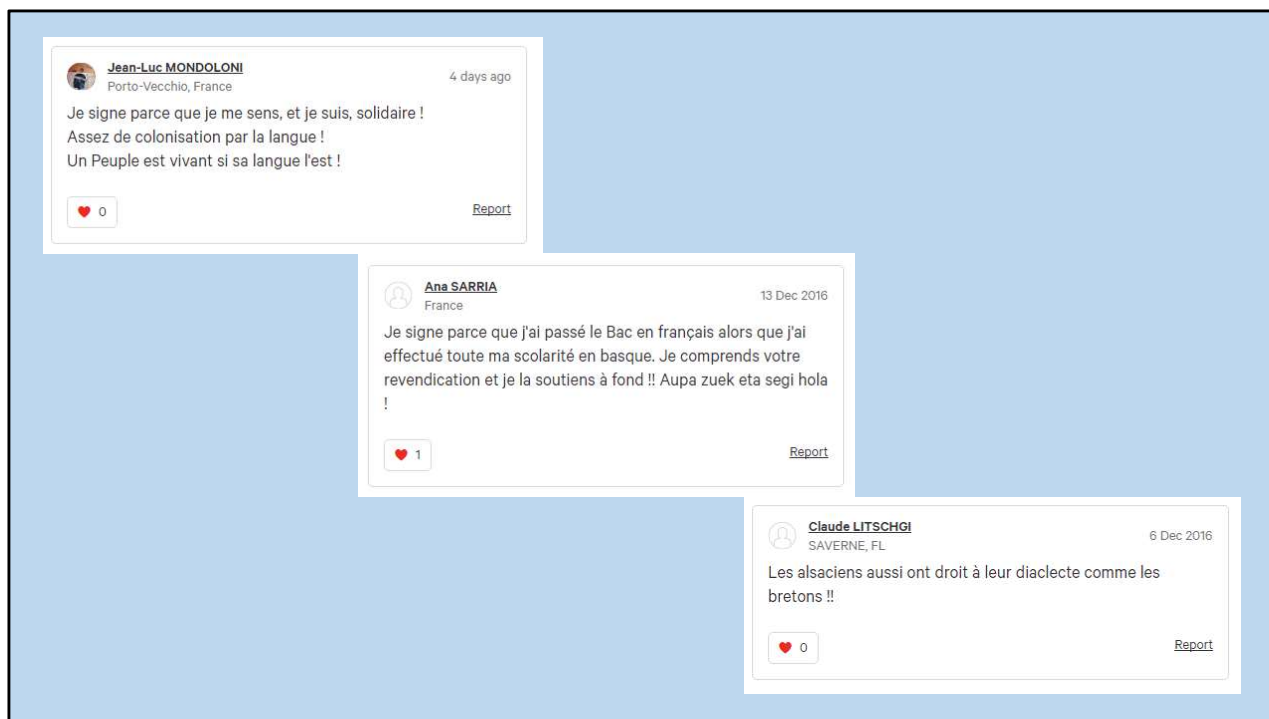


Next: encouragement to use the languages. This has been interpreted as visibility in the media and on public signage. So as for the media, there are a few minutes on local TV a day, not very much, but quite a lot more on state radio, about 3 hours a day in western Brittany.

And also in western Brittany most road signs are bilingual, as you can see here. Street signs are the responsibility of town councils, so a few towns have had bilingual signage for a while. In the last couple of months the first bilingual street signs have gone up in Quimper in the west and Nantes in the east too.

e. The maintenance and development of links, in the fields covered by this Charter, between groups using a regional or minority language and other groups in the State employing a language used in identical or similar form, as well as the establishment of cultural relations with other groups in the State using different languages

Links with other regions of France using similar languages: that's not really relevant here, but we also have links with other minority language groups. This tends to happen with regionalist politics, so we see the regionalist parties in Brittany supporting movements in places like the Basque country and Alsace.



We also see it among the community, so these are some comments on a petition asking for Breton to be allowed in school exams, and these are comments of support from, from the top, Corsica, the Basque country, and Alsace. So there is a feeling of mutual understanding but this isn't really exploited at a higher political level.

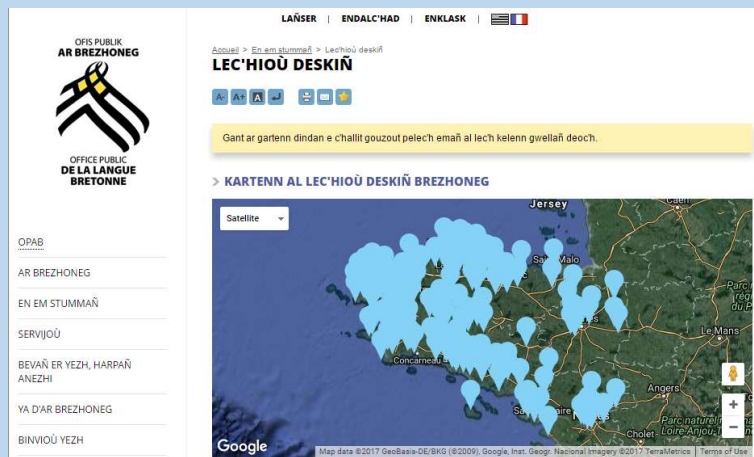
f. The provision of appropriate forms and means for the teaching and study of regional or minority languages at all appropriate stages



Education in Breton. Yes, there are schools where you can learn Breton, and there are also bilingual state schools where some lessons are in Breton. And there's of course full Breton-immersion education in the Diwan schools, which aren't part of the state system. This is one area where the national government aren't so good: they blocked the integration of Diwan into the state system in 2002.

And the way they train teachers means there are sometimes problems appointing teachers to the bilingual schools, so teachers sometimes get accidentally sent outside Brittany, which is what this article is talking about.

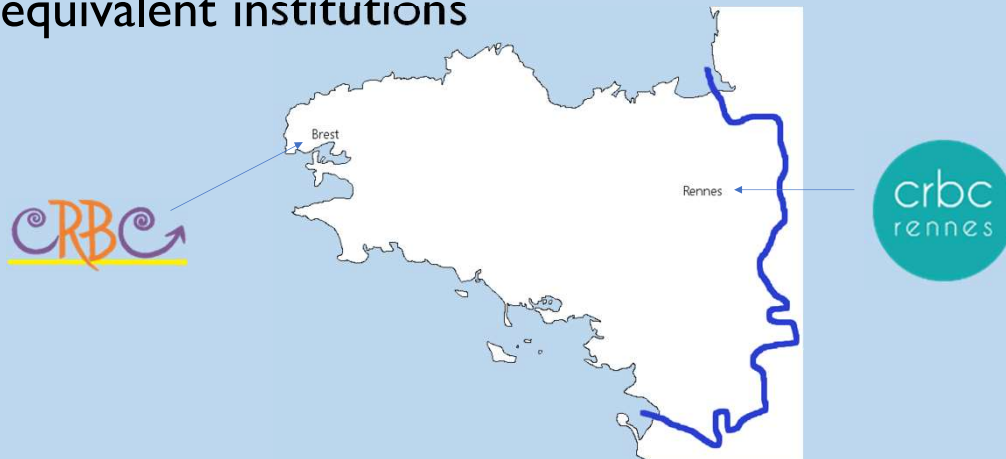
g. The provision of facilities enabling non-speakers of a regional or minority language living in the area where it is used to learn it if they so desire



Next, provision for adults to learn Breton.

This is very good: this is a page from the Breton language office website showing where you can learn Breton, and the coverage is quite extensive, particularly in the west. These are all of course organised by small associations, they're not instruments of the state.

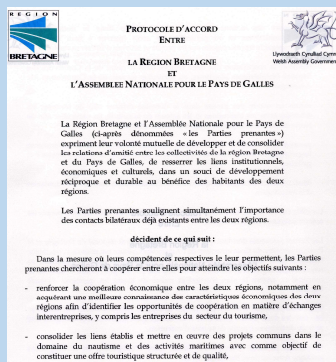
h. The promotion of study and research on regional or minority languages at universities or equivalent institutions



Provision to study Breton at universities.

So there are 3 state universities in Brittany, two of which have these units called a CRBC, centre for Breton and Celtic research, and they offer language teaching. So that's an area where Breton is a lot stronger than Cornish.

i. The promotion of appropriate types of transnational exchanges, in the fields covered by this Charter, for regional or minority languages used in identical or similar form in two or more States



And lastly, links with speakers of similar languages in other countries. So this is obviously Cornish and Welsh in this case.

There are quite formal links with Wales: this agreement between the regional governments in Brittany and Wales was signed quite a few years ago. And for Cornwall, the links aren't as formal but there are still lots of cultural exchanges, such as the young people's camp that happened last year.

So going through the parts of article 7, it looks like Breton is covered by these criteria to a certain extent, even though the national government isn't involved that often as the charter doesn't ask them to be. Of course in the case of Cornish the charter *does* ask the British government to put these things in place, and as we know it's not so good at doing so a lot of the time. I would say the ratification of the charter may not actually make a lot of difference, and we can't use the fact that it's ratified to be complacent about the position of Cornish.