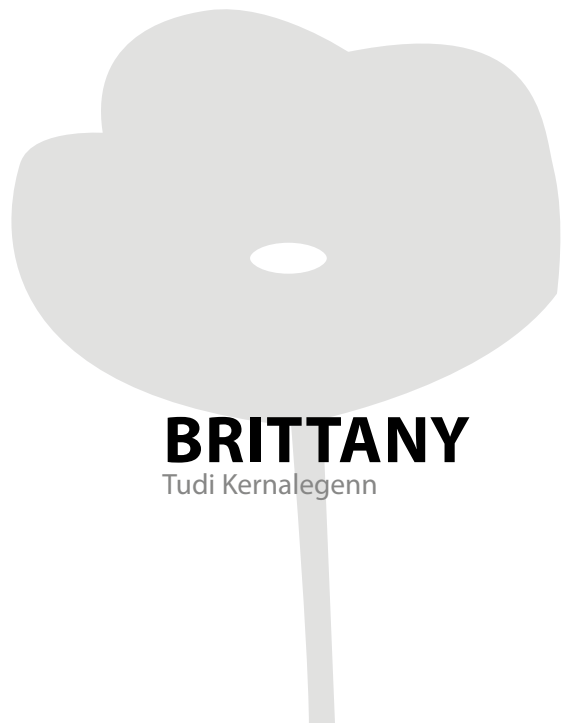




BRITTANY

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BRITTANY, BETWEEN REGIONALISM AND EMANCIPATION

Despite a strong and asserted identity, the claim for a right to self-determination is weak in Brittany. Since 1964, this aspiration has been mainly driven by the Breton Democratic Union (Union démocratique bretonne), which, however, has never managed much electoral success. From the early 2000s, though, Breton nationalists began to strengthen their political weight by integrating regional institutions. The emergence of the figure of Christian Troadec and the Red Caps social movement contributed also to the first electoral swing in their favour. However, this recent momentum remains fragile.

A geographically distinct region (it is a peninsula), historically stable (it was a kingdom and then a duchy in Medieval times until 1532), an independent province that was 'regarded as foreign' in the modern period (before 1789), with the only Celtic language in continental Europe (Breton) and its own

dynamic culture... Brittany has all the ingredients for fostering a strong movement in favour of self-determination. However, despite its dynamism and incontrovertible success in the cultural and economic field, the Breton movement is today one of the politically weakest in Europe among those regions where there is a demand for self-determination.

1. THE CONTESTED EMERGENCE OF A REGIONALIST MOVEMENT IN BRITTANY

The first political expression of the Breton movement - the *Emsav* - saw the light in 1898, in a moderate and conservative form: *Union régionaliste bretonne*. Close to the cultural circles, it was a striking representation of a conservative Brittany, dominated by the aristocratic and clerical classes. Limited to the political and social circles of leading figures, its social impact was virtually nil.

This circle of influence was reorganised after the First World War around the journal *Breiz Atao* (Brittany Forever). Rejecting the provincialism and folklore of their elders, the new generation of nationalists tried to draw the Breton movement into contemporary Breton society through a modernising break with the past, at once artistic (the *Seiz Breur*), linguistic (around the journal *Gwalarn*) and political, with the pro-autonomy *Parti autonomiste breton* (PAB, founded in 1927) and then *Parti national breton* (PNB, created in 1931). However, the social engagement and the political influence of this nationalist generation remained limited.

Rejecting federalism in favour of separatism, and replacing the relatively progressive ideas of the PAB with those of a fascist doctrine with a Breton inflection, the PNB moved towards the extreme right during the 1930s. This ideological turn found its conclusion in the collaboration of some Breton activists with the Nazi occupiers during the Second World, some going so far as to appear in German uniform, and the sometimes passive, but often active tolerance of the Vichy regime by the great majority. This was to discredit the Breton movement as a whole during and after the Liberation.

2. THE POLITICAL MARGINALITY OF BRETON AUTONOMISM

At the end of the Second World War, Breton demands thus started again from scratch. They rebuilt on a basis that was both cultural (with the emergence of Celtic circles and *bagadoù*, traditional dance and music groups), and economic (thanks to the *Comité d'étude et de liaison des intérêts bretons*, CELIB), which was the catalyst for economic recovery in Brittany. However, no new regional political movement emerged until 1957 with the creation of the *Mouvement pour l'organisation de la Bretagne* (MOB), a body which aimed to be ‘neither left nor right’.

The creation of the *Union démocratique bretonne* (UDB) in 1964 turned a new leaf in the history of Breton demands. Explicitly positioning itself on the left, the UDB gave itself a dual task: to develop leftist ideas within the Breton movement and to have the legitimacy of its autonomist aims accepted by the traditional French Left. While it got off to a slow start, the UDB saw a real boom in support during the 1970s, and had up to 2000 activists at the end of the decade. From 1977, the party succeeded in having numerous councillors elected in municipal elections, usually due to pacts with the *Parti Socialist* (PS). Nevertheless, when it stood alone, the party consistently received between 1.6% and 2.6% of the vote at legislative elections. This lack of electoral success, which contrasted with the militant and intellectual dynamism of the party, led to repeated internal crises, particularly during the 1980s when it almost disappeared. The presence of the UDB also helped to expose the French Left to the regional question, which reclaimed in part its rhetoric and instituted a policy of decentralisation under the presidency of François Mitterrand.

Table 1: UDB elected representatives in municipal election

Date	1965	1971	1977	1983	1989	1995	2001	2008	2014
Elected representative or councillors	1	2	35	Approx. 80	Approx. 70	Approx. 70	65	83	Approx. 60

In parallel to the UDB, two other major political currents took shape in Brittany from the 1970s onwards. Traditional nationalist circles, leaning to the right, persisted under various names (*Mouvement pour l'organisation*

*de la Bretagne, Strollad ar vro, Parti pour l'organisation de la Bretagne libre, Parti breton*⁸²), but never lost their limited appeal. An extreme left independence movement also emerged in the form of the party *Emgann*, founded in 1983, which attracted some of the activists who were members of the *Front de libération de la Bretagne* during the 1970s. Despite visible activism, mainly outside the electoral sphere, the party had little impact on the general public.

3. AUTONOMISM IN THE INSTITUTIONS

Starting in the 1980s, the UDB reinvented itself. It modernised its way of operating (abandoning democratic centralism) and updated its ideology. It rejected the analysis of Brittany as an internal colony in favour of a new approach, which cast the region as underdeveloped, and increasingly focused on environmental issues. It also joined European (it became a member of the European Free Alliance in 1987) and French (it was a founding member of *Région et peuples solidaires* in 1994) networks. After a decade of slow maturing, this new approach began to bear fruit, not least through a rapprochement with the Greens.

In 2004, the UDB acquired its first regional counsellors (three UDB and one affiliate, Christian Troadec) thanks to a pact with the Greens on the *Bretagne verte, unie et solidaire* list, which received 9.7% of the vote in the first round. This list merged with the Socialist Party list and helped to tip administrative Brittany to the Left⁸³. The spokesman for the party, Christian Guyonvarc’h, became Vice-President of the Regional Council, responsible for European and international affairs. The Green-UDB alliance was successfully repeated in 2010 (12.2% in the first round, 17.4% in the second). Without an agreement with the PS on this occasion, the four UDB regional councillors were in opposition, before re-entering the majority in 2012. Christian Guyonvarc’h was then appointed *general rapporteur* for the budget. As a result of their good relations with the

⁸² In 1999, the *Parti pour l'organisation de la Bretagne libre* (POBL) split into a radical extreme right wing, *Adsav*, and a moderate wing, the *Parti Breton*. The two parties still exist.

⁸³ It should be noted that the administrative region of Brittany only includes four of the five departments of historical Brittany. Loire-Atlantique (with Nantes, the historical capital of Brittany) is integrated in the adjacent administrative region, the Pays de la Loire. The question of the “reunification” of Brittany is of central importance to the Breton movement.

environmentalists (now known as *Europe écologie Les Verts* – EELV) and the PS, UDB was given a reserved constituency at the 2012 general election and, against all expectations (since it was a firmly right-leaning constituency) had its first affiliated Member of the Parliament elected, Paul Molac. The new high profile of UDB in the political sphere was also marked by the arrival of a new generation of more dynamic and anti-establishment activists. However, the party's electoral results continued to stagnate when it stood for election alone, and none of its major figures were widely known to the general public.

4. CHRISTIAN TROADEC, A POLITICAL ENTREPRENEUR

Events took a new turn in the first decade of the new century with the emergence of an external and personal dynamic around the figure of Christian Troadec. A successful entrepreneur (after founding a local weekly paper, he became the owner of the biggest Breton brewery, Coreff) and a cultural facilitator (he is the co-founder and long-term President of the largest music festival in France, the Vieilles Charrues Festival), Troadec became mayor of Carhaix, a small town in the rural centre-west of Brittany, in 2001. He was elected Regional Councillor in 2004, affiliated to the UDB, and gained attention in 2008 when he successfully led the campaign to retain a maternity ward in Carhaix.

This was the moment when he decided to strike out on his own, politically: he left the majority on the Regional Council and founded the movement *Nous te ferons Bretagne*. With the support of the Parti Breton (the final embodiment of the MOB, founded in 2000), he stood in the 2010 regional election and received 4.29% of the vote. With some fellow list members, he then launched the *Mouvement Bretegne et Progrès (MBP)* movement, which elected two general councillors in 2011 (including Troadec himself), the first Breton regionalists to be elected in a two-round election system.

It is interesting to note that Troadec's strategic choices are exactly the reverse of those of the UDB even though they appear to occupy the same niche - moderate, centre-left autonomism. Whereas the UDB is a collegial organisation resistant to personality cults, Troadec has a political career as a dominant figure, with strong local roots and a highly personalised approach. Whereas the UDB emphasises a well-thought out ideological position,

Troadec is content with a minimalist, pragmatic approach, fluctuating and even populist. Troadec has constructed a political stronghold in the centre-west of Brittany, which the UDB has never succeeded in doing in its fifty years of existence.

5. THE SPRING OF THE RED CAPS

In 2013, a social movement changed the state of play and gave a new dimension to Breton autonomist claims: this movement is known as the 'Red Caps'. Against the background of a crisis in the agro-food sector (important to Brittany), the introduction of an eco-tax on heavy goods sparked a large-scale social movement throughout the western part of Brittany. It adopted the red cap as a symbol, in reference to a major Breton revolt in 1675. It was characterised by repeated actions to pull down the tax portals used to monitor lorries on the roads, and by two huge demonstrations in Quimper (November 2nd, 2013, 15,000-30,000 demonstrators) and Carhaix (November 30th, 2013, 17,000-40,000 people). These demonstrations were visually striking with their mixture of red caps, Breton flags and heterogeneous in the diversity of their participants (trade unionists and businessmen, farmers and white-collar workers, artists and political activists). In the meantime, at the initiative of the leaders of this mobilisation - including Christian Troadec - a collective entitled *Vivre, décider et travailler en Bretagne* was set up to coordinate the movement and to raise its profile on a clearly 'regionalist' basis. On March 8th, 2014, the Red Caps General Assembly adopted eleven demands at a meeting in Morlaix, calling notably for an official status for the Breton language and the 'relocation' of political decisions and economic power in Brittany.

As the figure with the highest media profile in the movement, Troadec acquired a new status in Breton public life. In the 2014 European elections, he headed a list known as *Nous te ferons Europe* with the support of several small autonomist parties, receiving 5.49% of the vote in Brittany, but 7.19% in administrative Brittany and 11.54% in Finistère, the western-most department of Brittany. The UDB also presented a list against him, but this list obtained only 1.77% of the vote (2.03% in administrative Brittany, and 1.91% in Finistère). With 106,836 votes overall, the Breton autonomist tendency was beginning, for the first time, to have an influence in the electoral landscape. However, the driver of this development was not the historical UDB, but Christian Troadec.

6. OUI LA BRETAGNE

Not without tensions, an alliance was formed between Christian Troadec (and his MBP) and the UDB for the regional elections of December 6th-15th, 2015, as part of the *Oui la Bretagne* platform, which also included environmentalists, including Daniel Cueff, outgoing regional councillor and head of the list in Ille-et-Vilaine, and activists in the *Parti breton*. The aim was to exceed the 10% threshold needed to move into the second round, and thus to elect some representatives. The UDB kept its distance from its traditional green and socialist allies; it was particularly disappointed by the territorial reform conducted by the PS (2013-2015), which allowed neither the reunification of Brittany nor the strengthening of regional powers.

For the first time, two independence lists also stood. The first, *Notre chance l'indépendance* supported by the *Parti Breton*, was an essentially traditional nationalist list, somewhat to the right (though rejecting this description). The second, *Bretagne en luttés – Breizh o stourm* was supported by *Breizhistance*, an extreme-left independence party created in 2009 and the successor to *Emgann*. In Loire-Atlantique (in the Pays de la Loire region), a single list bringing together all the components of the Breton movement also stood under the name *Choisir nos régions et réunifier la Bretagne*, headed by the former docker and general councillor for the Greens, Gilles Denigot.

The Breton issue was at the heart of the campaign as never before. Each list presented its own more or less eligible regionalists, and called for a politically and culturally stronger Brittany. The head of the list on the right, Marc Le Fur, put the reunification of Brittany among his political priorities, and enjoyed the support of several small regionalist groups, including *Breizh Europa* and *En Avant Bretagne*. The socialist party list even succeeded in poaching Paul Molac, a deputy hitherto affiliated with the UDB, and Mona Bras, UDB spokesperson from 2006 to 2014, both of whom would be elected and who formed a ‘regionalist’ group on the Regional Council.

The first polls indicated the dynamism of the *Oui la Bretagne* list: 8% according to IFOP (13-15 October 2015) and 9% according to BVA (6-15 October 2015). However, the impetus of the regional campaign was interrupted by the 13 November attacks in Paris. The campaign was

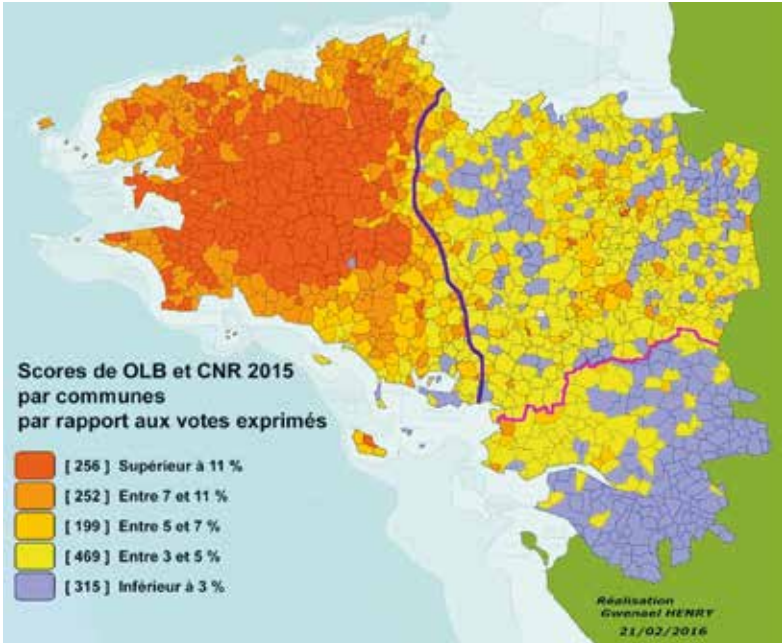
suspended. A climate of national unity, even an atmosphere of flag-waving, settled in. The campaign became a national one, to the detriment of regional issues. The head of the socialist list, Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, became untouchable. The *Oui la Bretagne* list was particularly vulnerable in this new context, as can be seen in the polls carried out after the attacks, which now put the list between 6% (BVA, 17-23 November 2015) and 7% (IPSOS, 20-29 November 2015).

The results therefore fell a long way short of expectations. The *Oui la Bretagne* list obtained only 6.71%, far from the hoped-for 10%. The pro-independence lists performed even worse, none receiving more than 1% of the vote. In Loire-Atlantique, results were equally unsatisfactory for *Choisir nos régions*, with 2.67% of the votes cast. Nevertheless, this result was the best ever achieved by the Breton autonomist movement in a regional election, and it maintained the levels obtained in the European election.

Table 2: Breton autonomists in the regional elections

Election	List name and components	Result	Comments
1986	<i>Convergence bretonne</i> (UDB, PSU, etc.)	1.55%	
1992	<i>Peuple breton-Peuple d'Europe</i>	2.07%	
1998	UDB	3.18%	
2004	<i>Bretagne verte, unie et solidaire</i> (the Greens + UDB)	9.70%	3 UDB councillors + Christian Troadec
2010	<i>Europe écologie Bretagne</i> (the Greens + UDB)	12.21%	3 UDB councillors
	<i>Nous te ferons Bretagne</i> (Christian Troadec, with the support of the Parti breton)	4.29%	
2015	<i>Oui la Bretagne</i> (Christian Troadec, with the support of the UDB and MBP)	6.71%	Dissident autonomists were on the PS list, including three councillors forming a 'Regionalist' group.
	<i>Bretagne en lutte – Breizh o stourm</i> (Gael Roblin, with the support of Breizhistance)	0.62%	
	<i>Notre chance l'indépendance</i> (Bertrand Deléon, with the support of the Parti breton)	0.54%	

Map 1: Results for the *Oui la Bretagne* (administrative Brittany) and *Choisir nos régions* (Loire-Atlantique) lists in the first round of the regional election of 6-13 December 2015



7. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE BRETON MOVEMENT

While for decades the Breton movement was of marginal importance in electoral terms, the situation began to change in the first years of this century for two reasons. Firstly, the UDB played a part in Brittany’s lurch leftwards, and thanks to an effective alliance with the Greens and then the PS, it obtained elected representatives in positions of responsibility on the Regional Council. Next, the emergence of the strong figure of Christian Troadec gave the Breton movement a charismatic leader it had never been able to produce from its own ranks.

But this is still a fragile dynamic, as the partial failure of the December 2015 regional election shows. It relies heavily on one individual, Troadec,

who now hopes to represent the ‘regionalist’ trend in the presidential election of 2017. The territorial dimension of this vote is also striking. As Jérôme Fourquet points out,⁸⁴ it reaches its maximum intensity in Carhaix, whether in 2014 for the *Nous te ferons* Europe list (44.64%) or in 2015 for *Oui la Bretagne* (44.84%). The vote then declines gradually as we move further from Carhaix. This is not just a fiefdom effect. The traditional boundary between western Brittany (Breton-speaking Lower Brittany) and eastern Brittany (Gallo-speaking Upper Brittany) appears very clearly, as does that between administrative Brittany and Loire-Atlantique, where results remain marginal. Even in Lower Brittany, however, the autonomists struggle to make an impact in towns and achieve relatively worse results on the coast.

Structural reasons for the poor electoral performance persist. The orthodox French opinion which regards as illegitimate any public discourse that might undermine the one and indivisible nature of France, and in particular any discussion of the pluri-national nature of France, lives on. The Breton identity, while still very strong – a 2009 survey found that 94.3% of Bretons are very or fairly attached to Brittany – is not divisive. 88% of the population of Brittany see themselves as to some extent both Breton and French (with 23% feeling more Breton than French, and just 2% feeling only Breton) (Pasquier, 2012: 72-82). Finally, the French electoral system, essentially a first-past-the-post model, is still hostile to emerging forces.

Nevertheless, the ideological opportunity structure has shown signs of opening up recently; this can only be reinforced by the discredit of the French political class, and more specifically of the PS, which is the dominant party in Brittany. It remains to be seen whether the autonomists will be able to exploit this window of opportunity, which could close again at any time. It all depends on their ability to organise themselves effectively and sustainably in Brittany as a whole, and to construct and disseminate a message that resonates with Breton socio-economic and political aspirations. More than ever, Breton autonomists hold their future in their own hands.

⁸⁴ www.huffingtonpost.fr/jerome-fourquet/bonnets-rouges-christian-troadec_b_5483186.html