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Peuples et Frontières: a Europeanist Journal against the Europe of the Treaties (1936-1939)

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From 1919 some voices were raised in Brittany to claim the right of the Breton people to dispose of themselves. Grouped around the newspaper *Breiz Atao*, a team of young activists pretends to lead Brittany to autonomy within the framework of a federal Europe, even to independence, which requires a redrawing of borders. Very quickly it was the Europe of the Treaties which was criticized, in a logic of rapprochement with other regional nationalisms, and with Germany, some nationals of which stirred up local claims. This Breton and European activism finds its most complete expression in two reviews: the *Bulletin des minorités nationales en France*, created in 1936, and quickly renamed *Peuples et Frontières* (Peoples and Borders). Why and how did a few Breton activists without an audience pretend to get involved in European geopolitics? What interest did their journal defend?

After being disappointed by Panceltism, these Breton nationalists first turned to the oppressed minorities of France, who gathered in 1927 in a committee without a future. The federalism promoted by this committee finds new life in the *Bulletin des minorités nationales en France*, which soon spread to Europe under the name *Peuples et Frontières*, in accordance with the wishes of some German activists, including Gerhard von Tevenar. Consequently, the review defends German interests in Central Europe, since asking for the revision of the Treaties would make it possible to defend Breton interests in France. Largely, this monthly was moderated by Yann Fouéré, whose network extended to central Europe, that was considered as a laboratory.

Keywords: Breton Nationalism; federalism; Central Europe; Collaboration; Brittany.

Introduction

At the end of the Great War, for reasons already explained elsewhere,¹ a handful of young people who had been too young to take part in the combat invested their heroism deficit in politics instead. They became convinced that Brittany had lost the war and began to denounce the degeneracy of their Gallicised compatriots. The *Groupe Régionaliste Breton* (Breton Regionalist Group) was founded in 1918.² Its main aim was to ‘work actively to restore the Breton Fatherland’.³ Armed with its mouthpiece, the journal *Breiz Atao*,⁴ the group hoped to remedy this state of affairs by unearthing Celtic warriors who had been buried under the veneer of a forced Latinisation and by re-Celtising Brittany through contact with their so-called Celtic brothers in Ireland, Wales and Scotland.⁵ However, by the mid-1920s, the cross-Channel contact they had made had proved disappointing and their plan for a Celtic alliance had come to nothing. This failure of pan-Celticism contrasted, however, with the reception that Olier Mordrel and Morvan Marchal, two leading figures in the group, were given by Flemish students in Belgium in February 1925 (the Breton activists also saw the Flemings as the victims of Latinisation). The activists thus began to promote European federalism. The objective was clear. The ‘small, oppressed nationalities’⁶ intended to join forces to defeat the common enemy – sovereign states – and establish a new federal European order. Very quickly, the Europe of the Treaties came in for criticism as they sought closer ties not just with other regional nationalisms but also with Germany, where some nationals were stirring up local grievances. This Breton and Europeanist activism found its fullest expression in the *Bulletin des Minorités Nationales en France*, a fortnightly journal founded in 1936 by Olier Mordrel and edited by Yann Fouéré. Renamed *Peuples et Frontières* shortly after its launch, this twenty-to-thirty paged journal moved to monthly publication in 1938 before being banned in 1939 after just twenty-nine issues.⁷ Why and how did a few Breton activists without an

audience pretend to get involved in European geopolitics? What interest did their journal defend? To answer these questions, we need to look closely at the context in which the journal emerged, which will give us an understanding of who the main protagonists were and what the content of its discourse was.

Federating first the French and then the European regional nationalisms

The first issue of the *Bulletin des Minorités Nationales en France* opened with an article written by Olier Mordrel. This son of a general, who had joined the Breton cause seventeen years earlier while still an architecture student, was one of the key figures within the small *Breiz Atao* team. A brilliant polemicist with a divisive personality, he regularly presented contemporary political experiments that he saw as offering solutions for Breton activism. Indeed, he tried to merge the ideologies of the *Groupe Régionaliste Breton* (1918), the *Parti Autonomiste Breton* (Breton Autonomist Party) (1927) and the *Parti National Breton* (PNB - Breton National Party) (1931) with these successive experiments. We can see this in his shift from championing pan-Celticism to promoting European federalism. On his return from Flanders in 1925, he noted that 'It is in the interests of small oppressed nationalities to stand together on their respective causes, to create an international programme from their own specific programmes, to form a European movement out of their dispersed struggles.'⁸ He would speak of a United States of Europe. His alter-ego at the time, Maurice Marchal, also a former architecture student who was in the process of designing the Breton flag, had taken this idea a step further, advocating the union of 'comrades in the struggle' who were linked by a 'similar fate, similar hopes, similar efforts':

An era of closer contact seems have opened up [...] from this affinity, from this friendship in some cases, that has spontaneously sprung up between parallel movements, we believe it is possible to form a closer relationship and more effective moral support [...] The existence of a common organisation would allow not only exchanges of views but, where necessary, a real coordination of our efforts.⁹

Marchal had therefore proposed a '*Comité International des Minorités Nationales* [International Committee of National Minorities], to meet periodically and to comprise delegates from the national movements of Western Europe'. The *Comité Central des Minorités Nationales de France* (CCMNF (central committee of the national minorities of France)) was inaugurated in Quimper on 12 September 1927 at the end of the Rosporden congress, which had also seen the creation of the *Parti Autonomiste Breton*. The CCMNF charter, which was signed by a small group of Corsican, Alsatian and Breton activists, claimed to 'align the efforts of all the member groups and, where necessary, to represent them en bloc'.¹⁰ It also provided for the establishment of statutes and the integration of the Flemings.

The CCMNF had a meteoric trajectory. On 4 December 1927, it met in Paris to publicly protest against the banning of several newspapers,¹¹ and the arrest of a number of Alsatian autonomist leaders for conspiring against state security.¹² This activity had been enough for the investigating judge in Mulhouse to order searches to be carried out in Corsica, Flanders and Brittany. At the same time, the national press believed – wrongly – that the CCMNF's actions were being orchestrated by 'the hand of Moscow'.¹³ Finally, in a special issue of *Breiz Atao*, which was distributed in Alsace on the day the autonomists' trial opened in Colmar, the CCMNF had published an open letter to the jurors.¹⁴ This was to be its final act. Due to the arrests in Alsace and the lack of means

available to all, the links between the Alsatians, Corsicans and Bretons became more distant after this.

It would be reasonable to suppose that, eight years on from Colmar, the *Bulletin des Minorités Nationales en France* was an old project resurrected. It was in fact a scaled-back version. The CCMNF's aim was to compare its member organisations' information and methods and 'increase their influence on public opinion through joint events'.¹⁵ Mordrel set out the *Bulletin's* objectives, which included the following: 'regular reading [...] will give European opinion, which has been misled by French propaganda, a precise idea of the importance and struggle of each distinct nationality within the French state. It would be a mistake to ascribe to each and every one of them similar situations and even aspirations'.¹⁶ The *Bulletin* therefore intended to stick to providing information, but not just any information.

The contributors to the *Bulletin*, who were mainly Breton, offered articles highlighting the historical, linguistic, literary and cultural specificities of Brittany, Alsace-Lorraine, Flanders, the Basque Country, Corsica, Catalonia and Occitanie. For example, Karl Heller gave an 'overview of the history of Alsace until 1918',¹⁷ while an anonymous contributor analysed the relationship that the Flemish of France had with their language.¹⁸ Local political movements, demonstrations and actions were also presented in the journal, as was the Basque *eskualerri* movement's programme¹⁹ with details of actions undertaken in Brittany to support the teaching of Breton.²⁰ There was a strong emphasis on French oppression and the hostility of successive governments towards the demands of minorities.²¹ Information and even activist pedagogy also appeared in the form of maps – for example there was one map showing the chronology of the decline of the Breton language²² – and electoral results, particularly during the legislative elections in the Haut-Rhin and Bas-Rhin departments in April and May 1936.²³ It is not clear whether this type of information was included predominantly because

of a need to produce papers.²⁴ This was perhaps the *Bulletin's* main problem. Its editors had quickly understood the need to open it up to other countries in order, on the one hand, to have more topics to write about and, on the other, to reach a wider audience.

In January 1937, the *Bulletin* was renamed *Peuples et Frontières* with the subtitle 'Revue d'information sur les peuples opprimés d'Europe Occidentale' (Journal of Information on the Oppressed Peoples of Western Europe).²⁵ The editors explained the situation to their readers, assuring them they would 'adopt exactly the same line' as the *Bulletin* and that the change had been prompted by the need to broaden the scope of the publication 'if only to ensure the continuation of its material existence'. They wrote:

The role of our journal will be to show that there are peoples living within these borders, and in some cases on both sides of a border, who are ignored through diplomatic arbitrariness. We will show that, standing in stark contrast to these factitious borders, these seeds of wars, these bloody conflicts, there are peoples, small populations, whose dynamism and right to live must throw off these crippling shackles.²⁶

It was thus not just French oppression that the journal aimed to denounce now but also the Europe of the Treaties and any form of imperialism that ran contrary to Germany's interests. While the *Bulletin* had only offered a few forays outside of France (Ireland, Italy, Slovakia) and almost a third of its articles had concerned Brittany, *Peuples et Frontières* was characterised by a greater emphasis on Celtic countries (Ireland, Scotland, Wales), Central and Eastern European countries, and the Netherlands. In addition, Brittany now accounted for only a fifth of the articles, and references to Catalonia, Corsica and Occitanie were rare. There was a marked increase in the number of articles on topics related to Germany's sphere of influence, specifically Flanders, which quickly

became included in everything concerning the Netherlands, Alsace-Lorraine, and Central Europe, particularly Czechoslovakia. These countries represented 29% of the total content in 1936 rising to almost 40% a year later. During this same period, the number of articles on Brittany and the Celtic countries had increased from 25% to 29% and, on the Basque Country, Catalonia, Corsica and Occitanie, the number had dropped from 16% to 12%. The peoples and borders that the journal focussed on were situated in a Nordic grouping that was also regularly discussed in *Breiz Atao* and *Stur*, the doctrinal journal edited by Mordrel. In the mid-1930s, all these publications were operating under the influence of a young German man named Gerhard von Tevenar.

The promotion of an ethnic Europe under Germanic rule

Although Mordrel had created the *Bulletin* in 1936, the closure of his architect's practice and personal problems had forced him to abandon activism for a while in order to provide for his family. Yves Delaporte was therefore put in charge of the journal's editorial staff, mainly because Mordrel already had to manage his own staff – at *Stur* – and to provide papers for *Breiz Atao*. The two men were not on friendly terms, but they knew what their actions could bring to the cause. Delaporte was the son of a prominent local figure from Central Brittany and the third child in a family of activist children. His Catholic piety was matched only by his seriousness, his organisational skills, and his low-key but effective work. Mordrel, on the other hand, was more prone to the grand gesture and to embarking on political experiments that he would then quickly abandon. The leader of the *Parti National Breton*, François Debauvais, was wary of Mordrel's antics and his propensity to dip into the party's coffers and would have preferred to entrust the management of the party and *Breiz Atao* to Raymond Delaporte, Yves's brother.

All was going fairly well until March 1937 and the publication of the encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* containing Pius XI's reactions to, among other things, the adoption of racism as an official state doctrine and the anticlerical and pagan statements being made by the Nazi regime's dignitaries.²⁷ Mordrel had been expressing increasing admiration for Germany since 1931 and the transformation of the *Parti Autonomiste Breton* into the *Parti National Breton*. He had translated Rilke into Breton, tried to impose a Breton adaptation of the NSDAP's programme and disseminated his racist and Nordicist thinking in *Stur* and *Breiz Atao*. While none of this had prompted any response from party members generally speaking, some Catholics had taken offence after the publication of *Mit brennender Sorge*, in particular Raymond Delaporte, who publicly condemned Mordrel's racism.²⁸ Even though Delaporte's wealth was useful to the survival of *Breiz Atao*, Debauvais decided to dispense with his services and side with Mordrel. The reason for this was that behind Mordrel, there was Tevenar.

Tevenar has only recently attracted the attention of researchers, who see him as an enlightened Celtic specialist, architect of the European minorities' revolution for the benefit of Germany and opponent of Hitler.²⁹ Born in 1912, this son of a Prussian aristocrat who had died in the trenches had come through the *Wehrjugendbund 'Schilljugend'*, the largest nationalist youth organisation of the 1920s. He had studied law, history and geopolitics and regularly associated with the *Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund* (National Socialist Student League). Forced to abandon plans to join the *SA-Dienst* due to ill health, he became a *Nachrichtenerlieferant* (intelligence provider) for Admiral Canaris's *Amt Ausland/Abwehr* in 1934, where he received an order to move to Paris to try to establish contact with the minorities in France.³⁰ During his first year there, he met some Breton activists, including Mordrel. In 1937, Canaris placed him as a correspondent in Holland for the *Berliner Börsenzeitung* and the *Münchener Neueste*

Nachrichten. In the meantime, Tevenar had become the secretary general of a society he had co-founded with friends in Berlin in January 1937 called the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für keltische Studien*. Headed by Dr Kurt Georg Haller, this German society for Celtic studies was connected to the *Ahnenerbe* institute,³¹ and the journal *Zeitschrift für keltische Philologie*. Very quickly, links were forged between this journal and the *Abwehr II*'s subgroup no 7, led by Major Voss, whose mission was to intervene clandestinely with European national minorities.³² Tevenar was also a follower of the *Unabhängige Freikirche*, Friedrich Hielscher's pagan 'Independent Free Church'. Hielscher was an original representative of the 'Conservative Revolution', who dreamed of becoming the priest-king of an ethnic and hierarchical Reich, built on the ruins of the dismantled European states, under the aegis of Germany.³³

Tevenar meddled in the Breton affairs through these different capacities.³⁴ For example, in exchange for information on the French maritime installations, he managed to secure a place for Debauvais, who was sick at the time, in a sanatorium in the Black Forest. He also made a significant financial contribution to the *Parti National Breton*, which ensured the survival of *Breiz Atao* and funded more regular issues of *Stur* as well as the *Bulletin des minorités nationales de France*'s transformation into *Peuples et Frontières*.³⁵ Additionally, he supported a strengthened Nordacist discourse in the three publications. It became clear to everyone that *Peuples et Frontières* was the international showcase of *Breiz Atao*, which worried its handful of Corsican and Catalan friends. In June 1937, Yves Delaporte wrote:

Some of our Catalan and Corsican collaborators have asked us to clarify our position with regard to the Mediterranean peoples, a request they consider to be justified by what they read in the last issue of the journal *Stur* (1 April 1937), which contained some violent attacks against the peoples of Latin language and civilisation.³⁶

Despite Delaporte's insistence that the journal was independent of *Breiz Atao* and *Stur*, and that Mordrel was merely a guest writer from the first *Bulletin*, both his own and the *Peuples et Frontières*'s fates were already sealed because Tevenar did not like him. In fact, even though the material existence of the journal was considered to be assured, the next issue appeared a month late. A 'profound change' in the journal's administration was cited.³⁷ Charles Gaonac'h, who was also an administrator at the *Bulletin* and who had just quit the secretariat of *Breiz Atao*, demonstrated his loyalty to Raymond Delaporte, who had been repudiated by Debauvais, by giving up his position. Yves Delaporte was also forced to quit *Peuples et Frontières* at the end of 1937 but not before issuing a final snub to the pagan Tevenar in a two-page spread comprising a photo, a short biography and extracts in Breton translated into French of the sermon given by Monsignor Tréhiou, Bishop of Vannes, at the *Millénaire de la Résurrection de la Bretagne* (Millennium of the Resurrection of Brittany) mass in Plougastel on 24 August 1937.³⁸

Yves Delaporte was immediately replaced by Fred Moyse, who changed the journal's direction:

We shall make [...] our modest contribution to the creation of a fairer and more humane order in that part of Europe whose states and diplomacy have ignored national problems for too long. We want to collaborate in the search for the foundations of a new order, which will exclude the assimilative imperialism of the large states. We are therefore aware that we are leading a profoundly human struggle and that we are fighting, like our minority brothers in Central and Eastern Europe, for the triumph of universal principles.³⁹

Moyse had been living in Belgium since 1930, where he was employed at the permanent secretariat of the Salon de l'Alimentation in Brussels.⁴⁰ He was very involved as an activist in the PNB and had links with Flemish

autonomist circles as well as with the Gaelic League and with Scottish and Irish nationalists. Because of his job and also because he enjoyed it, he travelled a lot to the Netherlands, England, Germany and France. He thus acted as a linchpin between the nationalist movements of Northern Europe and Nazi Germany. This was reflected in the journal's potential readership.

There were only seventy-two names on the list of subscribers to *Peuples et Frontières*. These were mainly Breton activists, a few people closely associated with the movement, such as Gantois and Thomasset, and twenty or so Dutch, Belgian and German nationals.⁴¹ In addition to these subscribers, the journal was also regularly distributed to numerous news outlets and press correspondents and to more than four hundred key figures, generally located in Northern and Eastern European countries. The Brittany contingent obviously made up a large proportion of the journal's distribution, comprising activists as well as some elected representatives and municipal libraries. However, the Brittany contingent was outstripped by that of Belgium, which counted Flor Grammens and Joris van Severen among the journal's readership, and Germany, which totalled more than sixty recipients, including Otto Abetz and Erich Mengel, a member of the *VDA*.⁴² A specialist in the minorities of Germanic origin in the west of the Reich, Mengel received twenty copies alone. Excluding Brittany and Alsace, France accounted for around forty copies, which went mainly to libraries, foreign embassies, and some newspaper outlets, such as *La Flèche*, *Esprit* and *Temps Présents*. Switzerland and the Netherlands each received around thirty copies. After these two countries came Alsace, represented by Karl Roos, Emil Pinck, Hermann Bickler and Camille Dahlet, and then Scotland.

There were also very small shipments sent to representatives from the League of Nations in other countries, like the United States, South Africa and India. Clearly, the very existence and distribution of *Peuples et Frontières* contributed to Germany's European policy such as it was

defined in the interwar period, which was to establish a Europe under a Germanic-rule Nordic hegemony and to reshape *Mitteleuropa* by deciding the future of the nationalities concerned with a view to restoring Germanic greatness.⁴³ Central Europe in fact represented the final key position for the *Peuples et Frontières* press service, with about thirty copies being sent out to Bulgaria, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia and, above all, Hungary.

Central Europe: a laboratory

Central Europe was one of Yann Fouéré's pet causes. Having joined the Breton movement in the early 1930s, Fouéré had access to many networks and was never one to miss an opportunity. He was involved in the push to have the Breton language taught in schools through his association *Ar Brezoneg er Skol*. He had also campaigned for a Franco-German rapprochement as a youth representative in the *Union Fédérale des Anciens Combattants* (Federal Union of Veterans) and was seen as an expert on the ideas promoted by the 'relèves' (the new generation of politically-minded young people) of his time, particularly those around the journal *L'Ordre Nouveau*.⁴⁴ Alongside Abbé Gantois for Flanders and Hermann Bickler for Alsace, he was one of the cornerstones of *Peuples et Frontières* in his position as editor-in-chief. Although representatives from other European nationalist movements contributed from time to time, Fouéré provided the bulk of the copy under multiple pseudonyms that read like a solo tour of Europe, including van Huffel, F. Fraggiani, H. Muller and J. Irigoyen.

In 1935, Fouéré went to Romania as part of a trip organised by the *Fédération Interalliée des Anciens Combattants* (FIDAC). By 1936, he had made the acquaintance of André Tamas, secretary of the Office for Hungarian Minorities and representative of the Hungarian revisionist

league in Geneva, who organised his visit to Budapest in September 1937. He was also in touch with Christo Dimov-Bogoev, the chairperson of the youth organisation's foreign affairs department in the Bulgarian union *Otetz Païssy*.⁴⁵ Tamas had put Fouéré in contact with Aldo Dami, a regular contributor to the journal *Esprit* and occasional writer for *Plans*, who was very interested in the Hungarian and Bulgarian minorities. Fouéré had also managed to establish a correspondence with the Czechoslovakian Borsody, a doctor of law, who saw in him 'an excellent specialist in the question of Central European nationalities'.⁴⁶

The Hungarian cause was often seen by the French 'relèves' as an external projection of their own situation.⁴⁷ The focus of some of them on questioning the system, in particular the idea of nationhood, was echoed in the desire of others to revise the treaties, especially the Treaty of Trianon, which had redrawn the borders of Central Europe in 1920 following the dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Both sides aspired to a different future. For the Hungarians, the revision of the Treaty of Trianon was a prerequisite for plans that extended far beyond the national context. They were looking to save universal culture and defend the West.⁴⁸ Thus, at the end of the 1920s, René Dupuis from *L'Ordre Nouveau* and Philippe Lamour from *Plans* were regular contributors to the *Revue de Hongrie*, which was soon to become the *Nouvelle revue de Hongrie*. Aldo Dami also used the journal as a platform to speak out against the Treaties and to propose solutions concerning Czechoslovakia.⁴⁹ In May 1936, acting on his own initiative but on behalf of the PNB, Fred Moyses sent an article from Brussels entitled 'La lutte pour l'indépendance des Bretons' (The Struggle for Breton Independence) to the Hungarian journal *Magyar Hírlap*. He explained his approach to the journal's editors as follows: 'Given the great affinity that exists between the Hungarian nation and the Breton people, both victims of the same injustices and the imperialism of the major powers, I thought that these documents might interest you'.⁵⁰

Noting ‘the huge revision of values that characterises the modern world’,⁵¹ Yann Fouéré was saying similar things in *Peuples et Frontières*. Fouéré tried to get André Tamas to acknowledge that the Breton question had as much legitimacy as the claims of the Central European minorities. Fouéré planned a meeting with Tamas and the senior teams at *Peuples et Frontières* and *Stur* (which Tamas could not praise highly enough).⁵² The idea being developed by both men was to establish an international conference for minority young people.⁵³ Fouéré promoted this idea in an article in *Peuples et Frontières*, and it was reprinted in *Voix des Peuples*, the mouthpiece of the *Bureau Central des Minorités* (Central Office for Minorities). He pointed out in this article that the Congress of European Nationalities, which only recognised the countries that had resulted from the treaties, did not ultimately attach any importance to minorities. In his view, this institution was more of an ‘archaeology congress than a real assembly of minority peoples’.⁵⁴ He added that while *Peuples et Frontières* and *Voix des Peuples* played an important role, they did not have the impact of a body ‘that would lead the joint action of all minorities on a more general level’.⁵⁵ He therefore proposed to make up for the League of Nations’ shortcomings by creating ‘a central body whose task it would be to bring together initiatives, coordinate efforts and create a solid de facto link between all minorities’.⁵⁶ Denouncing the treaties and thus the postwar division of Europe actually translated as a call for a global redefinition of borders, including within France, and an engagement in the fight for Brittany.

A few weeks after the Anschluss, Fouéré wrote in an article published in *Les cahiers de l'Union Fédérale*: ‘The international policy followed by France since the end of the war has failed miserably’.⁵⁷ While he noted ‘the all-consuming activity of the two totalitarian countries forming the Rome/Berlin axis’,⁵⁸ he pointed above all to the ‘criminal recklessness’ of those who had dismembered the Austro-Hungarian Empire and thus encouraged ‘irredentisms that are impossible to assuage’.⁵⁹ He was

aiming his comments at France and its Romanian and Yugoslav allies. Because of the ties that united the veterans of these three countries, Fouéré's article had a certain impact. The Romanians and (with the exception of two or three veterans) the Czechoslovaks refused to be represented at the *Union Fédérale* (a French interwar veterans association) congress held in Nice in June 1938. In a letter to André Tamas, Fouéré wrote: 'I have no doubt my name is now blacklisted in CZECHOSLOVAKIA and ROMANIA. They would probably be even more furious if they knew that I was also involved in "PEUPLES ET FRONTIERES"'.⁶⁰

Then came Munich. At the height of the crisis, Fouéré claimed that the centralising Jacobin ideology, which had originated in France and been applied in Czechoslovakia, threatened to cause a war and bring an end to Western civilisation. It was necessary to fight for peace and freedom, which were under threat from the treaties that France had imposed.⁶¹ His discourse was echoed in *Breiz Atao* and in many pacifistic right publications. Fouéré therefore considered the agreements signed in Munich to be realistic and even saw in them the promise of a new era: 'One chapter in a territorial revision that is more essential than ever. This can be the starting point for a total reconstruction of Europe based on new principles'.⁶² At the beginning of 1939, after Poland and Hungary had also taken their slice of the Czechoslovakian cake and sub-Carpathian Ruthenia had become autonomous, he wrote: 'The Anschluss and the rectification of Czechoslovakia's borders mark the first step towards the construction of a new European order that is more in keeping with the true rights of nationalities'.⁶³ This new European order was in fact imposed by Germany. So when Hitler decided in March 1939 to violate the agreements of six months earlier by invading Bohemia and Moravia to establish a protectorate there and when the Slovak Republic was formed with his blessing, Fouéré told anyone who would listen: 'Sometimes the best things can come out of the worst situations'.⁶⁴ The

‘worst’ in this case were the postwar treaties. The ‘best’ was the so-called Reich’s federalisation policy in Central Europe. By giving Bohemia its autonomy while annexing it, Germany was countering the economic, political and military interests of France and England. Fouéré remained cautious with regard to Hitler but believed that if he respected autonomy, his action would produce fruitful and lasting results.⁶⁵

Such arguments amounted to self-deception. The previous month, referring to Franco’s action against the Basque language, the Italianisation of the French-speaking Aosta Valley and France’s oppression of the Breton language, Fouéré had contrasted the Latin and Nordic spirits. He had criticised the outdated Jacobin ideology, which he said acted as ‘a real encouragement to violence’, and highlighted the fact that it ran contrary to what he was seeing in England, Germany and the Scandinavian countries.⁶⁶ Fouéré admired the Reich’s successes. When the police questioned his concierges in 1939, they were told that he had a portrait of Hitler in his home and that ‘privately, he was always championing the Führer, understanding only him, seeing things only through his eyes’.⁶⁷

The content of Fouéré’s articles in *Peuples et Frontières* was enough to raise alarm bells with the police. In February 1939, a covert note on the journal stated: ‘This booklet, which has been published in France, is being distributed, free of charge, to the Dutch press and in particular to Dutch members of the pan-Dutch and Francophobe movement “Algemeen Nederlandsch Verbond”. It is likely to be detrimental to French propaganda works in the Netherlands’.⁶⁸ The note was accompanied by an article entitled ‘Décadence de la nation française’ (Decadence of the French nation), which Fouéré had written under the name of Jean Cam. In it, he described a country unable to adapt to the problems of postwar Europe, as evidenced by its inability to take into account the challenges faced by its minorities. He depicted a France that had given up its ideal of liberty: ‘By remaining mute in the face of new

problems, it remains on the sideline of the great spiritual, political and moral revolution that is in the process of transforming the lives of the peoples and the principles of their governments before our very eyes'.⁶⁹ In May, the journal was subjected to a more thorough police investigation, but the person known as 'Jean Cam', author of the seditious article, was never identified.⁷⁰ From then on, however, the Breton nationalist press found itself in the crosshairs of the justice system, which scrutinised the columns of *Breiz Atao*, *Stur*, and *Peuples et Frontières*, rightly seen as mouthpieces intended to 'persuade people abroad to believe in substantial, serious separatist movements'.⁷¹ At the end of August, *Peuples et Frontières* was banned, and censorship was introduced throughout France.⁷²

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After the Second World War, Mordrel set about writing a history of the Breton nationalist movement. A few scattered notes survive from this endeavour, including a list of concerted actions between Brittany and Germany featuring mentions of *Peuples et Frontières*.⁷³ There are two points worth noting in this regard. On the one hand, this journal was part of a strategy to tighten the noose on France that was mobilised at the end of the First World War by a handful of engaged activists and their allies at the time, both coveted allies – like the so-called Celtic brothers and Hitler's Germany – and more concrete allies, such as the Flemish, Alsatian, and Corsican nationalists as well as a few German nationals. The aim of this 'noose' strategy was to allow the *Parti National Breton* to raise awareness of the Breton cause abroad and enable Germany to justify its diplomatic pretensions. On the other, this corresponded to an ideological convergence between the main leaders of the *Parti National Breton* and some figures of the German 'Conservative Revolution', who all believed in the supremacy of the Celtic and Germanic peoples, united under the same Nordic banner.

From this dual perspective, independence for Brittany would have meant dismantling France, a move that would in turn have been linked to a reworking of the Europe of the Treaties, in accordance with the rights of minorities and the right of peoples to self-determination. It is therefore not surprising to learn that the two mainstays of *Peuples et Frontières*, Tevenar and Fouéré, had been trained as jurists and that Central Europe had taken on a paradigmatic significance for them.

It is clear their plan failed. We may have the journal's press service and subscribers lists, but we know nothing about its real readership or the impact that its articles had. It is likely, however, that this was almost non-existent and that it ultimately only addressed activists who needed no convincing or diplomats who were indifferent to the Breton cause. Otto Abetz, for example, who received copies of the journal, had no interest in helping the Breton nationalists during the Second World War. Moreover, by 1940, it was clear to all that the German authorities in general were going to do nothing for the Breton nationalists except allow their party to keep afloat just enough to disseminate their Nordacist propaganda and to act as a recruitment pool for agents in the fight against the Resistance. It is difficult nevertheless to believe that the *Peuples et Frontières* activists were being taken for fools, because the Breton/German alliance actually only involved a small handful of outsiders, both in Brittany and in Germany, and all of these individuals were nurturing a dream that was essential to their own survival in a world where they did not fit in.

Endnotes

¹ S. Carney, *Breiz Atao! Mordrel, Delaporte, Lainé, Fouéré: une mystique nationale (1901-1948)*, (Rennes, 2015). On Breton movement, see also R. Dulong, *La question bretonne* (Paris, 1975); A. Deniel, *Le mouvement breton: 1919-1945* (Paris, 1976); M. Nicolas, *Histoire de la Revendication Bretonne: ou la revanche*

de la démocratie locale sur le « démocratisation » Des origines jusqu'au années 1980 (Spézet, 2007).

² On the impact of the First World War on regionalisms and nationalisms in Europe, see X. M. Núñez Seixas (ed.), *The First World War and the Nationality Question in Europe. Global Impact and Local Dynamics* (Leiden/Boston, 2021), in particular F. Zantedeschi, 'Micro-Nationalisms in Western Europe in the Wake of the First World War', 145-169.

³ Olier Mordrel private collection, OM7 I78. Statutes of the GRB, 1918-1919 (author's highlight). Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations and extracts from French sources have been translated into English.

⁴ *Breiz Atao* was published from 1919 to 1939.

⁵ For an example of a re-Celticisation attempt, see S. Carney, 'L'Écosse régénératrice ou la création des "cliques nationales" bretonnes, d'une sortie de guerre à l'autre', in C. Manfredy & M. Byrne (eds.), *Bretagne-Ecosse: contacts, transferts et dissonances. Brittany-Scotland: Contacts, Transfers and Dissonances* (Brest, 2017), 167-183.

⁶ Breiz Atao [alias O. Mordrel], 'De la Flandre à la Cornouaille', in: *Breiz Atao*, 3(75), 1/3/1925, 535.

⁷ On *Peuples et Frontières*, see also S. Rojo, 'Prensa bretona y nacionalismo vasco: la revista Peuples et frontières', in: *Sancho el Sabio* 18 (2003), 89-103.

⁸ Breiz Atao [alias O. Mordrel], 'De la Flandre à la Cornouaille', in: *Breiz Atao*, 3(75), 1/3/1925, 535.

⁹ M. Marchal, 'Pour une politique internationale des minorités', in: *Breiz Atao*, 3(75), 1/3/1925, 536-537.

¹⁰ Cited in P. Zind, *Elsass-Lothringen Alsace Lorraine: une nation interdite* (Paris, 1979), 432. On Corsican and Alsatian movements, see F. Arzalier, *Les perdants: la dérive fasciste des mouvements autonomistes et indépendantistes au XXe siècle* (Paris, 1990); Y. Rogé, *Le corsisme et l'irrédentisme 1920-1946: histoire du premier mouvement autonomiste corse et de sa compromission par l'Italie fasciste* (PhD thesis, Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense, 2008); A. Walh, *Les autonomistes en Alsace, 1871-1939* (Orbe, 2019).

¹¹ Those journals are *Zukunft*, *Volksstimme*, *Die Wahrheit*, banned in November 1927. In 1928 they are followed by *D'r Schliffstaan*, *D'r Muehlstaan*, *Des Neue Elsass*.

¹² Unsigned, 'Protestation', in: *Breiz Atao* 7, 18/12/1927, 1.

¹³ Unsigned, 'Derrière les autonomistes on retrouve la main de Moscou', *Le Matin*, 12/2/1928, 3.

¹⁴ Le Comité Central des Minorités Nationales de France, 'Lettre ouverte aux jurés de Colmar', in: *Breiz Atao*, special issue, 1/5/1928, 1.

¹⁵ Article 8 of the statutes. 'Le Comité central des minorités nationales de France', in: *Breiz Atao*, special issue, 1/5/1928, 3.

¹⁶ O. Mordrel, 'Le conflit des nationalités en France', in: *Bulletin des minorités nationales en France* 1, 1/6/1936, 2-5.

¹⁷ K. Heller, 'Aperçu de l'histoire de l'Alsace jusqu'en 1918', in: *Bulletin des minorités nationales en France* 1, 1/6/1936, 13-14.

¹⁸ Unsigned, 'Les Flamands de France et leur langue', in: *Bulletin des minorités nationales en France* 2, 1/8/1936, 32-34.

¹⁹ 'Le programme Eskualerriste', in: *Bulletin des minorités nationales en France* 1, 1/6/1936, 18.

²⁰ Y. Douguet [alias Yves Delaporte], 'Le Mouvement en faveur de l'enseignement du breton', in: *Bulletin des minorités nationales en France* 1, 1/6/1936, 11-12

²¹ See for example: La Rédaction, 'La France et nous', in: *Bulletin des minorités nationales en France* 2, 1/8/1936, 22-23, and La Rédaction, 'Que devons-nous attendre du Gouvernement Blum', in: *Bulletin des minorités nationales en France* 3, 1/10/1936, 38-39.

²² 'Les diverses étapes du recul de la langue bretonne', in: *Bulletin des minorités nationales en France* 3, 1/10/1936, 44-45.

²³ 'Elections législatives 1936', in: *Bulletin des minorités nationales en France* 3, 1/10/1936, 48-49.

²⁴ This was the case, for example, with the publication of the aforementioned Basque programme, which was used because an article that had apparently been promised had not arrived in time.

²⁵ From the next issue onwards, the subtitle was 'Revue d'information sur les nationalités d'Europe Occidentale' (Journal of Information on the Nationalities of Western Europe).

²⁶ Y. Douguet, 'Notre programme', in: *Peuples et Frontières* 1, 1/1/1937, 1-2.

²⁷ S. Carney, 'Mit brennender Sorge et le mouvement nationaliste breton', in F. Bouthillon & M. Levant (eds.), *Pie XI, un pape contre le nazisme? L'encyclique Mit brennender Sorge (14 mars 1937)* (Brest, 2016), 321-335.

²⁸ R. Furic [alias Raymond Delaporte], 'La position de Breiz Atao reste nationale', in: *Breiz Atao* 274, 18/4/1937, 3-4.

²⁹ I. Schmidt, *Der Herr des Feuers. Friedrich Hielscher und sein Kreis zwischen Heidentum, neuem Nationalismus und Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus* (Cologne, 2004), 85-93; J. Lerchenmüller, *Keltischer Sprengstoff: eine wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Studie über die deutsche Keltologie von 1900 bis 1945* (Tübingen, 1997), 384 sq; B. Schnitzler., 'Gerhard von Tevenar (1912-1943). Secrétaire de la *Deutsche Gesellschaft für keltische Studien*', in: *L'archéologie nazie en Europe de l'Ouest* (Gollion, 2007), 289-299.

³⁰ Testimony of Erika von Tevenar, widow of Gerhard von Tevenar, conversations from 20/7/2009 and 10/1/2012. The Alsatian autonomists resumed contact with the Bretons at this time.

³¹ On *Ahnenerbe*, see M.-H. Kater, *Das « Ahnenerbe » der SS, 1935-1945. Ein Beitrag zur Kulturpolitik des Dritten Reiches* (Stuttgart, 1974) and H. Pringle, *Operation Ahnenerbe. Comment Himmler mit la pseudo-science au service de la solution finale* (Paris, 2007).

³² R. Faligot, *La harpe et l'hermine* (Rennes, 1994), 88.

³³ On Hielscher, see the indulgent biography of I. Schmidt, *Der Herr des Feuers*.

³⁴ Concerning the relations between Nazism and Breton nationalism, see L. Mees, 'The Völkisch Appeal: Nazi Germany, the Basques, and the Bretons', in *War, Exile, Justice and Everyday Life, 1936-1946* (Reno, 2011), 251-284; J. A. R. Caballero, 'Nazismo alemán y *emsav* bretón (1933-1945): entre la sincera alianza y el engaño recíproco', in: *Historia Actual Online* 30 (2013), 25-38; S. Carney, 'Olier Mordrel, une des voies du national-socialisme en Bretagne', in: M. Grunewald, O. Dard, U. Puschner, *Confrontations au national-socialisme en Europe francophone et germanophone. Auseinandersetzungen mit dem*

Nationasozialismus im deutsch-und französischsprachigen Europa, 1919-1949, volume 4, (Bruxelles, 2020), 171-185.

³⁵ Between 1935 and 1937, the PNB received more than 30,000 francs from the *Abwehr II*. S. Carney, *Breiz Atao*, 279.

³⁶ Y. Douguet, 'Les latins et nous', in: *Peuples et Frontières* 4, 1/6/1937, 87.

³⁷ Y. Douguet, 'Aux amis de la revue', in: *Peuples et Frontières* 5, 1/8/1937, 90.

³⁸ Unsigned, 'Milvet Bloaz Adsavidigez Breiz (Millénaire de la Résurrection de la Bretagne)', in: *Peuples et Frontières* 7, 1/12/1937, 154-155.

³⁹ F. Moysse, 'Notre nouvelle organisation', in: *Peuples et Frontières* 8, 15/1/1938, 186-187.

⁴⁰ Archives Générales du Royaume Belge, Auguste Frédéric (Fred) MOYSE, file no 1660960 of the Office des Étrangers.

⁴¹ Service Historique de la Défense [henceforth SHD], 7NN 2589. Renseignements sur activités du mouvement autonomiste breton.

⁴² *Volksbund für das Deutschtum im Ausland*, the largest pan-Germanic organisation in Germany in the inter-war period.

⁴³ J. Elvert, 'Plans allemands d'entre les deux guerres mondiales pour la Mitteleuropa', in: E. Bussière, M. Dumoulin & S. Schirmann (eds.), *Milieus économiques et intégration européenne au xx^e siècle* (Paris, 2001-2002), 30-38.

⁴⁴ On the 'relèves', see O. Dard, *Le rendez-vous manqué des relèves des années trente* (Paris, 2002). On *L'Ordre Nouveau*, see C. Roy & T. Keller, *Alexandre Marc et la jeune Europe (1904-1934): l'Ordre Nouveau aux origines du personnalisme* and *Le personnalisme de l'entre-deux-guerres entre l'Allemagne et la France* (Nice, 1998).

⁴⁵ Institut de documentation bretonne et européenne [henceforth IDBE], box 'Action bretonne et minoritaire', letter from the Bulgarian Union 'Otetz Païssy' to Yann Fouéré, 12/10/1936.

⁴⁶ IDBE, box 'Action bretonne et minoritaire', letter from Dr Borsody to Yann Fouéré, 29/5/1938.

⁴⁷ H. de Montedy, *La Nouvelle revue de Hongrie et ses amis français (1932-44)* (PhD thesis, Université de Lyon 3, 2009); Roy & Keller, *Alexandre Marc et la jeune Europe*, 180-181.

⁴⁸ Montedy, *La Nouvelle revue de Hongrie et ses amis français (1932-44)*, 79 sq.

⁴⁹ A. Dami, 'Sur la mort des traités', in: *Esprit* 34, 1/7/1935, 501-549; 'À la recherche de la Tchécoslovaquie', in: *Esprit* 69, 1/6/1938, 363-400.

⁵⁰ Archives Nationales [henceforth AN], 20030297 art. 9, note from Commissioner Chenevier, 30/6/1936.

⁵¹ Y. Kerberio [alias Yann Fouéré], 'États, Nationalités, Minorités', in: *Peuples et Frontières* 9, 15/2/1938, 210-212.

⁵² IDBE, box 'Action bretonne et minoritaire', letter from Yann Fouéré to André Tamas, 27/9/1937. Relations between the two men seem to have ended before the meeting could take place.

⁵³ IDBE, box 'Action bretonne et minoritaire', letter from Yann Fouéré to Christo Dimov-Bogoev, 15/9/1937.

⁵⁴ Y. Kerberio, 'Pour une action commune des minorités', in: *Peuples et Frontières* 11, 15/4/1938, 262-264 and G. Kerberio, 'Pour une action commune des minorités', in: *Voix des Peuples* 4, 15/5/1938, 247-251.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Y. Fouéré, 'La fin des traités', in: *Cahier de l'Union Fédérale des Combattants*, 142, 20/5/1938, 15.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ IDBE, box 'Action bretonne et minoritaire', letter from Yann Fouéré to André Tamas, 6/1938 (author's highlights).

⁶¹ Y. Kerberio, 'L'évolution du problème Tchécoslovaque et son influence sur le régime général des minorités', in: *Peuples et Frontières* 16, 15/9/1938, 386-388.

⁶² Y. Kerberio, 'L'Europe sera-t-elle reconstruite', in: *Peuples et Frontières* 17, 15/10/1938, 410-412.

⁶³ G. Marion [alias Yann Fouéré], 'La Nouvelle Tchecoslovaquie', in: *Peuples et Frontières* 21, 15/2/1939, 50-52.

⁶⁴ J. Cam [alias Yann Fouéré], 'Du pire peut parfois sortir le meilleur', in: *Peuples et Frontières* 23, 15/4/1939, 82-85.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ J. Cam, 'De quelques folies politiques', in: *Peuples et Frontières* 22, 15/3/1939, 58-60.

⁶⁷ Archives de la Préfecture de Police de Paris, 1 W 0158, dossier no 39203, report of 21/10/1939.

⁶⁸ SHD, 7NN 2536. Fiches de renseignements sur le mouvement autonomiste Breton. Note dated 16/2/1939 (author's highlight).

⁶⁹ J. Cam, 'Décadence de la nation française', in: *Peuples et Frontières* 20, 15/1/1939, 4-6.

⁷⁰ SHD, 7NN 2801. Dossier sur les poursuites à l'encontre de Guieysse Marcel, autonomiste breton, pour atteinte à la sûreté extérieure de l'Etat (juin 1938-novembre 1939). Report of May 1939.

⁷¹ AN, BB/18/7007, 2 BL 91, Breiz Atao, Parti National Breton, 1939. Report of 30/6/1939.

⁷² AN, BB/18/7008, 2 BL 108, *Peuples et Frontières*, 1939. Reports of 22/7/1939 and 21/8/1939.

⁷³ Private collection of Olier Mordrel, OM8 M198, Notes on the chronology of the Breton movement.