

## AIKB Radio Project: Yann Rivallain

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### The Breton Language

Interviewer	Today I'm delighted, on behalf of Spotlight on Brittany, to have with me here in the studio, Yann Rivallain, Editor in Chief of Ar Men magazine. Welcome Yann.
Yann	Hello.
Interviewer	The Breton language itself has, for many years, been in decline, I understand, and was placed on UNESCO's list of endangered languages. What's the current situation?
Yann	Well, it's still very much endangered. The UNESCO made that report in the '90s, given the fact that the Breton native speakers had stopped transmitting the language and the chances for it to survive were very thin. Actually the schools have been doing well and in the late '90s there was a lot of hope, at the turn of the century as well because the schools were growing so fast that new hopes were em that report at the time was a little bit challenged because the rate of new speakers was increasing, but sadly in the last ten years now, the last five years especially, the schools have had a bit of difficulty developing more beyond the state they are now in. They need more money, they need more political support and we've realised that without that political support and that money they won't grow, definitely not as fast as they have done, and in that situation the language then will remain very much endangered. We've seen in other parts of Europe, if we take 30 years ago, languages like Welsh, which is related to Breton, was pretty much in the same situation as Breton. The difference now is enormous. Welsh is redeveloping, most children have access to Welsh. We could take the example of the Basque language as well. The same situation. Basque was nearly erased from the country at the end of the Franco years. Now Basque, with a lot of political

	<p>support, a lot of money invested has really redeveloped and it's virtually a bi-lingual society again which is the aim of most Breton people. None of them actually dream of having a Brittany one day where we only speak Breton but we really have a bi-lingual dream and tri-lingual if possible.</p>
Interviewer	<p>You say 'the aim of most Breton people'. Is that an exaggeration?</p>
Yann	<p>Well, I mean I'm talking about the ones who sort of are attached to the language. I'm not talking about, there's a lot of Breton people, actually it would be wrong to say a lot of Breton people who don't care about the language because the polls show that I think it's 85 or 89 per cent of Breton people that think the Breton language is an important thing to defend and to keep. You're right to say a lot of people don't think Breton language every day when they get up in the morning but for the ones who are attached to it, unlike other countries like Ireland where I've lived, where the Irish speakers, the ones who really struggle to keep Irish alive, actually have the intention of living through Irish, sort of, you know, have an Irish world where you speak Irish every day, where you have your Irish media and you don't need to go through English at all. That's a subtlety and, I think, an important one for Brittany. I think a lot of Breton speakers actually, you know, are kind of used to switching languages. The reasons for the French state not to support languages, really when we go to the bottom of the problem, is that they're scared that this will encourage, you know, separatism or the idea that some countries, like the Basque country or Corsica or Brittany would set free just because they want to keep the language. Some language speakers might want that but it's not because you want to defend the language that you want that, and some other parts of Europe have shown that, have demonstrated that. So I think it's a shame that in France we are a little bit behind with those things.</p>
Interviewer	<p>And you put that down to central government pressure?</p>

Yann	<p>Definitely, definitely, for the problem of not supporting the language in the last twenty years. The decline of the Breton language is not only, hasn't been caused only by the French policies though. The Breton people, at the middle of the century actually, wanted to learn French and become French even, to get jobs, to move on in life, to maybe break away with a civilisation that, for some of them had been tough. So, but that's sort of nearly passed already now. A lot of people now aspire to something else. They want to keep part of their heritage, they don't want to become mono-lingual again and that now, as the years go by, actually, the responsibility of the French state is getting stronger and stronger because the fears that they had, the reasons they had to do that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century or the 20<sup>th</sup> century have gone. Most European states have signed conventions and have recognised the importance of their heritage so it's, er, in that respect the French government is more and more backwards as the years go by.</p>
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