Brittany is one of those minority territories which has consistently had to defend its own identity. We will not endeavour here to ‘demonstrate’ that Brittany is an ethno-cultural community, since much pluridisciplinary literature has already been written on the nature of Breton culture, and the extensive activities of the Breton movement for more than a century amply reflect Brittany’s spontaneous and committed desire to survive and thrive.

The Duchy of Brittany was united with France in the sixteenth century. It was destroyed by the decree passed on the night of 4 August 1789, by which Brittany was stripped of its political identity by being totally integrated within the French Republic. From that time onwards Brittany became the target of a system which not only aimed to integrate but also to assimilate the territory within the French state.

Today another political model, federalism, has become prominent, which, despite the presence of co-ordinating institutions, also provides greater freedom and scope for initiative to the various ranges of local government. The embryonic stage of such federalism is the present position of the European Union. Such a community emerges as an economic, political and cultural entity. Like the state its aim is to unite and integrate. It is not surprising, therefore, that it has become the focus of a wide debate concerning supranationality, which is, paradoxically, stronger within the member states. The real issue is
the degree to which the states are prepared to lose their internal and international sovereignty.

On the one hand, in those states which are either federal or neo-federal, either local communities, or the people, have gained political recognition. They can be consulted themselves, or can grant a coordinating organization a mandate to negotiate on their behalf and in their best interests. On the other hand, the centralizing and assimilating states, local communities, and in particular the ethno-cultural communities, have no political recognition as such: only one community is recognized: the state as administered and served by its people. The issue is therefore to assess the extent to which ethno-cultural minorities within a state such as France will have their identity recognized within a European federal organization.

The time is right. The driving principle of Europe is that of progressive growing integration which, naturally, is opposed to varying degrees by the member states, especially those with a strong centralizing tradition. This explains why Europe is seeking to strengthen the power of local communities within the states and hence is tempted to encourage the recognition of their cultural and legal identity. The states which are organized along federal lines are in agreement with such an idea and in turn their support contributes to strengthening the European Union’s initiative.

As for France, it continues to operate its ‘rational’ model. However, it is hard to imagine that such a model can remain compatible with that of the development of European integration. There is no doubt that, within a federal environment, regions will be the object of a growing ‘recognition’ and will be more closely associated with the European governmental institutions. With regard to Brittany, Europe acts as a prism which not only reflects many unsuspected