



Sorb women
in traditional
dress in Werben,
eastern Germany

THE LOST TRIBES OF EUROPE

How some of the Continent's oldest minority groups
are fighting to revive their customs and cultures



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THE LOST TRIBES OF EUROPE

As national borders blur, the Continent's original minorities are fighting to reclaim their ancient cultures and identities

BY JAMES GEARY

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HEN JOHN ANGARRACK ACCOMPANIED HIS TWO young sons on a school trip to a local-history exhibit in their hometown of Bodmin, Cornwall, in southwestern England, he was shocked to see 10th century King Athelstan portrayed as a benevolent monarch who gently persuaded the indigenous Cornish people to pledge their lives and land to the English crown. Angarrack had been taught that

Athelstan was an expansionist tyrant, and that Cornwall became part of England only after centuries of strife. So he led a protest at the next town council meeting with 40 demonstrators waving banners demanding: WE WANT OUR HISTORY BACK!

That was eight years ago, and Angarrack is still fighting to reclaim Cornish history. His group, Cornwall 2000, is waging a campaign to get the Cornish recognized as an ethnic minority within Britain, a designation he says would revive Cornish culture and language with the help of state funding. "The English national curriculum does not include Celtic history [of which the Cornish are a part] because it doesn't want to suggest that the concept of the 'English people' is fairly new," he says.

Angarrack isn't out for independence, but he does want some form of Cornish gov-

ernment—like the Scottish Parliament or the Welsh Assembly—in the hope that increased local control will spur growth in an economy driven primarily by tourism. And if the Cornish aren't granted status as an ethnic minority, he plans to ask the courts to review the decision. "If Cornish people want to be English, that's up to them," Angarrack says. "But many of us don't and I'm going to do my best to get the state to accept that."

Angarrack's campaign may seem like a lone, eccentric quest—his Celtic rallying cry is heeded by only a few—but it is emblematic of an identity crisis that's playing

itself out all across Europe. The recent London terrorist bombings, some of which were carried out by young men who were born and raised in Europe, have opened a fierce argument about multiculturalism, which pivots on whether Europe has been too tolerant of extremism masquerading as cultural diversity. As those questions are debated across the Continent, another, less obvious clash is taking place. This time, the conflict is not between national identities and the cul-

Europe, albeit for different reasons. For many in the west, a bigger E.U. is a blander E.U.—and a potentially threatening one. When the French and Dutch rejected the proposed European constitution earlier this year, many of those who voted no saw the poll as a way of preventing "non-European" Turkey from joining the club. The fear is that as old borders erode—due to globalization, mass tourism and possible further E.U. expansion—long-cherished ethnic and regional differences will be

mined editors formed the European Association of Daily Newspapers in Minority and Regional Languages (MIDAS); the organization brings together some 30 dailies to co-ordinate strategies and share experiences and resources. Some minority languages are making a comeback, too. In the state of Schleswig-Holstein in Germany, 20% of the 50,000 or so people who consider themselves North Frisians—descendants of tribal migrants who settled in this coastal region around 2,000 years ago—still speak dialects of their West Germanic language. "It's only been during the last couple of years that people here—especially young people—have begun to realize that belonging to our ethnic minority is something to be treasured," says Fiete Pingel of the North Frisian Institute in Bredstedt.

Have Europe's lost tribes found their groove? There may be economic as well as cultural benefits to doing so. Stefan Wolff, a professor of political science at Bath University and co-editor of *The Ethnopolitical Encyclopaedia of Europe*, says a distinct cultural identity is a competitive advantage. Tourists want precisely those experiences—folk dances, handmade crafts, unusual culinary delights—that they can't get at home. And local delicacies have a way of catching on further afield. Maryon McDonald, a Cambridge University anthropologist and author of *We Are Not French! Language, Culture and Identity in Brittany*, points out that the humble crepe—once the daily fare of poor Breton peasants—is now available in the region's finest restaurants.

Of course, Europe has always been a mosaic of competing and collaborating cultures. It was only with the rise of the nation-state in the 18th and 19th centuries that many people—often by force rather than choice—began primarily identifying themselves by nationality rather than local ethnic group. Now that national borders are crumbling, the tribal mind is once again coming to the fore.

And the time may be right for revival. Far from stamping out diversity, the E.U. in many ways encourages it. In Cornwall, for example, part of the Union's current €1.2 billion, seven-year aid package is devoted to harnessing "the benefits from the arts, cultural and heritage industries to develop new, sustainable opportunities for growth." "A local identity has become a powerful resource for politicians," says Wolff. "If you want E.U. funds, you need a relatively strong regional identity."

Not all minorities have been successful in making their identities marketable or politically viable. Of Slovakia's 350,000



BLOWING THEIR OWN HORN: A celebration of Cornish culture; Basque men in Spain, below; Roma schoolchildren in Slovakia, below left



tures of relatively new immigrants to Europe—like those who have arrived from Asia or North Africa—but between the idea of a nation and the cultural survival of Europe's oldest minority groups.

In Eastern and Central Europe, the fall of communism and the enlargement of the European Union have unleashed a new pride and interest in cultural roots, especially those minority identities that were suppressed under communist rule. There has been a similar resurgence in Western

gradually sanded out of existence.

Increasingly, Europe's national minority groups—those "tribes" who are ethnically and culturally distinct, and who for decades have been lost to the mainstream—want to accentuate, celebrate and commercialize their differences. The Sami, a reindeer-herding people who live across the Nordic region, have their own parliaments in Finland, Norway and Sweden to make decisions on linguistic and cultural matters. About three years ago, a clutch of deter-

Welcome to Old Europe

Long before the rise of the nation-state, Europe was divided along tribal lines. Many of these minority groups were absorbed into the dominant cultures and disappeared; others had their identities wiped out by political repression and forced assimilation. Yet many communities survived, and some are even staging a comeback. A cultural cartography of some of Europe's lost tribes. —By *Theunis Bates*

WESTERN EUROPE

The roughly 2.5 million **BASQUES** are probably the region's best-known minority, inhabiting an area in northern Spain and southwestern France on either side of the Pyrenees. The Celts established themselves across the Continent as early as 500 B.C., but were gradually pushed to the geographic fringes of Europe, in what is now Ireland, Scotland, Wales, southwestern England and northwestern France, home to the **BRETONS**. Some of Western Europe's other minorities include the 150,000 ethnic **CORSICANS** on the French island of Corsica; the 60,000 **SORBS** in Germany; and the roughly 14,000 **WALSERS** scattered across Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Austria and Italy.

TIME Map
by Gareth Burgess

SOURCE: www.euroromminority.org, Norwegian Polar Institute, World Bank and others

EASTERN AND CENTRAL EUROPE

The **ROMA** are the region's largest ethnic minority, with an estimated population of some 6 million. After decades of segregation, the Roma are beginning to start businesses and enter politics. The **RUSYNS**, some 24,000 of whom live in Slovakia, aren't faring as well; their population is less than a quarter of what it was a century ago. Some of Eastern and Central Europe's other minorities include the 300,000 **KASHUBIANS**, members of a Slavic ethnic group who live in northern Poland, and some 200,000 **GAGAUZ**, a Turkic people living mainly in Moldova.

NOTE: *Countries where Roma make up more than 5% of the population

Roma, 150,000 live in segregated rural settlements or urban ghettos. A 2003 U.N. report described the living conditions of Central and Eastern Europe's Roma as "closer to those in sub-Saharan Africa than to Europe." Things are only slowly beginning to change. Last year, Hungary's Livia Jaroka, 30, became the first Roma to be elected to the European Parliament. The Basques, by contrast, have managed to maintain a vibrant, thriving culture. The Spanish Basques have their own regional government, and some 45% of the books published in the area in 2003 were in Basque.

Why should we care about the Basques, Roma, Sami and North Frisians?

For starters, because cultural diversity, like biodiversity, is a good in itself. "Minorities are part of the cultural heritage of Europe," says Wolff. "We would all lose out if cultural diversity didn't survive." There are more practical benefits as well, especially at a time when disaffected young people too often find radicalization when they go looking for their roots. From the Caucasus to the Balkans to the Basque country, regions with multiple minorities often have histories of violence and instability. A recognition of cultural diversity—rather than an attempt to crush it—can stop a sense of identity spinning out of control into violent separatist campaigns.

To find out how some of Europe's oldest minorities are faring, TIME visited four groups: the Veps in Russia, the Rusyns in Slovakia, the Sorbs in Germany and the Bretons in France. Some of these ancient peoples seem doomed; others are thriving, in part by transforming their traditional crafts and customs into cultural commodities. However disparate their fortunes, though, they are all, like Angarrack and his group of Cornish, fighting to get their history back. —*Reported by Theunis Bates and Jeninne Lee-St. John/London, Leo Cendrowicz/Brussels, Ursula Sautter/Bonn, Jan Stojaspal/Prague and Enrique Zaldua/San Sebastian*

THE NORDIC AND BALTIC REGION

The **SAMI**, a traditionally reindeer-herding people spread across Europe's far north, are thriving. With a population of roughly 75,000, they have their own elected parliaments in Sweden, Finland and Norway to promote the Sami language and advise governments on policies that affect the Sami people. The seafaring **LIVONIANS**, who inhabit Latvia's northwest peninsula, have lived in the area for over 5,000 years, but today less than 500 people speak their ancient Finno-Ugric language.

RUSSIA

Russia is home to roughly 65 native ethnic groups, which account for just 500,000 of the country's rapidly declining population of 143 million. In northern Russia, where many of the tribes live, alcoholism, disease and the loss of traditional lands have cut the number of tribespeople from 270,000 in 1989 to 135,000 in 2002. The **VEPS** minority, mainly located in Karelia, has dropped to just 8,000. In Siberia, the reindeer-herding **SELKUP** numbers under 3,600 but the traditionally migratory **NENETS** people are relatively healthy with a population of 29,900.



THE VEPS, RUSSIA

POLINA LEVKINA IS UNIVERSALLY acclaimed as the best pastry chef in Sheltozero, a village nestled in the lush pine forests of Karelia, a republic in northwestern Russia along the border with Finland. Levkina, 80, a retired nursery school teacher, proudly sets out an impressive spread of *pashtates* (pastry): *rahtpirgat* (pot cheese pies), *kolobs* (oat flour and potato pies) and *kalitkas* (rye pancakes topped with cottage cheese and sour cream). Delicacies like these are traditional fare for the Veps, an ancient Finnish-Ugric tribe that first settled in the region in the 6th century, and Levkina still prepares the food the way her ancestors did centuries ago. The recipes may be the same, but other things in this tiny Veps community are changing. Crime is rising; Levkina tells how someone stole the neighbors' tomatoes right out of their garden. "Veps never knew such an outrage," she frets. "Veps never even locked their houses."

It's not only the vegetable patches that are under threat. During the reign of the Czars, the Veps were permitted to run their own local affairs. But under Stalin's policy of forced assimilation, Veps scholars, teachers and writers were jailed or shot; the Veps language was banned; and Veps land was carved up among Russia's Karelia, Leningrad and Vologda regions. In the 1930s, the Veps numbered around 35,000; today, just over 8,000 are left. And under President Vladimir Putin, they're pessimistic about their chances of staging a revival. "We expected the 1999 legislation on minorities to give [minority peoples] more attention," says Zinaida Strogalschikova, chairwoman of the Veps Culture Society. "But unfortunately, that attention has dwindled. The ongoing centralization of power has produced legislation that impedes regional authorities' potential to support minorities."

During his second term, Putin has moved to further consolidate Kremlin control over Russia's far-flung regions. He has centralized budget control in Moscow and replaced elected regional governors with his own appointees, and he's considering merging some smaller regions into larger administrative units. "Many are worried that this merging begins with autonomous districts, established back in the 1930s especially to protect the interests of minorities," says Strogalschikova. "Now, indigenous ethnicities have no say in the policies drafted by the federal or regional parliaments."



Under Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika* of the late 1980s, the Veps enjoyed a brief renaissance. The Veps Culture Society, founded in 1988, was crucial in restoring the language and encouraging the publication of primers, textbooks and dictionaries. To revive Veps ethnic dress, society members had to re-search the collections of the St. Petersburg Museum of Ethnography, as no examples survived anywhere in the Veps lands. Using the only two remaining garments as patterns, Veps seamstresses reconstructed a modern version of traditional Veps attire: a colorful *sarafan* (long, broad-skirted dress) over a white or red-and-white *ratsin* (shirt) for women; and for men, a

linen *paid* (tunic-like shirt) complete with a *siberkad* (long coat).

But times are hard in Veps villages. Most do not have proper water, heating or sanitary facilities. Villagers rely on private vegetable gardens to survive. The region is rich in marble and timber, but locals see little of the money generated by the exploitation of these natural resources. Without economic prospects, younger Veps are heading off to the cities in search of jobs. "Our numbers keep dwindling because life does not have much to offer our young people," says Strogalschikova. "To get ahead, they have to become Russian."

What's left of Veps culture can be seen in Sheltozero's museum. Located in a sim-

" Life
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ZINAIDA
STROGAISHCHIXOVA,
CHAIR, THE VEPS
CULTURE SOCIETY

ple log house, it looks like a traditional Veps home: the creaky wooden floorboards are spotless; homespun woolen mats adorn the walls; a wooden cradle, ornamented with hand carving, is parked in a corner. The museum's collection consists of over 10,000 household items like pots, chests, coffee mills and spinning wheels, all of which were retrieved from dusty attics and abandoned sheds. In fact, the museum looks a lot like Polina Levkina's kitchen, which is in danger of becoming a museum piece itself. "How can we teach our grandchildren Veps ways if they don't even speak our language?" Levkina gripes. Then she puts more *kolobs* on the table. —J.G. and Yuri Zarakhovich/Sheltozero

THE RUSYNS, SLOVAKIA

IF YOU'RE AN ANDY WARHOL FAN, where do you go to find the largest concentration of his works in one place? Well, you could try the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the city where the pop artist was born and raised. Housed in a converted warehouse, the museum has more than 500 of Warhol's works.

Or you could come to Medzilaborce (pop. 6,500), an impoverished town in northeastern Slovakia that boasts the world's second largest museum dedicated to Warhol's life and work. Here you'll

find some 160 original prints and drawings, Warhol's leather jacket and family memorabilia. "If you want to know Andy Warhol the superstar, go to Pittsburgh," says Michal Bycko, 52, who founded the Andy Warhol Museum of Modern Art in 1991. "But if you want to know him as a person, and what he was like before he became famous, you need to come to Medzilaborce."

What's an artist like Warhol doing in a place like Medzilaborce? His parents were born in the village of Mikova, a stretch of modest homes along a single-lane road about 14 km from Medzilaborce. While Warhol himself never visited, Bycko insists that the region's peasant mentality and religious iconography were a profound influence on his art.

The museum, housed in a boxy communist-era palace of culture, is partly a tourist attraction; it draws as many as 17,000 people a year to this deeply rural region of undulating fields and scarecrows. But Bycko says it's also a statement of defiance. Warhol's parents were Rusyns, also known as Ruthenians, members of a Slavic tribe that settled in this part of Slovakia after the 6th century. The museum, Bycko says, is a way of keeping Rusyn culture alive: "An identification with Warhol boosts people's self-confidence. They no longer need to be ashamed of being Rusyn."

In this neglected part of the country, where alcoholism is rampant and jobs are scarce, there's not a lot else to be proud of. The Rusyns—who speak a distinct language and are renowned for their exquisite wooden churches, often built without nails—have been stubbornly resisting assimilation and natural disasters for centuries. Some 1.2 million Rusyns are currently estimated to be living in Central and Eastern Europe. Under Czechoslovakia's communist regime in the early 1950s, they were declared to be Ukrainians and their Greek Catholic church was abolished. In Ukraine, where an estimated 740,000 Rusyns live, the government has yet to recognize them as a separate ethnicity.

The pressure has taken its toll. In present-day Slovakia, the number of people declaring themselves to be of Rusyn nationality dropped from 110,000 in 1910 to just over 24,000 in 2001. Today, many Rusyns struggle with the Cyrillic script of their written language, and a growing number of parents find it more convenient to raise their children speaking only Slovak. Rusyn culture, says Bycko, a

melancholy former bar musician and recovering alcoholic, is "like a terminal patient who rallies enough to get out of bed but dies shortly afterward."

Paul Robert Magocsi, a Rusyn expert at the University of Toronto and editor of the *Encyclopedia of Rusyn History and Culture*, is a bit more optimistic. "There have always been dire predictions," he says. "Rusyns, like many other national minorities, aren't going to go away. Ten years from now, we will be in more or less the same situation as we are now." That situation may not be quite fatal, but it's certainly fragile, kind of like local interest in the world's most famous Rusyn. Despite Medzilaborce's efforts to rebrand itself as Warhol City—two E.U. grants are currently paying for new facades, bus stops and other infrastructure, all in the style of Warhol's Pop Art—only about 3% of visitors to the museum are from the region. "The attitude is the same as toward Rusyn identity," Bycko says. "People have other things to worry about."

As a result, Rusyn identity is slowly being whittled away by economic hardship, flight to the cities and plain old indifference. "An apocalypse will strike the Rusyns within two generations," predicts Michal Smajda, 84, a Rusyn writer and ethnographer. "Children are not being born, our youth are going abroad in search of jobs, and the elderly are departing for eternity." You need look no farther than Andy Warhol's parents' hometown to see the effects. Mikova currently has a population of 162, of whom more than half are retired, and unemployment is running at 30%. There's no longer a school, a pub or weekend bus connections. "The community is dying," says Alexander Vaco, the 58-year-old mayor.

Still, there are some signs of life. Slovakia's Rusyns are now recognized by the state as an ethnic minority, their language is taught in more than a dozen schools, and in the 2001 census, the number of Slovaks who gave their nationality as Rusyn jumped by 7,200 to 24,000, a 40% increase over 1991. This modest resurgence is thanks largely to groups like Rusinska obroda (Rusyn Revival), one of a handful of Rusyn organizations that sprang up in Slovakia after 1989 to revivify the beleaguered community by publishing newspapers and books, organizing culture and sporting events, and lobbying the government. In the run-up to the 2001 census, Rusinska obroda activists went door-to-door to persuade people to declare themselves

Rusyn. The Slovak Rusyn community is "the most vibrant" in Europe, says Rusyn scholar Magocsi.

For that state of affairs, thanks are due to people like Father Frantisek Krajnak, 49, a soft-spoken Greek Catholic priest from Medzilaborce who's

ing up for his culture. In the 1980s, when the communist regime in Czechoslovakia banned his translations of religious texts into Rusyn, he distributed them secretly. He's equally undeterred today when confronting the bureaucracy of the Greek Catholic church in Slovakia over the

"An apocalypse will strike the Rusyns within

battling to make sure the Rusyn language continues to be used in church services. Krajnak fears that the language's disappearance from religious services will only hasten its decline. "Our language is a treasure that informs our culture," he says. Krajnak has a long history of speak-

appointment of a Rusyn Bishop, a position Krajnak feels would be an important symbol of cultural identity.

Despite the leap in Rusyn numbers, Bycko is convinced his people will eventually be relegated to the status of a cultural curiosity. He cites the 13th Annual

THE SORBS, GERMANY

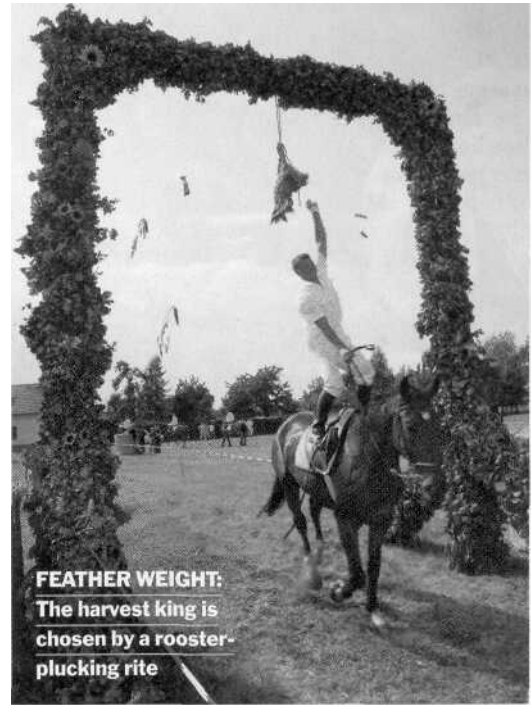
THE SCENE LOOKS LIKE A CROSS between a foxhunt and an amateur horse-jumping competition. A posse of 10 young men gallop at breakneck speed toward a tall wooden gallows in a field. Standing bolt upright in their stirrups as they pass under the gallows, the riders lunge at the neck of a freshly slaughtered rooster dangling from the crossbeam. When, after dozens of attempts, one of the horsemen finally manages to tear the animal's head off, a crowd of about 500 spectators erupts into cheers and applause. The new harvest king has been chosen.

This ancient ritual, called *lapanje kokota* (rooster plucking), is performed every summer in Werben, a village of about 1,900 people located some 120 km southeast of Berlin. The participants are Sorbs, descendants of two Slavonic tribes that settled in the region during the 6th century. Most Sorbs still live in rural areas, and the annual *lapanje kokota* ceremony is a re-enactment of an old fertility rite that's supposed to ensure a bountiful harvest. Modern Sorbs still turn out for the event less for its alleged agricultural benefits than for the chance to mix and mingle, catch up on the latest village gossip, enjoy the homemade cakes and, perhaps, overhear one of the village elders speak the old language. "We're a very special, small people," says Susann Hockwin, 22, a Werben hairdresser of Sorb descent. "It's important to keep the old customs alive, if only by showing up on days like this."

Like the Veps and the Rusyns, the Sorbs had to contend with centuries of persecution, repression and forced assimilation—plus the Nazis, who tried to make them more Aryan by closing Sorb schools and churches and banning the language. Ironically, the Sorbs thrived under East Germany's communist regime, which was keen to demonstrate solidarity with the Slavic countries of the Soviet bloc by recognizing the Sorb language, subsidizing Sorb media and sponsoring cultural festivals. But there was a price to pay. All politically oriented Sorb organizations had to toe the party line, and dozens of Sorb villages were razed for the strip-mining of

lignite, a brown coal that's plentiful in the region. The Sorb population dropped from around 100,000 in 1945 to around 60,000 in 1989. "It's a miracle that we still exist," says Dietrich Scholze, head of the Sorb Institute in Bautzen, a research center focusing on Sorb history and language.

The Sorbs' survival owes less to miracles than to the group's tenacity in preserving its traditions. During the worst of the Nazi oppression, Sorbs secretly taught children their native tongue and continued to circulate Serbian literature privately. "As an ethnic minority, you have to be inventive and stubborn," says Horst Wolk, 51, head of the Werben branch of



FEATHER WEIGHT:
The harvest king is chosen by a rooster-plucking rite

Domowina (Homeland), an umbrella organization for Sorb cultural groups.

That recalcitrance has been rewarded by the German government's policy of increased legal protection and cultural promotion. Since reunification in 1990, the Sorbian language has been officially recognized, and the state constitutions of Brandenburg and Saxony, the German states where most Sorbs live, stipulate that the two Sorb Councils at the Potsdam and Dresden parliaments be consulted on all matters affecting the ethnic group. Berlin provides some €16 million annually to fund groups like the Sorb National Ensemble, which stages ballets and musicals based on Sorb themes.

The Sorb experience in Germany is an example of how a small but deter-

Festival of Rusyn Culture, which took place last year in Mikova and is dedicated to Warhol, as a case in point. Several hundred people gathered to watch an afternoon of folk songs and dance, but Bycko calls it a "drunken ball" of little value for the preservation of Rusyn culture. "It's

two generations. "

MICHAL SMAJDA, ETHNOGRAPHER

not enough to dust off the relics of Rusyn culture the way that it was circa 1820," he says. "One needs to look for contemporary forms that reflect the fact that we are living today." The Rusyns could really use another Andy Warhol.—**J.G. and Jan Stojaspal/Mezylaborce**

mined ethnic group can thrive when the government is on its side. But there are still plenty of reasons to worry. Unemployment, which exceeds 22% in some Sorb areas, is forcing many young people to look for work in other parts of the country. As a result, says Scholze, the number of Sorbs who still speak the language is dropping. "It's not like I'd be able to really use Serbian anywhere, so why bother?" shrugs Hockwin.

Berlin's long budget crisis means that

Matthias Schilka, a 20-year-old student from Werben, is competing in his fourth *lapanje kokota*. "I can't do anything about the language—I'm not from a minority family—but I'm taking part in the harvest ritual because it's important that at least these customs live on," he says. "It would be sad if they died out."

It would be more than sad. The Sorbs are one of just four national minorities left in Germany. Siegfried Ramoth, 76, has long been Werben's vil-

THE BRETONS, FRANCE



OME 600,000 PEOPLE TURNED OUT last month for the annual Interceltic Festival in the small port town of Lorient in Brittany, the peninsula in western France that juts into

the Atlantic. Started in 1971, this mix of music, art, crafts and cuisine brings together people from across the globe to celebrate all things Celtic—specifically, all things related to Brittany's Celts, the Bretons. Festivalgoers browse through a bazaar filled with traditional handicrafts; enjoy authentic Celtic fare like *kouign-amann*, a butter cake, and *chouchen*, a honey-based liquor; and listen to bands like Soldat Louis, which plays modern music with a Celtic beat, and Trophee Loic Raison, which plays traditional Celtic folk. The 10-day event is a chance to enjoy good food, good music and good fun, but for the people who attend it's also something more—a declaration of cultural independence. "There's often a will to homogenize things in France, but not everyone wants that," says Matthieu Serot, 23, a *biniou* (bagpipe) instructor from Brittany who was at the festival last year. "I consider myself fully French but first and foremost Breton."

That's a provocative statement in France, where the emphasis on *La Republique Francaise* has often meant the cultural suppression of the country's original peoples. But over the past century, successive waves of immigration—first from other parts of Europe and more recently from former colonies in northern Africa and Asia—have compelled the French to recognize that the state can't impose a uniform culture, language and faith. The controversy of the past few years over a law preventing Muslim girls from wearing head scarves in state-run institutions demonstrates that this battle is still being fought.

The Bretons have successfully reclaimed their cultural niche. They have fiercely defended their language and transformed their ancient traditions into thoroughly modern trends. Breton bands like Tri Yann popularized Celtic music in France over the past 30 years with their folksy shanties sung in Breton and French, and composer Yann Tiersen, who wrote the soundtrack for the 2001 hit movie *Amelie* and played at this year's festival, are big sellers throughout the country. The revival of *fest-noz* dances, a contemporary take on the ancient Breton



DRESSING UP: Anja Ramoth dons traditional Sorb clothes for the Werben harvest festival

the government is cutting back on educational grants. With typical resourcefulness, though, the Sorbs are taking matters into their own hands. In 1998, the Domowina launched the Witaj (Welcome) kindergarten project in which children learn Sorbian in a playful environment. "I'm 100% happy with Witaj," says Ilka

lage chronicler, a job that entails recording important local events and researching the region's past. Over the past four decades, he's heard how the clipped sounds of Sorbian have almost com-

" These customs are what will keep our culture and our history alive. "

SIEGFRIED RAMOTH, VILLAGE CHRONICLER

Lachmann, 37, whose two children attend a Witaj school in Hoyerswerda, 55 km northeast of Dresden. "The kids pick up the second language without any exertion, and profit from it; it helps them learn other languages later."

Many Germans are sympathetic to the Sorbs' struggle for cultural survival.

pletely disappeared from village life. "Languages die out; that's the way it goes," Ramoth says. "But these customs—which strengthen the bonds between the members of our village, young and old, German and Sorb—are what will keep our culture and our history alive." —J.G. and Ursula Sautter/Werben

end-of-harvest celebrations, is another sign that Breton culture is cool—a lifestyle choice more than a matter of genealogy. "To be Breton isn't about what's in the blood," says Yves Guilloux, 76, a former mayor of the Breton town of Ploerdut. "It's what's in the heart."

Brittany has had a significant Celtic presence since the 5th century, and Bretons have been resisting domination by Paris since the region became a French province in 1532. For years Bretons were ridiculed as hicks—unsophisticated peasants living a largely medieval life on the fringes of French society. As recently as 1902, churchgoing Bretons were forbidden to learn their catechism in their own language, even though half of them didn't speak any French. In the 1970s, a tiny band of Bretons turned to violence to fight for independence.

Some people continue to push for more political autonomy and even independence, but the main battle has moved to the cultural front. Things began to change in the 1970s, when embracing Breton culture was seen as a way of countering Paris. "People who really wanted to rebel went to the countryside, found Breton-speaking peasants, and started to speak Breton to make statements about their opposition to the French government, centralization and capitalism," says Cambridge University's Maryon McDonald. Jean-Louis Jossic of the band Tri Yann emphasizes the rustic appeal of Breton culture: "Over the last century, a whole generation moved from the countryside to the cities. Breton culture is a rural one by nature, and those city dwellers, beginning with the social movement of 1968, began to look at their roots and embrace them."

Bretons have kept the language alive, aided by the establishment of the Diwan (seed) school system, the model on which Germany's Sorbs based their Witaj network. More than 2,500 students a year learn Breton alongside French in the Diwan

schools, while thousands of other public school pupils learn Breton as a second language. Thanks in part to these academic measures, there are now some 257,000 Breton speakers in France, significantly less than the 1.1 million in the early '50s but enough to keep the language alive and vital. "The shame that existed for so long about our language hasn't been fully digested yet, but it's at least been swallowed," says Anna Vari Chapalain, director of Diwan.

ries, such as *Perry Mason*, in French, with the option of a Breton soundtrack for some programming. These changes have been good for business: the station is now the third highest-rated themed cable channel in the country. Still, the room for growth is small. "All over Europe you have regional channels," explains TV Breizh founder Patrick Le Lay, a Breton who is also the head of France's popular TFI network. "But France is a centralized country where] the law doesn't allow for regional networks." Consequently, TV Breizh is only available for those willing to pay for satellite or cable.

Le Lay, who says he created TV Breizh to do his part for his roots, sees the channel as an important symbol of the regional culture, even if only a small part of its programming is Breton-related. "With the profits from the channel's success, we can invest in programming more focused on Breton and Celtic subjects," he says. He also sees great potential in the spread of broadband Internet to create "ways to circumvent the national laws and give people more regional programming," providing a cultural richness that isn't as dependent on big ratings.

Cultural richness is one thing the Bretons have going for them, and they savor the national attention. A Diwan school opened last September in Paris, the city's first. But as their culture has become more popular and accessible, Bretons could end up being victims of their own success. If anyone can be "Breton" simply by wear-

ing the right clothes and listening to the right music, does the term have any real meaning? "It's always a risk," Jossic concedes, "but we are a mixed people ourselves, of different origins and influences. Breton identity will continue to change with the times, and be richer for it." And France, like other European countries with minority peoples, will be, too. —**J.G. and Grant Rosenberg/Lorient. With reporting by Theunis Bates/London**



SOUND OF MUSIC: Tiersen, above, has helped popularize Breton culture; artists from across the Celtic world, like Spain's Susana Seivane, left, perform at the Interceltic Festival, below



Part of that vitality can be seen and heard on TV Breizh, France's first and only private channel dedicated to the region. Based in Lorient, it was created in 2000 to give a voice to Brittany, but viewing habits forced the station to scale back its Breton programming. Until recently, the nightly newscast even featured a segment in Breton. TV Breizh retains a Celtic flair, even though it mostly broadcasts films, cartoons and foreign TV se-