

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Interracial Marriages In Europe: History And Modernity

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Abstract

Modern Europe is a space of cultural diversity, where dozens of peoples and languages coexist. One of the significant social phenomena reflecting the processes of integration is interethnic marriages. Their prevalence is growing, and their social significance is becoming more and more noticeable.

KEY WORDS

Nation, marriages, country, religion, mentality, law, nationalism, culture, traditions, rituals.

INTRODUCTION

Modern Europe represents a unique space of cultural diversity. On a relatively small territory, dozens of nations coexist, speaking different languages, practicing various religions, and belonging to different cultural traditions. One of the most significant phenomena reflecting the processes of integration and cultural interaction has been international marriages.

These unions have long ceased to be exceptions. Where once international marriages were perceived as unusual or even risky, today they have become a natural part of European society. Nevertheless, this process has deep historical roots, a rich dynamic, and continues to evoke widespread public interest.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on international marriages holds an important place in European sociology. Castles and Miller in their work "The Age of Migration" view such unions as a marker of deep migrant integration. Kalmain emphasizes the role of interracial marriages in accelerating social adaptation and shaping dual identities in children. Reports from Eurostat and OECD provide the statistical framework necessary for studying dynamics.

Research from the Pew Research Center demonstrates a growing public approval of intercultural unions. The Council of Europe underscores the importance of mixed families in strengthening social stability and promoting multiculturalism.

METHODS

The article employs common sociological methods such as observation, diagrams, interviews, surveys, tables, as well as statistical and archival materials. The article is based on universally accepted scientific methods: historical, comparative-logical analysis, sequence, objectivity, and a dialectical approach to social phenomena.

RESULTS

The history of Europe is a history of contacts, conquests, trade, and cultural exchange. Even in ancient times, marriages between peoples were used as a tool of diplomacy. For example, the Romans actively arranged marriages with Gauls, Spaniards, and Greeks to strengthen their colonies and unite the population.

In the Middle Ages, inter-dynastic marriages became a key

mechanism for establishing peace between states. Notably, the marriage of Anna Yaroslavna, daughter of the Kievan prince Yaroslav the Wise, to French King Henry I strengthened ties between Eastern Europe and the West. Other examples include marriages between the Habsburg and Bourbon dynasties, which influenced continental politics for centuries.

The 18th century brought new ideas to Europe are freedom, equality, tolerance. The Enlightenment era changed attitudes towards the "other." Travel, universities, trade, and literature contributed to broadening Europeans' horizons. International marriages during this period began to be perceived not as diplomatic transactions but as a natural outcome of personal relationships. French aristocrats married Englishwomen, Italian women wed Germans, and the cultural elite sought not only political but also spiritual unity.

The 19th century marked a turning point. Industrialization and urbanization altered Europe's social map. People of various nationalities began to move en masse to cities, working in factories. During this period, international connections among working communities flourished. For instance, neighborhoods in Berlin, Manchester, and Paris emerged where representatives of dozens of nations lived. This fostered not only economic cooperation but also personal relationships between people of different cultures. International marriages became especially active after World War I, as millions of displaced persons, soldiers, and refugees appeared in Europe.

After 1945, Europe entered a new phase in its history. Economic recovery required labor, and the governments of leading countries invited migrants: Germany welcomed Turkish and Yugoslav workers; France recruited people from Algeria, Morocco, and Senegal; the United Kingdom saw migrants from India, Pakistan, and the Caribbean; Italy accepted immigrants from Albania, Tunisia, and the Philippines.

These processes inevitably led to an increase in international marriages. For the first time, interethnic unions became a mass phenomenon, shaping a new multicultural face of Europe.

Today, Europe is one of the world leaders in the number of mixed marriages. According to Eurostat (2024), about 18% of all marriages in France are international; in Germany, 12-14%; in the United Kingdom, 15%; in Italy, around 11%; and in Spain and the Netherlands, over 20%.

The growth of such unions is particularly noticeable among youth studying in international universities. For example, in universities in Paris, Berlin, or London, nearly half of the students have partners of a different nationality. International marriages not only unite people but also create new cultural models. In such families, dual identities emerge: children often speak two languages fluently, celebrate different holidays, and serve as a "bridge" between cultures. However, there are also challenges.

Differences in religion, traditions, and child-rearing often become sources of conflict. For example, the distinctions between Catholic and Muslim traditions in Italy or France can create tension. However, society as a whole is becoming increasingly tolerant. Sociological surveys show that around 70-80% of Europeans have a positive attitude toward marriages between individuals of different nationalities.

British society is considered one of the most multicultural in Europe. Marriages between British people and immigrants from India, Pakistan, Africa, and the Caribbean have become a common phenomenon. Interestingly, statistics indicate that in London, about 25% of all marriages are international.

Prevalence: According to the latest census by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), one in ten residents of the UK is married to or cohabiting with a partner from a different ethnic group.

Legislation: Unlike other countries, the UK has never had laws prohibiting interracial or inter-national marriages.

Public opinion: Although in the 1970s and 1980s more British people opposed mixed marriages, negative attitudes did not deter couples. Over time, public opinion has become much more open and accepting.

Demographic changes: The share of mixed-race populations is growing. Experts suggest that by the end of the 21st century, the proportion of mixed populations could reach 30%, which would significantly alter the ethnic landscape of the country.

Younger generation: Among the youth (under 20 years old), the proportion of individuals of mixed heritage exceeds that of other minority groups. The number of mixed marriages in the UK between Black and White individuals, as well as those from Asian backgrounds, is increasing. Children from these unions often identify as being of mixed heritage, with the numbers in

the UK reaching 700,000. Due to active international migration, the number of mixed marriages is on the rise.

France has long been a symbol of integration. Marriages between French citizens and immigrants from North Africa are perceived as part of the social norm. The government views such unions as indicators of successful assimilation. According to French sociological studies, international marriages accounted for about 30% of all marriages between French citizens and individuals from other nationalities. The increase in this indicator is linked to migration from countries in Europe, Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East. According to a report by the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE), in France, 236,300 marriages were registered in 2015, of which 14% were mixed marriages. Among these, 37% were with individuals from Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria, 22% with Europeans, and 14% with representatives from Asian countries. In 2015, among those marrying French citizens, 49% were foreign women and 51% were foreign men.

International marriages in Germany have long been a contentious issue due to historical prejudices; however, the situation has improved dramatically since the 1990s. Today, mixed families actively participate in public life, and many children from such families become well-known artists, athletes, and politicians. According to the Federal Statistical Office of Germany in 2013, 87% of marriages were between Germans, while 7% were international marriages involving Germans, and 6% were between citizens of other countries. The statistics on mixed marriages in Germany have not experienced significant changes over the past ten years.

Italy has transitioned from a traditional Catholic society to an open multicultural country. There is particularly a high number of international marriages in the northern part of the country within cities like Milan, Turin, and Verona. The European Union pays considerable attention to the rights of international couples. Directive 2004/38/EC secures the freedom of movement and residence for family members of EU citizens, including spouses from third countries. Economically, such families tend to be more mobile and successful: spouses often speak multiple languages, work in different countries, and have a wide range of social connections. In 2014, Italy registered 24,230 marriages where one partner was a foreigner, accounting for 12.8% of all marriages.

The frequency of marriages with foreigners was higher in the

North and the Center, where there are significantly established communities of foreigners. In the Northeast, nearly one in five marriages involved a foreign partner. In contrast, the proportions in the South and on the islands were considerably lower, at 6.3% and 6.2% of all marriages, respectively. Mixed marriages accounted for 17,500 in 2014, with 72.4% involving foreigners. Among these mixed marriages, men constituted 7.2% of the Italian participants, while women made up 2.0%. By 2022, 15.6% of marriages in Italy were international.

The prospects for the development of international marriages in 21st-century Europe continue along the path of integration. New technologies, migration, education, and tourism are creating more opportunities for interaction. International marriages are becoming a natural reflection of globalization, and their numbers continue to grow. Likely, in a few decades, the distinction between "national" and "international" marriages may become meaningless, giving way to the idea of a "global family."

CONCLUSION

International marriages are not just a personal expression of love between individuals; they are a mirror of Europe's social evolution. They contribute to breaking down stereotypes, bringing cultures closer, and raising a new generation—open, free, and tolerant. Europe's history shows that it is through mutual understanding and respect among peoples that a peaceful and harmonious future is built. International marriages represent a pathway for the continent, which has endured centuries of conflict, to ultimately establish itself as a space of unity in diversity.

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