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Patterns of European intermarriages: trends and meaning in Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands

Clara Cortina

Spanish Research Council

Helga de Valk

Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI)

Suzana Koelet

Vrije Universiteit Brussel/Interface Demography

Leo van Wissen

Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI)

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Abstract

Previous studies on intermarriage in Europe have focused mainly on marriages between migrants from non-western origin and partners from the EU settlement country. This paper examines intermarriage among EU migrants and the native population in three countries of settlement: Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands. It is relevant to know who marries whom and what patterns of intermarriage among EU citizens are observed since European migrants are an important part of the migrants in each of the three settlement countries. Taking an international comparative approach can highlight how and to what extent the same patterns and factors are found to be relevant in different EU countries. This study can advance our understanding of the trends in EU intermarriages, their changes over time and factors involved. This study draws from data including the total population in each of the three countries by combining vital statistics, census and register data over the 1990-2009 period.

Key words: intermarriages, European migrants, EU, union formation

1. Introduction

Studies on intermarriages in Europe traditionally focus on migrants from non-western societies and the native populations in the European countries of settlement. At the same time 37% of immigrants in most European countries are nowadays those of other European descent. Despite that fact, there hardly exist any studies on intermarriage between EU citizens. We know virtually nothing, in particular, about trends in intermarriage between EU citizens. Furthermore, work on intermarriage in Europe lacks a comparative or European-wide dimension and focuses on specific countries (Niedomysl et al. 2010; Cortina et al. 2008; González Ferrer 2006). Although some of the studies have included Spaniards, Greeks, Portuguese, and Italians in their analysis, they largely target at the cohorts of low-skilled labour migrants that migrated in the 1950s and early 1960s to north-western Europe and their offspring (partially born in the destination countries) (Lucassen, Laarmana 2009). In these and other studies intermarriage is mainly used as an indicator for the integration of minority groups into the host societies (Kalmijn 1993; Lievens 1999).

This lack of interest is unfortunate. Especially now, when in the light of the European integration project one can question how European marriages have developed over time and what important factors are of influence here. The decrease in border controls and increased emphasis on EU mobility leads to the expectation of a rise in mixed European marriages. If international marriages are both a result and a driver of higher levels of mobility and interconnectivity, Europe should be a specifically interesting context in which to examine intermarriage. Some pioneer studies have appeared specifically considering this new context and focusing on the emergence of bi-national marriages in countries like Sweden (Niedomysl et al. 2010; Breger 1998; Johnson, Warren 1994).

This paper is part of a recently started project (Euromarr) which is funded by the European Science Foundation and aims to get more advanced insight in European intermarriages by applying a mixed method approach¹. In this first stage, our main objective is to analyse patterns of intermarriage between Europeans focusing on three countries, Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain. In each of these countries, there are large groups of immigrants coming from another member state. At the same time their history of EU migration is totally different as is their relation to the EU. Belgium and the Netherlands represent two of the six initial members of the European Union, founded in 1951. The capital of Belgium, Brussels, is the capital of Europe and hosts many of its central institutions. Spain on the other hand has only joined the EU thirty years later in 1981. All EU12 countries however belong sufficiently long to the European Union to allow for a study of long term trends in European intermarriage that is not influenced by the recent and unprecedented enlargements of the EU. They are also all highly developed countries without huge differentials in economic performance. This makes the comparison between each of these

¹ The study is a collaborative international research project seeking to examine the extent to which intermarriages between European citizens both reflect and contribute to the erosion of national identities and the emergence of groups of people who identify as Europeans (Díez Medrano 2008).

three settings very appealing for studying EU intermarriages. We focus our analyses on the last decade of the 20th Century and beginning of 21st Century, when the EU single market was already consolidated.

We specifically explore and compare across countries the trends of increase of European intermarriage, the national composition of couples and the characteristics of nationals marrying a EU partner. When studying long term trends in European bi-national marriages with a native partner it is moreover enlightening to compare these trends to those in other bi-national marriages. First aim is to get a better insight in patterns of European intermarriages in each of the three countries and the characteristics of the marriages and marriage partners. Second we aim to address similarities and differences in patterns of European intermarriages in the three countries. Third we question how and to what extent EU intermarriages can be explained against the traditional theoretical starting points from the intermarriage literature.

The structure of this paper is as follows: first we present the main theoretical framework applied to the analysis of intermarriage patterns. Second we describe the recent trends on migration patterns inside Europe in the context of the European integration process. Third we present the marriage statistics considering the specificities of the records in each of the countries. Finally, and before the concluding remarks, we present the main findings regarding the recent trends of European intermarriages in Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain and the characteristics of the spouses involved.

2. Intermarriage: changing and widening local marriage markets

Within the classic framework of studies on intermarriage, interethnic unions are taken as an indicator for immigrant integration. Earlier work in this research line has identified both individual (culture, language) and structural variables (group size, sex imbalances) as explanatory variables. One can question whether the same theoretical framework can be applied to the study of European intermarriages. Nevertheless the three explanatory factors as defined by Kalmijn (1998), namely preferences, opportunities structures (meeting chances) and third parties, could just as well be relevant in the case of European intermarriages. Therefore we try to elaborate on this framework as a starting point for analysis extended to our specific type of intermarriages. It can be an important first step for the study of the potential effects of an increase of mixed marriages in European countries.

According to Kalmijn's framework, individual preferences about spouse selection only occur in the specific context of mating opportunities. Other authors have used the term "marriage market" or "marriage fields" to refer to this opportunity structure. The number of potential male and female spouses in a defined area and their characteristics highly determine the choices and the resulting couples. Marriage markets have traditionally had a

spatial definition based on the idea that proximity makes frequency of interaction easier. In this regard, markets were supposed to be small and local and one could identify neighbourhood effects when analysing marriage patterns. Nevertheless recent evidence has proved that the local context is losing importance as marriage field because the opportunity structure has broadened enormously through increasing interconnectivity (international travellers and internet users) and we expect it to be reflected in marriage patterns. The broadening of the marriage structure might not be the only cause for the increase of international marriages though. As Niedmysl et al. (2010: 1120) put it: "an increase in the number of international marriages does not necessarily mean that marriage fields are globalising. It may simply indicate that more and more people live outside their country of origin, and still meet locally."

We can therefore conclude that we have two concurrent or maybe complementary hypotheses to support the expectation that the European intermarriages should be increasing in the last years. First, we can assume that the European local marriages or contexts have experienced substantial changes in their composition due to the increase in the intraeuropean migration flows (see next section). The increasing amount of non-nationals residing in other European countries would amplify the offer of potential European spouses. Second, we can assume that the mating opportunities of the Europeans have increased thanks to the increasingly interconnected individuals and society. These "fuzzy markets" could be responsible as well for an eventual increase of intramarriages in the European context.

3. European migrants in Europe

The new conditions for mobility created by the development of the single market, the institutionalization of the trans-European student mobility through programs like Erasmus and the increasing mobility inside Europe might have affected European intermarriages over the past decades (Salt 1992; King 2002; King, Ruiz- Gelices 2003; Casado-Díaz 2006; O'Reilly 2007; Rechi 2008).

The increase in migration flows between European countries has at least had an impact on the stocks of European migrants in the different countries. In 2008, in the EU-27, 6.2% of the population were non-nationals of the country in which they were residing (see Table 1 in Appendix). Around 37% of those non-nationals were citizens of another member state of the European Union. The number of non-nationals has increased by 9.2 million people since 2001, when the share was of 4.5%. In the same period, and despite the intensification of international migration flows towards Europe, the share of the total EU foreign population has risen from 34 to 37%.

The countries with the highest proportion of European non-nationals of the total population were Luxembourg (36.6%), Cyprus (10.3%), Ireland (8.9%), Belgium (6.2%) and Spain (4.7%). In The Netherlands the proportion was lower, 1.6% (see Table 1 in appendix). Table 1 shows the most numerous non-national groups in each of the three countries that we are analyzing. Belgium appears to be by far the country with the strongest presence of European non-nationals, which represent almost 68% of the total non-nationals in the country. This proportion is lower and similar in the Netherlands and Spain, around 40%, even if in the Spanish case the level is mainly due to the importance of Romanians which are the largest immigrant group in the country (we will see later how the restriction to EU12 instead of EU27 changes the trends of European intermarriages observed in Spain). In those two countries the foreign population is originated by the oldest (Netherlands) or newest (Spain) international migration flows towards Europe coming from north Africa, Turkey or Latin-America. Differences in the ease with which immigrants may acquire the citizenship of the host country might however explain part of the differences across the countries in the presence of EU non-nationals, especially relative to other non-nationals². The overall naturalisation rate in the Netherlands and Belgium is significantly higher than in Spain (respectively 4.5%, 3.9% for the Netherlands and Belgium and 1.6% for Spain in 2007, OECD³).

TABLE 1: MOST NUMEROUS NON-NATIONALS BY COUNTRY OF CITIZENSHIP, 2008 (IN ABSOLUTE VALUES AND AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL NON-NATIONALS RESIDENT IN THE COUNTRY)

Belgium			Netherlands			Spain		
<i>Citizens of</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Citizens of</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Citizens of</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Italy	169000	17,4	Turkey	93700	13,6	Romania	734800	14,0
France	130600	13,4	Morocco	74900	10,9	Morocco	649800	12,3
Netherlands	12500	12,7	Germany	62400	9,1	Ecuador	423500	8,0
Morocco	79900	8,2	United Kingdom	40200	5,8	United Kingdom	354700	6,7
Spain	42700	4,4	Belgium	26200	3,8	Colombia	282900	5,4
Total EU	659000	67,9	Total EU	263000	38,2	Total EU	2113000	40,2

Source: Vasileva 2009 (Eurostat)

4. Data

In this paper we rely on the demographic analyses of intermarriages, its background, determinants and trends. In order to obtain proper measures of intermarriage between Europeans we use vital statistics (marriage records) from the three selected countries for the period 1990-2009. For Belgium the data consist of all marriages registered in Belgium (thus

² In almost all countries, citizenship take up tends to be higher among immigrants from lower-income countries than among immigrants from high-income countries (OECD 2010).

³ Table A.1.6. Acquisition of nationality in selected OECD countries
<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/38/56/43185446.xls>

including marriages of couples living outside Belgium) and do not distinguish between opposite-sex and same-sex marriages (since 2003, marriages between persons of the same sex are authorised in Belgium but the sex of the spouses is not explicitly mentioned in the marriage certificates). For Spain, only opposite-sex marriages contracted in Spain are considered. Despite this small difference in definition we do not expect that this seriously affects our results as the number of same sex marriages is still extremely small. Checking the most recent data for the Netherlands e.g. shows that less than half a percent of all intermarriages referred to same sex couples (Statistics Netherlands, Statline 2010).

Registered marriages are classified according to the combination of nationalities of the spouses⁴. We establish the following categories:

International marriages: those where at least one partner does not have the nationality of the country of residence (these international marriages can either be uni-national or bi-national).

Bi-national marriages: those where the spouses have different nationalities.

Bi-national European marriages (or European intermarriages): those bi-national marriages involving two European spouses (these marriages can involve a native partner or not).

To analyse geographical patterns, we use the 2001 population census of Belgium and Spain because Belgian marriage records do not provide enough geographical detail. Nevertheless the scale used in the maps (Figure 3a and 3b) is different: municipalities for Belgium and provinces for Spain. We have restricted the analyses to opposite-sex married couples and we have identified the spouses by nationality, in order to keep the maximum degree of comparability with the marriage series previously analyzed.

5. Findings

5.1 *General patterns and trends in bi-national European marriages*

The first part of our findings refers to the overall patterns of European intermarriages in order to understand how bi-national EU12 marriages with a native partner relate to other international marriages. The data are derived from the vital statistics (marriage records) provided by the national statistical bureaus of Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands. For reasons of comparability the most recent year available for all three countries, 2008, is used.

Out of the total number of marriages contracted in Spain in 2008 almost a fifth included at least one partner with a foreign nationality (other than Spanish) (Table 2). Some

⁴ To group European citizenships we use a double definition of Europe: shorter for EU12 and larger for EU27.

of these 36,332 international marriages were uninational, but the majority were bi-national (N= 31,497). The percentage of bi-national European marriages was nevertheless relatively limited. About 1.8% of all marriages in 2008 involved two EU12 spouses of a different nationality of which by far the majority included a Spanish partner. Looking at it from a different perspective implies that of all bi-national marriages contracted in Spain 11% (3,441/31,497) are involving EU12 nationals. It points to the fact that a large majority of recent bi-national marriages in Spain include at least one non-European partner. In addition, bi-national marriages with so-called new Europeans (mainly Romanians and Bulgarians) are very important as well. If we include them in the definition of European spouse (EU27) the share of bi-national European marriages reaches 2.7%

Looking at the most recent data in Belgium, the European presence in marriage patterns is more noticeable (Table 2). Overall the levels of international marriages and bi-national marriages in Belgium are slightly higher (21 and 19% respectively) than in Spain. Even in Belgium, being at the hearth of Europe, a large majority of recent bi-national marriages includes at least one partner of non-European nationality. Nevertheless, in spite of much smaller population sizes in Belgium compared to Spain (10 versus 46.5 million inhabitants in 2010), the absolute number of bi-national EU12 marriages are almost comparable for the two countries (N=2,737 and 3,441 in Belgium and Spain respectively). This reflects the importance of European migrants in Belgians' foreign national population compared to that of Spain. In Belgium we find that slightly more than one in every twenty marriages registered in 2008 (i.e. 5.8%) consisted of a native partner marrying a EU12 partner. Another 0.5% consisted of two non-native EU12 partners of different nationality marrying in Belgium. New EU countries, as included and reflected in the EU27 category, were less prominent in the bi-national European marriages. Furthermore, EU12-native couples continue to represent almost 30% of all bi-national marriages registered between 2005 and 2009 (not in Table) which is highly comparable to the average for the 2000-2004 period.

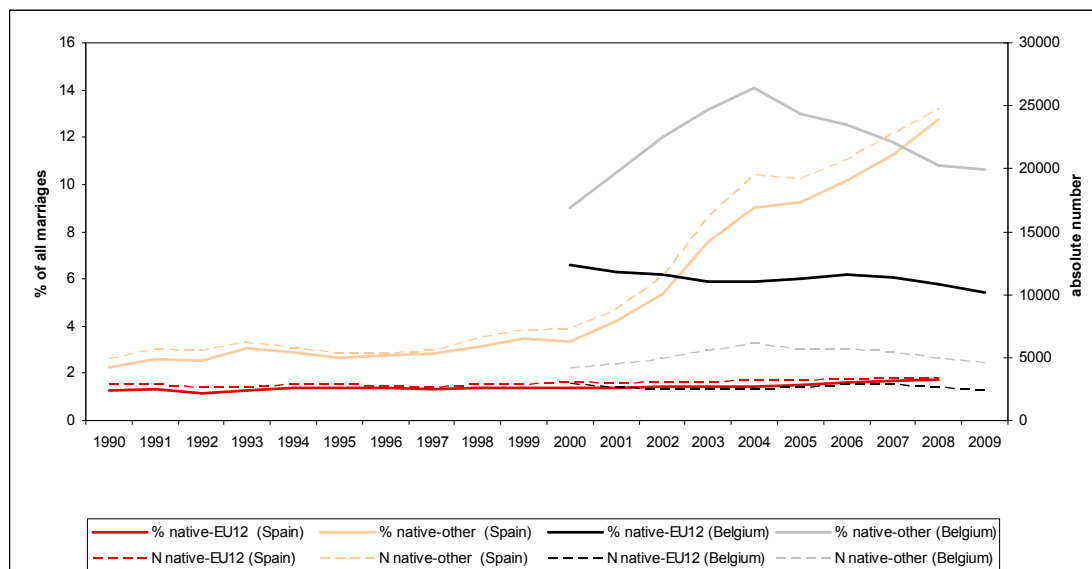
TABLE 2: PREVALENCE OF INTERNATIONAL AND BI-NATIONAL MARRIAGES IN SPAIN, BELGIUM AND THE NETHERLANDS, 2008 (VITAL STATISTICS, % OF ALL MARRIAGES REGISTERED IN 2008)

	Spain		Belgium		The Netherlands	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Total number of marriages	194,022	100	45,450	100	74,030	100
International marriages	36,332	18.7	9,769	21.5	11,126	15.3
Bi-national marriages	31,497	16.2	8,629	19.0		
Bi-national EU27 marriages	5,259	2.7	3,133	6.8	3,220	4.3
Bi-national EU12 marriages	3,441	1.8	2,737	6.3		
- of which with a native partner	3,337	1.7	2,614	5.8		

Source: Spanish Statistical Institute, Statistics Belgium, Statistics Netherlands

Of course it is relevant to go beyond these data which just refer to one specific moment in time. We therefore constructed trends of intermarriages between nationals and EU12 partners based on the annual marriage registers for both Spain (1990-2008) and Belgium (2000-2009). It is apparent from Figure 1 that the percentage of nationals marrying a partner from another EU12 country is rather stable over time in both countries. Where as the share of bi-national marriages including other nationals outside of EU 12 show a steep increase in Spain since the turn of the century, this is not the case for marriages of EU12 with Spanish nationals which have been rather stable over the two decades under study (with a very small increase over the past few years). This would not be the case if we would have included the new EU countries into our definition of bi-national European marriages. The main group of recent European immigrants to Spain has after all been the Romanians. The EU12 marriages with a native partner have nevertheless lost significance as a share of the total number of bi-national marriages over time: representing 39% of all bi-national marriages in Spain between 1990 and 1994 to only 13% in the most recent years (2000 to 2008). The changing immigration patterns to Spain over the past decade are thus directly shown in these figures. For Belgium we find that the relative share of bi-national European marriages among the total marriages has somewhat decreased, but their absolute number has remained stable (Figure 1). The decrease is again quite minimal when compared to trends in bi-national marriages not restricted to EU12 partners. Overall it is the relative stability of EU12-native marriages that is most apparent.

FIGURE 1: TRENDS IN BI-NATIONAL MARRIAGES WITH A NATIVE PARTNER IN SPAIN AND BELGIUM, 1990-2009 (VITAL STATISTICS)



Source: Spanish Statistical Institute, Statistics Belgium,

5.2 *Nationality of EU partners*

The results so far demonstrate how European bi-national marriages with a native partner in Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands, have a development over time which appears to be different from that of other bi-national couples including new Europeans and non-Europeans. The question remains however which Europeans the natives in Spain and Belgium marry to. 'European bi-national marriages with a native partner' after all refers to combinations with very different EU12 nationalities. These nationalities have different characteristics in terms of culture, language, group size, geographical proximity etc.. Before taking these composition effects into account, we start with a description of the most frequent origin combinations of EU12-native couples in Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands. Also, the trends over time can be useful for exploring the possible driving factors behind European intra-marriage.

In Spain 85% of all EU12-native marriages (contracted in the 2005-2008 period) include a partner from Britain (1), Italy (2), France (3), Germany (4) and Portugal (5) (Table 3). The five most popular EU12 nationalities in recent registered marriages with a native partner differ for men and women (Table 2). For Spanish women, Italians or Brits seem to be the most popular choice, while Spanish men seem to prefer French or German women. This could however reflect, at least in part, the preference to marry in a specific country, rather than the preference to marry a partner from a specific country. Couples whose marriages are registered in Spain are not necessarily settled in Spain. Some of them may only come temporarily to the country of origin of one of the partners to celebrate the marriage. This can be motivated by the value attached to the proximity of relatives at the time of marriage and/or by the attractiveness of marrying in a southern country. We expect it to be particularly important for Spanish and Italian women to celebrate the marriage close to their family.

In Belgium we find three predominant European nationalities in the EU12 marriages with a native partner: the French (31%), the Dutch (24%) and the Italian (22%) (Table 3). Together they represent 77% of the EU12 partners who marry a native partner. The importance of these origins seems to reflect a border effect: France and the Netherlands are two neighboring countries of Belgium. Italy in turn was an important source of cheap labor for the flourishing mine industry in Belgium in the early twenties of the past century and right after the Second World War. Today, the Italians represent the largest European origin community in Belgium (see Table 1). We will explore the geographical patterns in the next section. Overall no large gender differences are found here, even though as in Spain more marriages between a native women and an EU 12 partner were contracted in the studied period than was the case for native men.

TABLE 3: TOP 5 NATIONALITIES IN EUROPEAN BI-NATIONAL INTERMARRIAGES WITH A NATIVE PARTNER IN SPAIN (2005-2008) AND BELGIUM (2005-2009) (VITAL STATISTICS)

	Spain		Belgium	
	Spanish women (N=8,894)	Spanish men (N=4,208)	Belgian women (N=7,068)	Belgian men (N=5,990)
Nationality of the EU12 partner	20.7% Italian	21.2% French	28.5% French	34.1% French
	20.1% British	20.2% German	24.8% Dutch	22.1% Dutch
	16.5% French	17.5% British	24.3% Italian	19.1% Italian
	15.5% German	13.5% Italian	5.7% Spanish	8.3% German
	11.6% Portug.	13.2% Portug.	5.5% German	6.3% Spanish
	15.6% other	14.4% other	11.2% other	10.1% other

Source: Spanish Statistical Institute, Statistics Belgium

So far we just studied the most recent marriages (those contracted between 2005 and 2009). Of course it is relevant to know whether these patterns have changed over time. Figure 2 provides an overview of developments for Spain and Belgium; please note the different range in percentages on the Y axis for each country.

We already found a modest rise in bi-national European marriages with a native partner in Spain. This rise can also be noticed with 4 out of the 5 most common nationalities of the partners in native-EU12 marriages (Figure 2a). Twenty years ago (1990-1994) the Spanish-French and Spanish-Portuguese marriages were still the most common combinations, closely followed by the other three. Since then the share of Spanish-Portuguese marriages has been diminishing. Changes in partner preference of Spanish and/or Portuguese men and women could be at the cause of this decline, but it might also have to do with shifts in the preferred country of residence for Spanish-Portuguese couples who, as we will see later, are foremost located close to the border with Portugal (Figure 3). Also for Belgium the trends over time were studied though only data are available (yet) for the past decade (Figure 2b). No huge differences in shares of the different nationalities of partners are found, with only one exception. The share of Italian-Belgian couples is much less likely in the past five years than they were in the early 2000s. This is mainly attributable to the growing share of second generation Italians in Belgium who were born in Belgium from Italian parents but who do have Belgian nationality. As a result these young adults in the marriageable ages are no longer in these statistics as Italian nationals.

FIGURE 2A: TRENDS IN TOP 5 NATIONALITIES OF EUROPEAN BI-NATIONAL INTERMARRIAGES WITH A NATIVE PARTNER IN SPAIN 1990-2008 (VITAL STATISTICS)

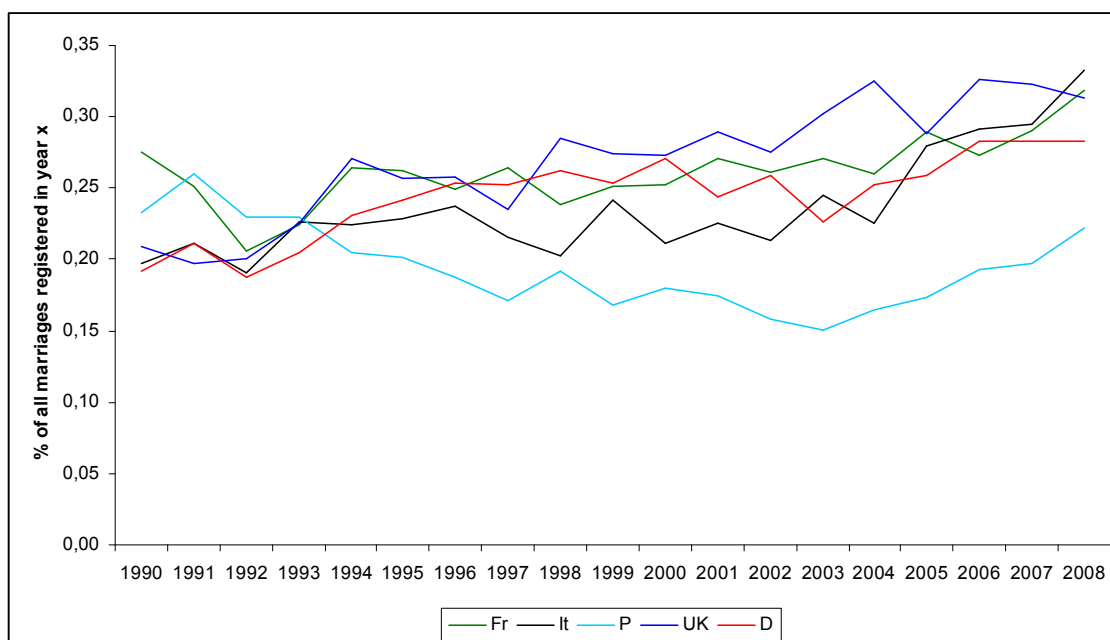
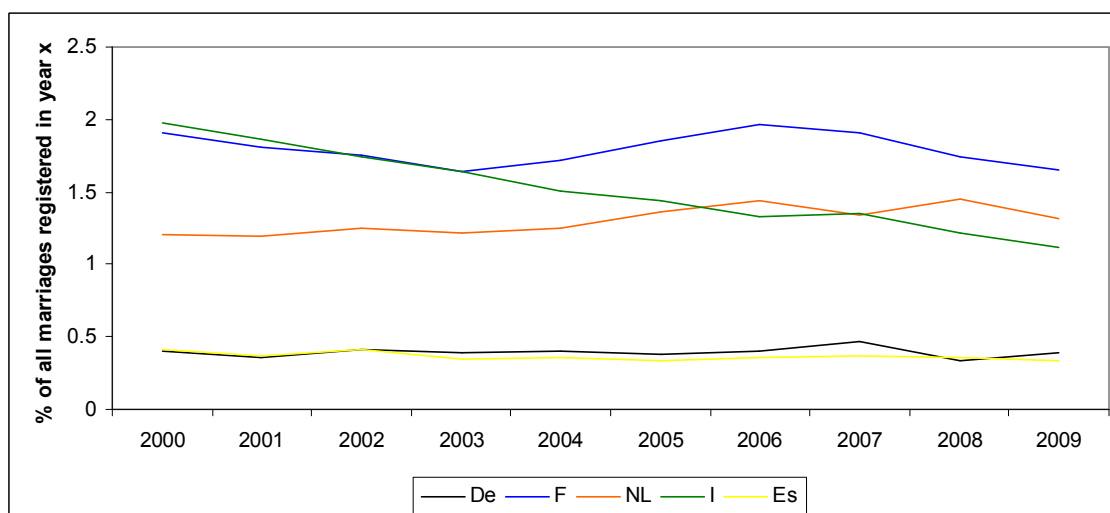


FIGURE 2B: TRENDS IN TOP 5 NATIONALITIES OF EUROPEAN BI-NATIONAL INTERMARRIAGES WITH A NATIVE PARTNER IN BELGIUM 2000-2009 (VITAL STATISTICS)



Source: Spanish Statistical Institute, Statistics Belgium

5.3 Settlement patterns: a geographical perspective

In order to get a better insight in to what extend factors of proximity and opportunity are important for bi-national European marriages we study the geographical dispersion of these couples. One should bear in mind that we include all intermarried national-EU12 couples in the maps presented in this section based on the census data in 2001. These are

the latest available data that allow for this type of comparison between countries. Given the relative stability of intermarriage we expect these data still telling about the geographical settlement patterns of the couples.

In the Spanish case the largest border is the sea and Portugal and France are the two only neighbouring countries. Their geographical proximity can create opportunities for international partners to meet and bi-national marriages to develop. French and Portuguese partners are nevertheless not the most common partners in recent EU12-native marriages (see Table 3). They represent less than a third of these marriages registered between 2005 and 2008, and only 0.49% of all new marriages registered in the same period refer to a French or Portuguese marrying a Spanish partner. Despite the closeness to Portugal and France this is not reflected so much in the intermarriage figures and the border effect thus seems to be relatively small.

This is demonstrated in Figures 3a-b which are based on the census 2001 data. The Spanish map in this figure depicts the geographical distribution of married EU12 and native couples over the 52 provinces of the country. It is based on census data (2001) and therefore not restricted to recent marriages, but encompasses all married couples in the population of Spain. The colors on the map portray the most prominent nationality combination in the married population of each province and the intensity of the colors portrays its density (i.e. its share in the total population of married couples, not only bi-national). The map demonstrates how Spanish-Portuguese couples are indeed formed predominantly at the border with Portugal, especially in the provinces of Pontevedra and Orense. Their density, even in these provinces, is nevertheless relatively low (and still declining – see figure 2a). For France the border effect is not as clear. The map further illustrates the effect of tourism-related migration for the formation of bi-national marriages in Spain. We can see how Spanish-German marriages are most popular in the touristic regions of the Andalusian coast and the Canary Islands. The Spanish-Italian couples are not yet predominant in almost any of the provinces in 2001, even though they have now become the most popular combination in the European bi-national marriages in Spain (see earlier).

In Belgium, a country much smaller than Spain, the border effect is much clearer. Here almost two thirds of the newly registered EU12-native marriages (2005-2009) include a partner with nationality from a neighboring country - France, Luxembourg, Germany or the Netherlands. More than half are French or Dutch. The bonds between France and the Netherlands on the one hand and Belgium on the other are strong. These two neighboring countries share the largest border with Belgium and their nationals speak the same languages French as in Wallonia and Dutch as in Flanders.

FIGURE 3A: GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE MOST FREQUENT NATIONALITIES IN EUROPEAN BINATIONAL MARRIAGES WITH A NATIVE PARTNER IN SPAIN (CENSUS2001)

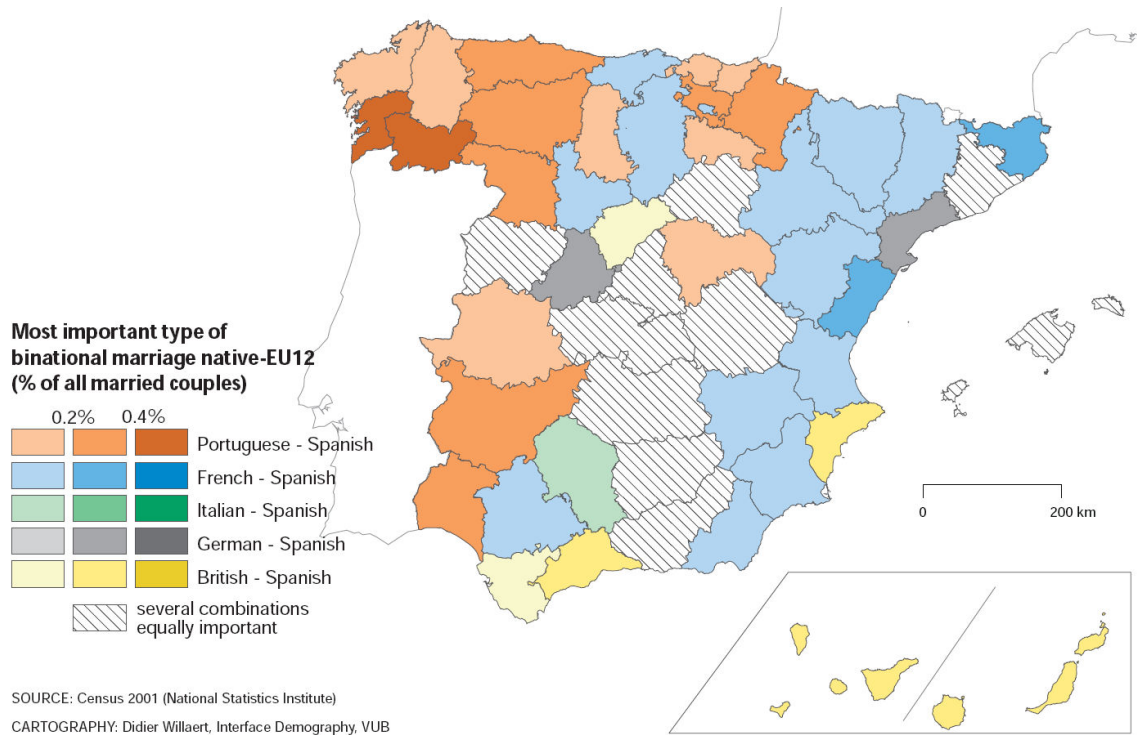
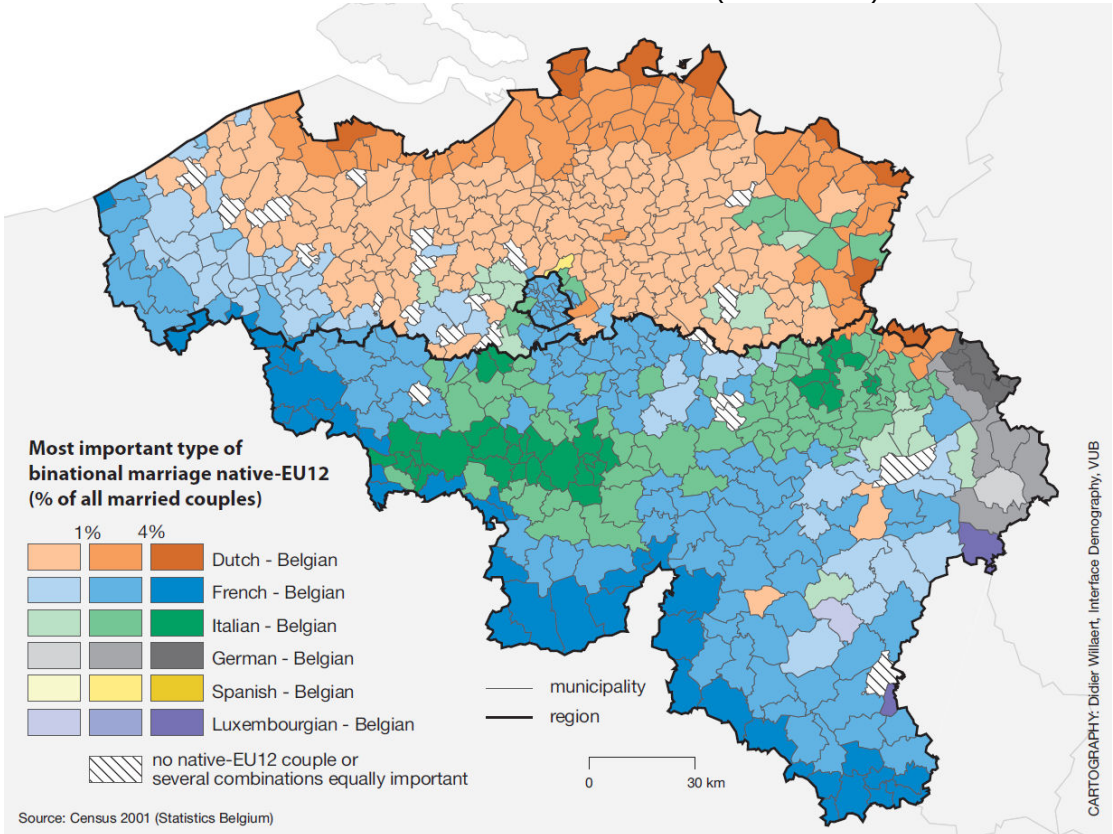


FIGURE 3B: GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE MOST FREQUENT NATIONALITIES IN EUROPEAN BINATIONAL MARRIAGES WITH A NATIVE PARTNER IN BELGIUM (CENSUS2001)



On the Belgian map (Figure 3b) we see clear impacts of language for the development and settlement patterns of bi-national marriages even though the Belgium data are only available at the commune level. The line through the middle of the map separates the Dutch-speaking northern part of Belgium (Flanders) from the French-speaking southern part (Wallonia). Apart from some communes at the close border with France and the Netherlands and two communes in the touristic Walloon area of the Ardennes, the Belgian-Dutch couples and the Belgian-French couples are clearly concentrated at opposite sides of the language border. Although Brussels belongs to both the Flemish and Walloon language community, the Belgian capital is largely French speaking, which is reflected in the dominance of Belgian-French couples among bi-national couples living in Brussels.

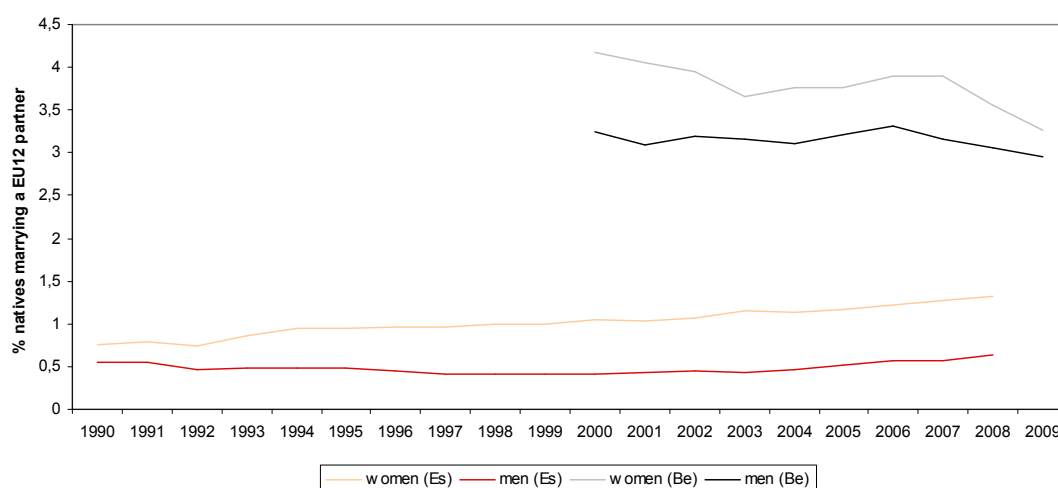
Although less known, Belgium's third official language is German. Nevertheless the German language community in Belgium is much smaller than the other two and mainly situated at the border with Germany. Belgian-German couples are the most frequent combination of all (European) bi-national marriages in this small language community. The relative small border effect at the border between Wallonia and Luxembourg is furthermore apparent, being aware that French is one of the three official languages in Luxembourg taught at school from a very young age. The important group of Belgian-Italian couples is very clearly present on the Belgian map. This group is still very prominent in the region of the former coalfields in the Walloon provinces of Hainaut (Bergen, La Louvière, Charleroi), Namur and Liège (Andenne, Seraing, Herf) and in the Flemish province of Limburg (Beringen, Maasmechelen, Houthalen-Helchteren, Genk, Heusden-Zolder).

5.4 Characteristics of nationals marrying a EU partner

Finally, we consider some of the personal characteristics of the partners in these bi-national European marriages, especially of the native partners. Who are the natives marrying a EU12 partner? We study their partner choice by gender and age and look for possible changes in their preferences over time.

Native women seem to be more likely to marry a EU12 partner than native men, in Spain as well as in Belgium, and the small changes found over time in the share of European bi-national marriages (see 5.1) seem to be particularly related to the partner choice of native women (Figure 4). In Spain this means that preferences for a EU12 partner are slightly diverging between men and women, while in Belgium they are slightly converging.

FIGURE 4: TRENDS IN EU12 PARTNER CHOICE FOR NATIVES IN SPAIN AND BELGIUM BY GENDER, 1990-2009 (VITAL STATISTICS)



Source: Spanish Statistical Institute, Statistics Belgium, Statistics Netherlands

So while for Spanish women there is a small increase in marriages with a EU12 partner, this is not the case for Spanish men. There has however been a significant increase in Spanish men marrying a partner from a foreign nationality other than EU12. This has led to the current situation where almost one out of ten Spanish men marries a partner from outside EU12 (2008 - Table 4). The choice for a non-EU12 partner is especially popular for very young men (13% of men younger than 25) and men in older age categories (17% of men older than 35). Note that these marriages also include higher order marriages and are not confined to first marriages. In contrast, only 0.6% of Spanish men and 1% of Spanish women in 2008 married a EU12 partner. The age at marriage of natives marrying a EU partner is on the average somewhat higher than for those marrying a native partner.

In 2000 the probability for Belgian women to marry a EU12 partner was still higher than for Belgian men, but in 2008 partner preferences of men and women have become quite similar: about 3% of the natives marry a EU12 partner and 6% a partner of another nationality (Figure 4). Comparing Belgium and Spain, we can say that Belgian natives marry a EU12 partner more often than Spanish natives and Spanish men marry a non-EU12 partner more often than Spanish and Belgian women and even Belgian men. Also in Belgium we find that native men marrying non-EU12 partners are older than those marrying partners from the EU or Belgium. Nevertheless, the age difference between European bi-national and native marriages in Belgium is not that outspoken as in Spain.

TABLE 4: PARTNER CHOICE OF NATIVE PARTNERS MARRIED IN SPAIN AND BELGIUM IN 2008 ACCORDING TO GENDER AND AGE (VITAL STATISTICS)

Partner choice in 2008	N	Native partner	EU12 partner	Other
		%	%	%
Natives in Spain		91.8	1.0	6.3
Women		93.3	1.3	5.3
<25	17,641	86.6	0.5	12.9
25-34	115,697	95.3	1.3	3.4
35+	35,595	90.4	1.9	7.7
Mean age at marriage		31.1	33.2	31.1
Men		90.4	0.6	9.0
<25	6,882	86.4	0.3	13.3
25-34	112,462	94.3	0.5	5.2
35+	55,157	81.9	1.0	17.1
Mean age at marriage		33.2	36.8	38.6
		90.4	3.3	6.2
Natives in Belgium				
Women		90.0	3.6	6.4
<25	7,962	85.9	2.9	11.2
25-34	18,761	91.7	3.2	5.0
35+	12,901	90.1	4.5	5.4
Mean age at marriage		33.2	34.8	30.6
Men		90.9	3.1	6.1
<25	3,330	91.1	3.1	5.8
25-34	19,151	93.0	2.9	4.1
35+	16,793	88.4	3.2	8.4
Mean age at marriage		36.1	36.6	39.4

Source: Spanish Statistical Institute, Statistics Belgium, Statistics Netherlands

6. Preliminary conclusions

This paper is a first attempt in exploring the patterns of what we have called bi-national European marriages (marriages between two European of different nationality in Europe). Using mainly information of marriage records we have been able to assess a common pattern in the three countries analyzed (Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain) and some relevant differences.

First, no evidence of important increase in the share of bi-national European marriages has been found in any of the countries. This finding is somewhat unexpected. We had argued that from the increasing mobility and interconnectivity within Europe could result an increase of the marital interaction. Nevertheless we should consider that maybe this context is not applicable to the same extent to all groups in the population because it projects the picture of the highly skilled worker or student, taking advantage of the social-political measures given by the EU, on the average European citizen. Moreover, the traditional labour migration from South-European countries has come to a halt and the recent migration from East to West is still restricted to temporary stays (Favell 2008: 25). In Belgium, we have seen how many of the second and all third generation South-Europeans, descendents of traditional labour migration, are born with a Belgian nationality, and how their marriages with Belgian natives are no longer considered bi-national European marriages, unlike those of their parents, explaining the decline in this type of marriages in Belgium. The Belgian data also reveal the importance of a common language for the formation of bi-national European marriages. The many different languages spoken in Europe might continue to form an important barrier to the development of bi-national European marriages. In Spain we have seen an increase for marriages with partners of new EU countries (mainly Romanians and Bulgarians), which are not counted when using a restricted definition of European spouses.

Second, regarding the differences between the countries, the results might suggest that the determinants of the current trends in European intermarriage are of different nature in each country. For Spain, the intensification in the last decade of the migration flows coming from new European countries (like Rumania or Bulgaria), together with those related to retirement and tourism coming from Germany and United Kingdom, seems to be mainly responsible for the increase of European intermarriages: local markets have changed because the composition by nationality of the potential spouses has diversified. For Belgium, on the contrary, migration patterns do not seem to be related to new migration patterns but rather to the geographical position of the country and the effect of the propinquity with the neighbouring countries. Here the local marriage markets have not significantly changed in composition but have shown to be clearly interrelated with the French, Dutch and German, even creating a single market defined both by the spatial and cultural proximity. Obviously, the city of Brussels is a side of this general Belgian trend.

Complete results referring to the Netherlands will soon be added but we expect the pattern to be much more similar to the Belgian than to the Spanish one (both in terms of incidence of intermarriages and of the importance of the effect of the cross-border local marriage markets).

This paper is just presenting a work still in progress. This basic description of the patterns and trends in European intermarriages using cross-sectional data has however given already a complete picture of the phenomenon. Later on we would like to go beyond marriage records and take advantage of more complete information coming from either census or specific surveys. With such kind of data we will be able to consider not only marriages but consensual unions as well; we will carry on a complete analysis of the sociodemographic characteristics of the partners (especially the role of education) and deeply explore the differences by gender; we will broaden our research to other European countries and hopefully identify the same combination of bi-national European marriages in different countries, without being restricted by the country of residence of the couple or of the country where the marriage was contracted.

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Appendix

Table 1: Non-national population, 2008
as share of total population

	Total population (in thousands)	Non-nationals		Citizens of (other) EU MS		Citizens of non-EU countries	
		in thousands	% of total population	in thousands	% of total population	in thousands	% of total population
EU-27	497,431	30,779	6.2%	11,302	2.3%	19,476	3.9%
BE	10,667	971	9.1%	659	6.2%	312	2.9%
BG	7,640	24	0.3%	4	0.0%	21	0.3%
CZ	10,381	348	3.3%	132	1.3%	216	2.1%
DK	5,476	298	5.5%	93	1.7%	205	3.7%
DE	82,218	7,255	8.8%	2,516	3.1%	4,740	5.8%
EE	1,341	229	17.1%	8	0.6%	221	16.5%
IE	4,401	554	12.6%	392	8.9%	162	3.7%
EL	11,214	906	8.1%	158	1.4%	748	6.7%
ES	45,283	5,262	11.6%	2,113	4.7%	3,149	7.0%
FR	63,753	3,674	5.8%	1,283	2.0%	2,391	3.8%
IT	59,619	3,433	5.8%	934	1.6%	2,498	4.2%
CY	789	125	15.9%	81	10.3%	44	5.6%
LV	2,271	415	18.3%	8	0.3%	408	17.9%
LT	3,366	43	1.3%	3	0.1%	40	1.2%
LU	484	206	42.6%	177	36.6%	29	6.0%
HU	10,045	177	1.8%	101	1.0%	76	0.8%
MT	410	15	3.8%	8	2.0%	7	1.8%
NL	16,405	688	4.2%	263	1.6%	425	2.6%
AT	8,319	835	10.0%	290	3.5%	545	6.6%
PL	38,116	58	0.2%	25	0.1%	33	0.1%
PT	10,618	446	4.2%	116	1.1%	331	3.1%
RO	21,529	26	0.1%	6	0.0%	20	0.1%
SI	2,026	69	3.4%	4	0.2%	65	3.2%
SK	5,401	41	0.8%	26	0.5%	15	0.3%
FI	5,300	133	2.5%	47	0.9%	86	1.6%
SE	9,183	524	5.7%	241	2.6%	284	3.1%
UK	61,176	4,021	6.6%	1,615	2.6%	2,406	3.9%
NO	4,737	266	5.6%	138	2.9%	128	2.7%
CH	7,593	1,602	21.1%	968	12.7%	634	8.3%

Note: Some data are estimated by Eurostat (see Methodological Notes); No data available for Iceland and Liechtenstein;

Source: Eurostat ([migr_st_popctz](#))

as share of EU-27 foreign population

	Non-nationals		Citizens of other EU MS		Citizens of non-EU countries	
	in thousands	% of EU	in thousands	% of EU	in thousands	% of EU
EU-27	30,779	100%	11,302	100%	19,476	100%
BE	971	3.2%	659	5.8%	312	1.6%
BG	24	0.1%	4	0.0%	21	0.1%
CZ	348	1.1%	132	1.2%	216	1.1%
DK	298	1.0%	93	0.8%	205	1.1%
DE	7,255	23.6%	2,516	22.3%	4,740	24.3%
EE	229	0.7%	8	0.1%	221	1.1%
IE	554	1.8%	392	3.5%	162	0.8%
EL	906	2.9%	158	1.4%	748	3.8%
ES	5,262	17.1%	2,113	18.7%	3,149	16.2%
FR	3,674	11.9%	1,283	11.4%	2,391	12.3%
IT	3,433	11.2%	934	8.3%	2,498	12.8%
CY	125	0.4%	81	0.7%	44	0.2%
LV	415	1.3%	8	0.1%	408	2.1%
LT	43	0.1%	3	0.0%	40	0.2%
LU	206	0.7%	177	1.6%	29	0.1%
HU	177	0.6%	101	0.9%	76	0.4%
MT	15	0.1%	8	0.1%	7	0.0%
NL	688	2.2%	263	2.3%	425	2.2%
AT	835	2.7%	290	2.6%	545	2.8%
PL	58	0.2%	25	0.2%	33	0.2%
PT	446	1.5%	116	1.0%	331	1.7%
RO	26	0.1%	6	0.1%	20	0.1%
SI	69	0.2%	4	0.0%	65	0.3%
SK	41	0.1%	26	0.2%	15	0.1%
FI	133	0.4%	47	0.4%	86	0.4%
SE	524	1.7%	241	2.1%	284	1.5%
UK	4,021	13.1%	1,615	14.3%	2,406	12.4%

Source: Vasileva 2009