



Albania – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 13 November 2012

Information on Inter-religious marriages in Albania. Are they socially acceptable?

An article published in East European Quarterly, in a section titled “Exogamous Marriage and Religious Tolerance” refers to the tradition of intermarriage in Albania as follows:

“Religious exogamy was also observed among Albanians. The clergy of Albania's three main religions-Christianity in its two forms, Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, and Islam-discouraged believers, especially young girls, to intermarry. However, the cultural regulations of the Albanian canons, which were in force in northern Albania and observed among Muslims and Christians alike, allowed intermarriage between believers of different religions.” (East European Quarterly (June 2003) *Albanians' First Post-Communist Decade. Values in Transition: Traditional or Liberal*, p.238)

This section of the article also states:

“During communism, the annual statistics of Albania do not reflect the religious denominations of the spouses. However, during the 20th century and especially after World War II, the number of mixed marriages increased, especially in the newly established socialist cities, or in the big industrial centers, where religiously mixed populations lived. During the period 1950-1968, in the city of Shkoder, northern Albania, the center of Albanian Catholicism, out of 8,695 marriages, 132, or 1.6%, were mixed marriages. During the same time period, in the city of Gjirokastra, southern Albania, out of 2,814 marriages, 120, or 4.3%, were mixed marriages. Between 1960 and 1969, out of 1,060 marriages contracted among workers of the textile industrial complex in the Albanian capital, Tiranë, 145, or 15.5%, were mixed marriages. According to statistics, the major type of mixed marriages that were contracted was between Muslim men and Eastern Orthodox women.” (ibid, p.239)

An Australian government – Refugee Review Tribunal country advice document, in response to the question “What is the attitude to mixed religious marriages in Italy and in Albania?”, states:

“Inter-religious marriages are common in Albania, including marriages between Muslims and Christians. However, no official statistics of such marriages are collected and published. Numerous sources suggest that most Albanians have tolerant or moderate attitudes towards mixed marriages.” (Australian government – Refugee Review Tribunal (29 June 2010) *Albania – ALB36850 – Muslim-Christian Intermarriage – Albanian Social Attitudes – Italian Social Attitudes – Albanian & Italian State Protection – Relocation*, p.1)

This document comments on the prevalence of religious intermarriage as follows:

“While there are no official data to support the view, the belief persists that religious intermarriage in Albania is common. In 2009 *Balkan Insight* reported that in Albania ‘intermarriage between different groups is so common as to be completely unremarkable.’ In 2006 the US Department of State described religious intermarriage in Albania as ‘extremely common’ and that Albanians ‘take pride in the tolerance and understanding that prevail among them.’ These views echoed those of the UK Home Office in 2004. A 1995 study reported that intermarriage occurs not only between Muslims and non-Muslims, but also between people of different religions and different ethnicities;” (ibid, p.1)

This document also states:

“Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT) stated in 2004 that ‘it is not plausible that as a result of marriage to a Catholic, an Albanian woman would be liable to generalised persecution. Albania is tolerant to different religions and there is very little religious fundamentalism – except possibly for some specific areas in northern Albania.’” (ibid, p.2)

An Agence France Presse report on religious tolerance in Albania states:

“Repression and international isolation under the militantly atheistic regime, which banned all forms of religious expression, has today forged an original mix of faith, superstition, folk lore and tolerance. The majority of Albania's population of almost three million is Muslim but there are strong Orthodox and Catholic minorities too. The different faiths tend to worship at the same places and people sometimes switch religions for convenience -- which would shock many in less tolerant societies.” (Agence France Presse (11 April 2011) *Albanian faiths blend together after hard times*)

A research paper published by the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, in a section titled ‘The “Myth” Of Religious Tolerance’, states:

“Unlike the rest of the Balkans, Albania is widely recognized as having a strong tradition of religious tolerance, an example of which was explicitly demonstrated in the euphoria of 1992 when, in Shkoder, the largest city in northern Albania which has historically been the centre of Albanian Catholicism, Muslims as well as Catholics had helped prepare the city’s Catholic cathedral for reopening, and five days later Catholics helped to reopen the city’s main mosque. Everywhere you go in contemporary Albania, people speak of the country’s tradition of religious tolerance and that there is complete harmony between the different faiths. This is indeed largely correct, with interfaith marriages being common. Nevertheless, some scholars argue that religious divides were minimized for nationalist purposes and that religious intolerance has always existed amongst Albanians, that Albanian culture is not one of peaceful religious co-existence, and that a tradition of tolerance has been invented and is constantly being reinforced today. Without a detailed and comprehensive study of multi-faith regions of Albania, it is difficult to assess whether this is the case or not.” (Defence Academy of the United Kingdom: Advanced Research and Assessment Group (March 2008) *Islam in Albania*, p.11)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time constraints. This response is

not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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