

70 Brides for 7 Foreigners

Russia seems to be turning into a major exporter of brides. Almost 1,500 marriages with foreigners are registered in Moscow every year. Another 10,000 women go to the international marriage agency Alliance each year, according to a poll, and 23 percent of Russian mothers would like their daughters to marry foreign citizens. Russian brides have always been prized by foreigners-ever since the time of Yaroslav the Wise [an eleventh-century grand prince of Kiev], whose daughter became the queen of France. But during Joseph Stalin's time, attitude toward marriages to foreigners was intolerant.

In the 1960s, the registration of foreign marriages was resumed, and since then the trickle of Russian brides abroad has turned into a powerful torrent.

Registration requires a passport and a guarantee from the groom's embassy that there are no obstacles to his getting married. The French embassy, for example, takes a ver serious attitude toward marriages to foreign women. It requires that the French groom obtain certification of his "legal capacity for marriage." If an embassy official registers a couple that has not passed the requisite medical tests, the official is fined. Stiff requirements are also imposed by Germany.

The Wedding Palace requires confirmation that, in the given country, a marriage to a citizen of another state is valid. After all, in a number of countries a foreign wife and her children could find that they have no property rights. In Syria, for example, marriage to a foreigner is considered invalid without special permission.

Many countries are trying to erect barriers to the marital migration from Russia. For example, one Moscow woman tried for nine months to get permission to go to the United States, where her fiance was waiting for her.

Another couple wanted to get registered in Canada. The fiance was called to the Canadian embassy for an interview, but an entry visa was never granted. "Prove that this isn't a fictitious marriage," they said.