

Same-Sex Couples Wed in Germany as Marriage Law Takes Effect



Bodo Mende, center right, and Karl Kreile, center left, took their marriage vows in Berlin on Sunday. Credit Odd Andersen/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

BERLIN — Cheers rang out in the City Hall of Berlin's Schöneberg district on Sunday as two men, who met 38 years ago, when the German capital was a divided city, became the country's first same-sex couple to legally marry.

The couple, Bodo Mende, 60, and Karl Kreile, 59, were wed in a civil ceremony, surrounded by a crush of photographers and television cameras eager to capture the historic moment.

Not even the crying of a child among the relatives and friends who attended the event interrupted their joy as the couple exchanged a long kiss after they were pronounced husband and husband.



Members of the Green Party celebrated in June with confetti after a vote on same-sex marriage in Germany's lower house of Parliament. CreditTobias Schwarz/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

"This is an emotional moment with great symbolism," Mr. Kreile told reporters before the event. "The transition to the term 'marriage' shows that the German state recognizes us as real equals."

In June, Germany became the 15th European country to grant same-sex couples the right to marry, after a swift vote in Parliament that followed a brief but emotional debate. A previous German law had allowed civil unions between same-sex couples since 2001, but those unions did not offer couples the same legal rights and were considered by many to be a second-class form of marriage.

Across the country, city halls that are normally closed on the weekend opened their doors to allow marriages on the first day the law took effect. Dozens of couples were expected to exchange vows in Berlin, as well as in Cologne, Hamburg, Hanover and Kiel on Sunday and the days beyond.

Gordon Holland, a registrar in Schöneberg, said, "We're making a single exception to fire a symbolic starter pistol because same-sex marriages are possible from today," according to The Associated Press.



Same-sex couples getting married at the Town Hall in Hamburg, Germany. Credit Fabian Bimmer/Reuters

Mr. Holland said it was appropriate for the district to hold the first same-sex wedding in the country because it had long been a center of gay life in the German capital.



Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/01/world/europe/gay-marriage-germany.html>

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