By gathering 39 local scholars, experts, and civil society activists specialized in racism and human rights, the fourth edition of the European Islamophobia Report addresses a still timely and politically important issue. All 34 country reports included in this book follow a unique structure that is convenient, first, for comparing country reports and, second, for selected readings on a particular topic such as politics, employment, or education with regards to Islamophobia across Europe.

The present report investigates in detail the underlying dynamics that directly or indirectly support the rise of anti-Muslim racism in Europe. This extends from Islamophobic statements spread in national media to laws and policies that restrain the fundamental rights of European Muslim citizens. As a result, the European Islamophobia Report 2018 discusses the impact of anti-Muslim discourse on human rights, multiculturalism, and the state of law in Europe.

This fourth edition of our report highlights how European societies are challenged by the rise of violent far-right groups that do not only preach hatred of Muslims but also participate in the organization of bloody terror attacks. The rise of far-right terrorist groups such as AFO (Action of Operational Forces) in France or the network Hannibal in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland confirms EUROPOL’s alarming surveys on the growing danger of right-wing terrorism.

This year, SETA worked in cooperation with the Leopold Weiss Institute, an Austrian NGO based in Vienna dedicated to the research of Muslims in Europe. In addition, the European Union has funded the European Islamophobia Report 2018 through the program “Civil Society Dialogue Between EU and Turkey (CSD-V)”.

About SETA
Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA) is a non-profit research institute based in Turkey dedicated to innovative studies on national, regional and international issues. SETA is the leading think tank in Turkey and has offices in Ankara, Istanbul, Washington D.C. and Cairo. The objective of SETA is to produce up-to-date and accurate knowledge and analyses in the fields of politics, economy, and society, and inform policy makers and the public on changing political, economic, social, and cultural conditions. Through research reports, publications, brainstorming sessions, conferences and policy recommendations, SETA seeks to guide leaders in government, civil society, and business, and contributes to informed decision making mechanisms.
EUROPEAN
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REPORT
2018

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ (Eds)

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Disclaimer: Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the European Islamophobia Report are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union and Ministry of Foreign Affairs-Directororate for EU Affairs.

Executive Summary

Islam is a historical and traditional religion in Belarus; the history of Islam in Belarus covers more than 600 years. The total number of Muslims is a little more than 30,000, accounting for 0.3% of the population. Belarusian Tatars, the majority of Muslims, profess Sunni Islam. Most Muslim communities and historic mosques are located in the Grodno region (Western region of Belarus). Tourist and pilgrim tours of historical Muslim places are available in Belarus.

Belarusian society is quite tolerant; Muslim culture is part of Belarusian culture and history. Open anti-Muslim hate speech is not widespread, but structural anti-Muslim racism exists as we see with employers creating obstacles to the employment of certain Muslim women in the public sector.

According to governmental sociological polls, about 25% of respondents consider “Islam, including Wahhabism, as a harmful, destructive phenomenon.” The negative image of Muslim migrants in the media is supported by Islamophobic commentaries. There is a discriminatory rule that obliges Muslim women to be photographed for a passport without a headscarf.

The anti-discrimination Law on Equality, which the National Human Rights Institution established in accordance with the Paris Principles, is absent in Belarus. The absence of this most important legislative framework and law enforcement practice actually opens the door to the further expansion of Islamophobia.
Рэзюме

Іслам з’яўляецца гістарычнай і традыцыйнай рэлігіяй у Беларусі, гісторыя ісламу ў Беларусі ахоплівае больш за 600 гадоў. Агульная колькасць мусульманаў- трохі больш, чым 30000 чалавек, што складае 0,3% насельніцтва. Большаясць мусульманаў складае супольнасць беларускіх татар, якія прытрымліваюць ісламу суніцкага толку. Большаясць мусульманскіх абшчын і гістарычных мячэці размешчаны ў Гродзенскай вобласці (заходні рэгіён Беларусі). Турыстычныя і паломніцкія туры па гістарычных мусульманскіх мясцінах вельмі папулярныя ў Беларусі.

Беларускае грамадства цалкам талератнае; мусульманская культура з’яўляецца часткай беларускай культуры і гісторыі. Рэдкія антыісламскія выпадкі стрымліваюць грамадзянскай культурай. Аднак ісламафобія працягваецца ў аснове для працаўладкавання некаторых мусульманскіх жанчын у грамадскім сектары.

Па дадзеных сацыялагічных апытанняў, каля 25% рэспандэнтаў лічаць, «іслам, у тым ліку ваћаабізм, шкоднымі, дэструктыўнымі з’явамі». Негатыўны вобраз мігрантаў-мусульман у сродках масавай інфармацый падтрымліваецца ісламафобнымі каментарамі. Існуе дыскрымінацыйнае правіла, якое абвясцівае мусульмананак фатаграфавацца на пашпарт без хусткі.

Закон аб барацьбе з дыскрымінацыйтай («Аб роўнасці»), Нацыянальны інстытут па законах чалавека, які адпавядае Паўднёвым прынцыпам, адсутнічае ў Беларусі. Адсутнасць самай важнай заканадаўчай базы і права-прымацыйнае практыкі адкрывае дзверы для пашырэння ісламафобіі.
Country Profile

**Country:** Republic of Belarus  
**Type of Regime:** Authoritarian regime with elements of democracy  
**Form of Government:** Presidential System  
**Last Elections:** 2015 Presidential Election (Alexander Lukashenko on 83.49% of the votes)  
**Total Population:** 9.5 million (in 2019)  
**Major Languages:** Belarusian and Russian  
**Official Religion:** The constitution (1996) defines the relationship between the state and the religious organizations (Article 16). Islam is recognized as a religion next to the dominant Catholic Church, the Evangelic-Lutheran Church, and the Jewish community (Law on the Freedom of Worship and the Religious Organizations 2002).

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** N/A  
**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** In 2018, 4 racist incidents (2 attacks on Roma, 2 hate speech: 1 against Russians, 1 against Belarusians) were reported to the police.  
**Major Religions (% of Population):** Christianity (circa 70%), Islam (0.3%), Judaism (0.2%), No religion (8%)  
**Muslim Population (% of Population):** Official data is not available. According to the 2009 Census, the approximate population of all ethnic groups that are traditionally Muslim, amounted to less than 30,000 (0.3% of population).  
**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** Muslim Religious Association in the Republic of Belarus, Republican Religious Association “Spiritual Administration of Muslims in the Republic of Belarus.”  
**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** Belarusian Helsinki Committee; Advisory center on contemporary international practices and their implementation in law “Human Constanta”; FoRB (Freedom of Religion and Belief ) Initiative; Civil Initiative “Journalists for Tolerance”; IPA “Center for the Study of Contemporary Religiosity”; Center of Equal Rights Expertise (Lithuania).  
**Far-Right Parties:** N/A  
**Far-Right Movements:** Illegal neo-Nazi groups  
**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** N/A  
**Limitations to Islamic Practices**  
- **Hijab Ban:** Muslim women are required to be photographed for passports without a headscarf (Regulation of Ministry of the Interior No. 200, 28 June, 2010)  
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** No  
- **Minaret Ban:** No  
- **Circumcision Ban:** No  
- **Burka Ban:** No  
- **Prayer Ban:** No (depends on employers)
Introduction
Islam is a historical and traditional religion in Belarus; the history of Islam in Belarus covers more than 600 years. The total number of Muslims amount to about 30,000 people, accounting for 0.3% of the population. The majority of Muslims in the country are Belarusian Tatars that profess Sunni Islam. There are 24 Muslim Sunni communities in Belarus, which are united by 2 Muslim associations, 8 mosques, and 2 prayer houses. The main mosque is located in Minsk; its official opening took place on 11 November, 2016.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Employment
Women in Muslim headscarves who work in various places are very visible, especially in Minsk. Five interviews recorded the absence of Islamophobia among employers, as well as among clients, but they said they feel the close attention of clients. Another five young women stated that they felt apprehension on the part of employers, yet they were not harassed. In the end, they decided against working in public spaces and preferred remote work (for example, in call centers). Non-Muslim employers do not support the idea of creating places for prayer, but if the employee wants to perform the daily ritual Muslim prayers, employers do not interfere. There are cases when employers provide short-term leave for Muslim employees for the period of religious holidays (for example for the kurban bayram).

Education
The Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus recommends that schoolchildren attend school in “business style” attire (see “Recommended School Uniform Collection.”) Muslim clothes and headscarves for girls are not allowed in school.

Loose business style is welcomed in universities; Muslim women have the opportunity to wear traditional headscarves.

Study programs have secular content, and information about the history of Islam in Belarus is included in the educational process. For example, the elective curriculum “The History of Religions and Atheism” includes a section entitled “Islam - World Religion” The following sections are included in the latter: "Preaching Mohammed and the rise of Islam in Arabia; Hijra: The formation of the Muslim Ummah; Four of the first righteous caliphs; Arab Caliphate and the spread of Islam; Fundamentals of the teachings of Islam; Mecca and Kaaba; The Koran - The

1. Ten interviews were recorded for this report, Minsk, December 2018. The five young women work respectively in a café, laundry, library, children’s clothing store, and bank.
Scripture of Muslims and the Sunnah - The Sacred Tradition of Islam; Five “Pillars of Faith”: The confession of shahad, namaz, zakat, saum, hajj; Jihad and its different perceptions; Islamic morality; Sharia; Holidays and posts; Sunnism and Shiism, their features; Sufism; Islam in the modern world; Wahhabism; The history of the Muslim religion in Belarus; Modern Muslim community in Belarus.”

Politics

The political situation for Muslims in Belarus is favourable. Belarus has friendly relations with the Muslim countries of the world; the Muslim communities of Belarus are drivers in contacts with Muslim countries. During a visit in Uzbekistan, President Lukashenko said, “If we have an election, Muslims would vote 120% for me…” portraying himself as a representative of his Muslim population.

The President of the Republic of Turkey, Erdogan, supported the construction of the Cathedral Mosque in Minsk. Muslim leaders have the opportunity of public presentations, while Mufti Abu Bekir Shabanovich was awarded the state prize “For Spiritual Revival” (2018) for his contribution to the preservation and development of the Muslim heritage in Belarus.

The Tatar Muslims’ capital in Belarus is Ivie, where the culture is a reflection of multi-religious life of Belarus. An unusual Monument of four faiths was placed in the center of Ivie: four white stela with arches. In one there is the image of Jesus Christ and an icon of the Holy Virgin. At the top, the following words are found, “I am the way and the truth, and the life.” On the other, the image of Pope John Paul II calling to “Open the doors to Christ!” The third presents symbols of Islam and the Koran, and the fourth stele - a decorated candlestick –the Menorah (symbol the state of Israel), and the following words in Russian and Hebrew, “Peace be with you!” In the middle of this monumental group is the Hill of stones in the wheel, which symbolize the unity of man and nature, communication between religions, and mutual tolerance.

The heritage of Muslims and culture is subject of attention of the authorities, especially often this attention is monitored in the international sphere. On 27 March, 2015, in the course of a visit to New York, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus Valentin Rybakov held a presentation of the book Belarus and the Muslim World by Belarusian historian Vladimir Likhodedov at the UN headquarters. The book was presented at the specially convened meeting of the heads of diplomatic missions to the United Nations of the member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).
According to government sociological polls about 25% of respondents consider “Islam, including Wahhabism, as a harmful, destructive phenomenon.” The state sociological agency believes that the trend towards a negative perception of Muslims has been on the rise since 2015; the terrorist activities of DAESH are believed to be behind this negative perception.6

**Internet&Media**

Two images of Muslims are promoted in the Belarusian Internet media:7 the positive image is that of “Belarusian Tatars Muslims,” who are presented as part of the Belarusian people and traditional culture. The second group consists of the following (negative) images:

- “Muslim migrants”: “Let any niggers work in the Chernobyl zone [impact area of the Chernobyl nuclear power station] for a plate of soup. They dream of a lifetime to receive benefits in the country of white people and to do nothing.”8
- Muslim women: “Wearing the belt of Shahid, the girl who blew up a dozen infidels automatically becomes the bride of Allah”; “Belarusian women who converted to Islam are traitors of their ancestors and faith.”9

**Justice System**

In the Constitution of Belarus (1994) it is stated that no religion is privileged in the country and that religious discrimination is not allowed. Amendments were introduced with the text of the constitution of 1996: “Relationships of the state and the religious organizations are adjusted by the law in view of their influence on formation of spiritual, cultural and state traditions of Belorussian people” (Article 16). The Law about Freedom of Worship and Religious Organizations (2002) has placed the constitutional thesis in the preamble: “The Orthodox Church plays a decisive role in the historical development and progress of spiritual, cultural and state traditions of the Belarusian people; spiritual, cultural and historical role of the Catholic Church on the territory of Belarus is recognized, too; the inseparability from the general history of the people of Belarus and the Evangelic-Lutheran Church, Judaism, and Islam are also recognized.”

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National Legislation to Prevent Discrimination

Despite the recommendations adopted by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), Belarus has failed to include the definition of racial discrimination complying with Article 1 of The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination into the national legislation. This impedes amending the criminal and administrative legislation in order to criminalize all forms of racial discrimination, including direct and indirect discrimination.

Belarus lacks effective legal mechanisms to ensure the equality and protection against discrimination. The Belarusian legislation includes only general provisions on principles of equality and non-discrimination, which fail to provide for effective implementation measures. These provisions cannot substitute a comprehensive anti-discrimination law. It will be very difficult to implement the principles of equality and non-discrimination in Belarus without the adoption of the specific legislation.

Although Article 14 of the Labor Code was amended to expand the list of prohibited grounds for discrimination, the existing legislation still lacks a general definition of indirect discrimination and definitions of the important terms, widely recognized in the other European jurisdictions in the context of the right to equality, such as harassment, reasonable accommodation, or victimization. The legislation fails to distinguish between direct and indirect discrimination and, consequently, to differentiate between responsibility for different types of discrimination.

There is no practice of directly applying provisions of the international treaties in the Belarusian courts, although the national legislation provides for this possibility.

Belarus has no anti-discrimination case law. In rare cases, the problem of discrimination has been brought to court (the cases did not fall within the scope of the Convention), but no information is available about any cases where discrimination was found to be present.

There are no special rules to regulate the consideration of cases on discrimination in courts, similar to those that have been developed in recent years in other European jurisdictions (e.g., placing the burden of proof on the defendant). As a rule, the burden of proof lies equally with all the trial parties. According to Article 179 of the Civil Procedure Code, every party proves the facts on which the basis for its claim or objections relies. In practice, this results in the need for the victim of discrimination to justify their claim and to provide evidence of the violation of the right to equality. In one of the judgements, the judge expressly stated that the plaintiff had failed to prove the defendant’s discriminatory behaviour during the employment interview.

Victims of discrimination have no possibilities to contact the authorities specializing in the protection of human rights or in the protection against discrimination. There is no access to special and simplified procedures for the resolution of conflicts related to discrimination. Furthermore, Belarus has yet to establish the Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman, who could in practice verify allegations of discrimination and systematically collect information about the implementation of the principles of equality and non-discrimination in Belarus.

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in the concluding observations on the 2013 report on Belarus expressed its concern about the extremely broad interpretation of the Law on Extremism. In this regard, we should note that Belarus has taken no measures to clarify the provisions of the Law on Extremism, including the definition of extremism, which is still interpreted very broadly, despite the new wording. In addition, Law No. 358-3 of 20 April, 2016 added Article 361-1 to the Criminal Code of Belarus, which criminalizes creating or leading an extremist group. The article provides for seven years of imprisonment as the maximal punishment for these actions. The absence of clear criteria and the broad definition of extremism make it possible to apply this article arbitrarily, which raises concerns.

The Belarusian legislation includes a number of provisions providing for liability for actions aiming to incite hatred or discord, including on ethnic grounds. Thus, Article 130, Section 1, of the Criminal Code of Belarus provides for liability for deliberate actions aiming to incite racial, national, religious, or other social hatred or discord on racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic, or other social grounds. Such actions are punishable by a fine or by arrest for up to six months or by restraint for up to five years, or by imprisonment for the same period.

Nevertheless, this article is not an effective deterrent to actions aiming to incite hatred or discord, including on ethnic grounds. The legislation fails to specify the actions aiming to incite hatred or to humiliate, provided for in Article 130 of the Criminal Code. To bring a person to justice under Article 130 of the Criminal Code, one needs to prove the offender’s direct intent to incite racial, ethnic religious enmity or discord, or to humiliate ethnic honour and dignity, which is extremely difficult in practice.

The national legislation does not provide for direct administrative responsibility for the use of elements of hate speech, including racist expressions or actions that offend a person on racial grounds. Such actions may be punished under Article 9.3 of the Administrative Code (Insult, i.e. deliberate humiliation of a person’s honour and dignity, expressed in indecent form). However, an offender may only be prosecuted under this article if they insulted the victim in an indecent manner. In addition, the case can only be initiated at the request of the victim.

In accordance with the legislation of Belarus, a citizen of Belarus who wants to obtain or replace their passport must provide photo of face without a headdress, this
regulation does not provide for any exceptions to religious beliefs. This rule applies to all citizens of Belarus, but it disproportionately affects Muslim women who cannot appear in public without the traditional Muslim woman’s headscarf in line with their religious beliefs. Therefore, Muslim women are forced to take off their headscarves in order to take these photos, which causes emotional distress. This practice also makes it difficult to identify Muslim women who have been photographed without the headscarf for their passport but who wear it in their daily life. During 2018, the Republic Human Rights Public Association “Belarusian Helsinki Committee” sent its proposals to the Ministry of the Interior to repeal the discriminatory rule (Regulation #200, dated 28 June, 2010). A reply was received from the Ministry of the Interior that the rules for photographing may be changed in the future, since biometric passports are being developed.

**Observed Civil Society and Political Assessment and Initiatives**

The situation of migrants from Chechnya (Russian Federation) in Brest was an important case. The majority of migrants profess Salafism and are persecuted in Russia. Chechen migrants were going to seek asylum in Poland, but were forced to wait for a border pass on the territory of Belarus. Some local residents helped Muslim migrants, many NGOs provided humanitarian assistance, but there were frequent cases of Islamophobia on the part of local residents, which were expressed in negative statements, refusal to provide rental housing, etc. The human rights organization “Human Constanta” organized a humanitarian mission to Brest and numerous educational events in order to change the negative attitude of local residents.

In 2018, the NGO coalition “For Equality” stands out for promoting the Law on Equality, and monitoring hate crimes and hate speech.

In addition, the civil initiative “Journalists for Tolerance” monitors hate speech in media.

**Conclusion and Policy Recommendations**

Belarusian society is quite tolerant; Muslim culture is part of Belarusian culture and history. Rare Islamophobic statements are held back by the culture of Belarusian cit-
izens. However, the absence of anti-discrimination legislation is the biggest problem, which actually opens the way for various forms of exclusion and hate speech.

Recommendations:
1) To develop and adopt a comprehensive anti-discrimination law, with the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders, including civil society representatives.
2) To establish a national human rights institution in accordance with the Paris Principles.
3) To conduct special training for judges, prosecutors, police officers, other legal professionals, and civil servants in order to improve their competence in identifying and investigating hate crimes and issuing judicial decisions to ensure the equality and the protection against discrimination.
4) To ensure the implementation of educational programs for journalists and the media on the promotion of the principles of equality and non-discrimination.
5) To monitor the use of hate speech in the media and to take measures each time elements of hate speech appear.
6) To amend Regulation No. 200, dated 28 June, 2010, of the Ministry of Interior, to provide for the possibility to take pictures for a passport in a headdress, unless it hides the shape of the face, for individuals who cannot appear with a bare head in public because of their religious beliefs.
7) Partnership between the state and religious organizations is necessary, especially to preserve the historical heritage, charity, and broad social programs for vulnerable groups of the population.

Chronology
- **26.01.2018**: Negative comments posted about Muslim women in the comment section of an online newspaper (tut.by); for example, “Belarusian women who converted to Islam are traitors of their ancestors and faith.”
- **26.01.2018**: Negative comments posted about Muslim women in the comment section of an online newspaper (tut.by); for example, “Wearing the belt of Shahid, the girl who blew up a dozen infidels automatically becomes the bride of Allah.”
- **23.10.2018**: Negative comments posted about Muslim migrants in the comment section of an online newspaper (tut.by); for example, “Let any niggers work in the Chernobyl zone [impact area of the Chernobyl nuclear power station] for a plate of soup. They dream of a lifetime to receive benefits in the country of white people and to do nothing.”
- **2018**: The Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus recommended that Muslim clothes and headscarves for Muslim girls should not be allowed in schools.