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Nurt SVD 50/1 (139), 204-221

2016

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Islam within the religious space in Belarus: centuries-old history and modern tendencies

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The beginning of the XXI century was marked by the creation of a globalized culture, which is common to all mankind and by the global rise of national self-consciousness and the turn to cultural and national traditions. The culture of Belarus has been closely integrated in the European culture, since the Middle Ages. The dilemma „the East – the West“ provided the foundation for the Belarus culture and has been expressed in traditional rivalry: Christian (Orthodox and Catholic) vectors. The traditional cultural dilemma „East-West“ reflects the real social and cultural situation not adequately at the present moment because various cultural and national traditions can co-exist both in West and in East regions, and, consequently, each one of different strategies of development.

Peculiarities of the social and cultural space of Belarus are: firstly, polytechnic population (there are 142 ethnic groups); secondly, poly-religiousness: the spectrum of religious tendencies and Churches, which represent them, is broad enough (there are 25 religious groups and more than 3 000 religious communities); thirdly, bilingualism of the Russian and the Belarusian languages. Century-old inhabitation of different national, religious and linguistic groups on the common territory did not mean the forming of a united ethnic conglomeration. Each social and cultural group remained true to language, customs, valuable orientations, out looking complexes, geopolitical preferences. Thus, the social and cultural space of Belarus is a field of varied conflicts. Do they become obvious or remain on the latent level – it does completely depend on state policy and civil activity.

Religiousness in Belarus is connected with a choice of a language, the historical past, with the certain way of life, with a choice of an ethnic accessory which – since the 14th century – have not coincided with citizenship.

Muslims in the Christian State

The history of the Christian State on the Belarusian territory lies far in the past, in the Middle Ages. Specific synthesis of the Slavic and the Baltic pagan cultures has been added (not superseded!) to the Christian spiritual tradition, which was not homogeneous, either. The religious policy of the first princes of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (further – GDL), as well as the geopolitical position of Belarus was characterized by building a great „bridge” which our contemporaries named „the bridge between the East and the West, the North and the South”.

Princes Mindovg, Jagailo considered the Catholic Church dominating, and Vitovt even tried to create autocephalous Orthodox Church. As a whole, the religious policy of the GDL tended to toleration and to pendulum fluctuations between the „Orthodox Russia” and the „Catholic Latin world”.

Tatars-Muslims moved to the Belarusian territory from the 14th century onwards. About 4 thousand Tatars along with their families have settled down on the territory of GDL in 1397, they were defeated by Vitovt armies and have received permit to settle down with the obligation of military service. According to some other versions Tatars have been invited to take part in a war against crusaders by Vitovt¹.

¹ И.Б. Канапацкий, *Белорусские татары: историческая судьба народа и культура*, <http://muslimby.info/> [accessed: 10.03.2011].

The Crimean Tatars, as well as The Tatars from the Volga regions migrated on the Belarusian territory. They were Muslims – Sunnites of the Hanafi madhhab. Religious freedom and the wide civil rights have been guaranteed to Tatars by Prince Vitovt. Tatars had rights for building of mosques and marriages with Christians. Tatars' nobles had the identical rights as Christians. The legal status of the Tatars was limited only to that state Christian religion had.

Again Tatar – Moslems along with those who had the origin of the GDL protected the country from enemies. Numerous military groups of the Tatars were created in the GDL. The Tatars who attacked the GDL territory in 1510, called up the Belarusian Tatars to join them for external actions, however with no success: „Neither God nor the Prophet calls to plunder, we should not be ungrateful: we have to fight against you as robbers”. True patriotism, spirituality and faith were raised as they occurred in this phrase².

Relative tolerance in the GDL promoted an increase of the Tatar-Muslims number. It reached 40 000 by the 16th century, and over 100 000 by the 17th century. About 30 mosques functioned in the GDL in the 16th century. The most ancient mosques up till now are found in the villages Nekrashuntsy near Lida (1415), and Lovchitsy near Novogrudok (1420).

It is characteristic that the beginning of the Jews movement in the GDL refers also to the 14th century. Prince Vitovt published documents proving the right of the Jews to commercial activity and craft, also guarantying religious freedom.

The experience of state construction of GDL gives a valuable material about the regulation of inter-Churches attitudes. Legal documents XIII – XVI centuries, including Statutes of GDL, based on a principle of subjecting rights, meaning a religious freedom, deportation of the persons who have made an offence in GDL territory, presence of witnesses of both sides in a court in cases of inter-Churches accusations.

Prince Gedimin provides in the „Messages” certain suggestions for construction of a fair state: „We shall establish the world which Christians yet did not know”³.

The ideas of toleration were reflected in the legislation – princely and royal Letters of 1563 and 1568, Statutes of the GDL, decisions of the Warsaw Confederation 1573, the Decree of Stefan Batory (1585)

² Ян Станкевіч, *Беларускія мусульмане і беларуская літаратура*, Вільня 1933, Менск 1991, р. 6.

³ *Послание Гедимины 26 мая 1323 г.*, [in:] *Послания Гедимины*, Вильнюс 1966, р 40-41.

etc. The Statutes of the GDL (1588) were one of the most tolerant acts in Europe of that time, the text of the Document was taken from the Warsaw Confederation (1573) which was the original manifest of religious tolerance. The ideas of religious freedom were realized in the Kingdom of Poland thanks to some Protestant nobles: They occupied 38 seats out of 73 in the Senate of the Kingdom of Poland in 1569⁴.

The first investigations of the Tatar culture refer to the 16th century. The Treatise by Mikhalon Litvin (real name – Vaclav Mikolaevich, was a diplomat and a public figure of the Kingdom of Poland) – *The Treatise about Customs of Tatars, Litovins and Moskovits* was addressed to King Sigismund August II in 1550. The Treatise contained the comparative analysis of a customs of these people, laudatory characteristics ascribed to the Tatars. M. Litvin admired an ascetic and rational life of the Tatars, their aversion of alcohol, military successes, the organization of their courts, polygamy, claiming that the Lithuanians should learn from the Tatars.

The first serious conflict in inter-Churches attitudes occurred at the beginning of the 17th century, it was provoked by the processes of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, expansion of the Vatican influence to the East. The legal status of the Orthodox Church was passed to the Greek-Catholic Church, it caused a violent reaction of the Orthodox believers who began to struggle for their own religious freedom. The period between the end of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th century was extremely difficult for non Catholics: the term „dissidents” was used in documents. The term refers to Orthodox believers, Protestants and non Christians. For example, a special agreement of the monarch of the Kingdom of Poland and also a Catholic bishop was necessary for Moslems to build a mosque. Muslims could not recruit Christians for employment under the threat of death penalty.

A temporary stabilization in inter-religious attitude came in the thirties of the 17th century during the reign of King Vladislav IV. However, in 1668, the Polish Parliament forbade people to pass from Catholicism into other religions. Jesuits developed „the project of destruction” of the Orthodox and Greek-Catholic Churches⁵.

„Dissidents have been deprived of the rights of election of ambassadors to the Parliament, Tribunals and other commissions

⁴ С.Ф. Сокол, *Политическая и правовая мысль в Белоруссии XVI – первой половины XVII в.*, Минск 1984, p. 201.

⁵ Сборник документов, уясняющих отношения латино-польской пропаганды к русской вере и народности (Из исторических материалов, помещенных в „Вестнике Западной России”), Вып. 1, Вильна 1865, p. 6-16.

(1732). The Parliament accepted the regulation (1764) about a death penalty for those who left Catholicism for other religions; the Parliament confirmed the proposal of the bishop of Krakow as the law (1766), that «those who speak in favor of non-Catholics are regarded as enemies of the State»⁶.

The constitution of 1766 allowed renovation of old mosques, and the constitution of 1775 – to build new mosques. By the end of the 18th century there were 23 mosques and 65 houses of prayer on the Belarusian-Lithuanian territory. The Trakai' region has been most densely populated by Moslems. Data about the number of Moslems living on the territory of the Kingdom of Poland at the end of the 18th century vary: Polish researchers Korzan and Sobchak say there were about 50 000, but not less than 21,5 thousand persons. However there is also a version that these data are strongly overestimated⁶.

The religious freedom under the domination of Catholicism has been declared in the *Constitutions of May 3, 1791*, however at this time the partitions of the Kingdom of Poland in fact were predetermined. The King Jan Kazimir warned about a possible occupation of the Kingdom of Poland in 1661⁷. As a result of the partitions of the Kingdom of Poland, the Belarus territory became a part of Russia, and religious situation began to be influenced by the Russian legislation.

The system of Muslim self-management in the form of the Dzhamiat – large communities whose members gathered for assemblies or congresses at regular intervals – developed during 15th-18th centuries. The Dzhamiat elected mullahs, imams, gave out certificates confirming noble privileges.

Minsk, Vilno and Grodno regions were parts of the Russian Empire between 1793 and 1795. The census of 1795 revealed that the whole number of the Tatars did not exceed 2330 persons in the Słonim and Vilno regions. The system of self-management of the Dzhamiat was abolished, and Belarusian Moslems were subordinated to the Orenburg mufti, however Moslems refused to subordinate, they recollected initial privileges which had been granted to them by the Kings of Poland. The Byelorussian Tatar-Moslems were subordinated to Taurian Muslim Religious Department in the years 1831-1891. Moslems asked the Department to approve nominees of mullahs and to obtain statements from the books of the metric. There is information

⁶ *Канфесіі на Беларусі (к. XVIII – XX ст)*, Мінск 1998, р. 145

⁷ О. Турчинович, *Обозрение истории Белоруссии с древнейших времён*, СПб 1857, р. 237.

that mullahs of Novogrudok were elected from among the nobles in the 19th century.

In the GDL territory, there were about 60 mosques and Muslim houses of prayer at the beginning of the 17th century, 23 mosques and 65 houses of prayer at the end of the 18th century. Construction and renovation of mosques stopped after incorporating the territory of the Kingdom of Poland by the Russian Empire. The Decree (of September 23rd, 1755) allowed that Muslim communities to be created only if a number of men-Moslems was not smaller than 200 persons. The Decree (of September 2nd, 1870) forbade building of mosques without the believers' estimation.

The Decree of December 13th, 1817 allowed building of mosques in settlements and according to the previously approved plan⁸. Mosques were located in settlements Mir (1809), Liakhovichy (1815), Slonim (1803-1804), Vidzy (1857), Kleck (1881), Ivie (1884) and others. Muslim communities were numerous: in Slonim – 170 persons, in Vidzy – 240 persons. Some mosques were built for money-donations of princes Radzivils, Zamoiskis and other nobles. Mosques' schedule of worship differed from the cathedral by the hours, in which the name of Allah was called usually five times daily, but Moslems did not gather in the mosques on Fridays and on holidays.

The attitude of the Russian authorities to Moslems was tolerant in the first half of the 19th century. The Decree of June 25th, 1840 allowed the noble-Moslems to own of the real estate and have Christian serf peasants. It is known that Moslems were willingly assigned to various posts because of their abstaining from alcohol, and their moral way of life. According to the population census (1897) 13.877 Moslems lived in the western provinces.

There is interesting information about Tatar-Moslems who widely used the Polish language. The Vitebsk governor-general Ver-evkin wrote in 1866: „Tatars have kept their religion and customs. Their customs were more Polish, than Russian”⁹. And it is since the 80s that the Tatars had been forbidden to use the Polish language in religious practices. The Arabic language was no more used at that time and consequently there was a necessity to translate religious books into available languages: Polish and Russian. The translation of Koran into the Polish language in two volumes was published in 1858 (J.T.Buchatski's translation). The book *Sharatul' iman. Precepts of Islam* was published in

⁸ *Канфесіі на Беларусі...*, op. cit., p. 148

⁹ *Канфесіі на Беларусі...*, op. cit., p. 149-151.

1897 in Russian in Petersburg, Russia, the Koran in the Russian translation of G. Sablukov's in 1907. Many authors of the 19th century had problems with religious education of children. Children were educated at mosques' schools at the age of 6 to 8. They were demanded to know the Arabic language and learn to read the Koran and Khamail (prayer book). The original methodical maintenance facilitating reading and understanding of the Koran, were Tedzhvids and Kitabs, containing interpretations of ceremonies, religious duties in the Polish or Byelorussian languages.

The hand-written heritage of the Byelorussian Tatar-Moslems is unique and includes 41 manuscripts together with fragments from the end of the 18th to the first half of the 20th century. The manuscripts mentioned are found in the collections of the Central Scientific Library NAS of Belarus, the National Library, and the Grodno State Museum of History of Religion. Several dozen hand-written texts are in the private possession of some Tatar families. The question of revealing them, cataloguing and creating electronic copies of them for further usage in science and its purposes is up-to-date now. Researchers of the Tatar hand-written heritage (E. Titovets, M. Tarelko, I. Synkova) think, that the Muslim culture with local Christian influence was actually reflected in the hand-written heritage. It was expressed in the contents of many books. Muslim books are written in the Polish or Byelorussian language with the usage of the Arabic letters, but Christian terminology. I. Gasprinsky in the book *Russian Moslem* (SPb 1881) wrote that Tatar-Moslems had lived in western provinces, had had a high degree of religiousness, and had wanted to teach their children about Islam¹⁰.

The illegal Academic Circle of the Polish Moslems was created in 1907, among its leaders there was Leon Mirza Krichinsky - the author of the encyclopedic book *Bibliographical notes on the Tatars' history in Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine* (Petrograd 1917).

The educational and charitable society of the Tatars was created in Vilno in 1909. The Tatar military divisions, including the First Muslim corpus on the Romanian front, operated in 1917.

The new period of Moslem history began with a victory of the Soviets: a propagation of atheism, a struggle against „religious prejudices” led to the destruction of mosques. The cathedral mosque in Minsk, constructed in 1902, was closed. According to the regulation of the Minsk Executive Committee of the Soviet of People's Deputies (July, 1949) the Muslim community in Minsk was dismissed, the

¹⁰ „Байрам”, № 1, 1991.

mosque was destroyed in the 60s. Religious activity was forbidden, but religious actions were carried out secretly. The unique Muslim community was the community in Muravshizna (Ivie), the Sunday school for children worked in Ivie, too. The quantity of believers was nearby 250 persons at the middle of the 60s.

The life of Tatar-Moslems in the Western Belarus was more interesting. Provisional number of Moslems was 6 thousand; and 19 communities worked. Poland's Congress of Muslim Dzhamiats was lead in 1925 in Vilno, the mufti office was created, autonomy of Dzhamiats was proclaimed. Religious life of Moslems was intensified: new mosques were built (in Miadel – in 1930, in Vidzy – in 1932, in Liahovichy – in 1928); religious holidays in Slonim were accompanied by dancing evenings; mizars (the Tatar cemeteries) were equipped with modern appliances; many editions were published. The short-term religious revival was stopped in September 1939 when the Western Belarus in the structure of the BSSR occurred, from this point on mass repressions of clergy and atheistic propaganda started.

According to the census of 1989, the number of Tatars in the BSSR amounted to 12 552 persons.

Islam in the Republic of Belarus: the revival of religious life

The following stage of the revival of religious life including Muslim had begun in Belarus in the 90s of the 20th century. Mosques were constructed in Slonim (1994), in Smilovichy (1996), are reconstructed in Novogrudok (1997), in Vidzy (1999), the most ancient mosque – in Lovchitsy (2001), the Muslim center was created in Ivie (1998), the Minsk cathedral mosque started getting under construction.

The Byelorussian Muslim religious associations, the public association of Tatars „Zikr ul'-Kitab” play the key role in that religious revival. The annual scientific and practical conferences at the same time, devoted to the problems of the Tatar-Moslems, have been taken place since 1993. Among the problems discussed – a conservation of a historical and cultural heritage (mosques, ancient mizars, and handwritten heritage), religious education of Muslim children. The sociological monitoring of religious life (in the middle of the 90s) shown a high degree of religiousness of Tatars-Muslims: believers of the senior age groups (from 55 years and older) read the Koran in Russian, Polish and in single instances – on Arabic languages (about 71% of Tatars), the others study the Koran together with mullahs. From Moslems of average age group (30-55 years) 28% of believers know the Koran („read itself”),

43% study the Koran together with mullahs. The sociological monitoring¹¹ has revealed the certain problems in education of the youth: only 9 from 100 have declared that read the Koran. 80% of the senior age Tatars, 80% of average age group, 60% of the Tatar youth have recognized the positive value of Islam in life. Practically all Tatars have recognized the Byelorussian language as their native language. These data testify that national-cultural originality of the Byelorussian Tatar-Moslems is kept; Islam plays the major role also.

At the end of the 90s a group of the Pakistan students distributed the Mirza Guljam Ahmad's doctrine – the religious reformer of Islam. Ahmad' pan-islamism, the accent on propagation of the doctrine among the non-religious elite of a society, non-recognition of mullahs and ulems, the thesis that Ahmad is „the promised Messiah“, some antichristian ideas – all these ideological factors have not allowed to extend the Ahmad's doctrine in Moslem groups in Belarus.

There were 23 Muslim communities at the beginning of 1997 in Belarus, 19 of them were in the Western region. The First Byelorussian congress of Muslims took place in 1994; The Muslim Religious Association of Belarus was created. 27 Muslim communities (26 of them were Sunnites) were registered by 2001. The majority of communities are in the Grodno region, it is a region of historical settlement by the Tatar-Moslems. The provisional number of Moslems-Sunnites is about 20.000 persons. One community is registered as Azerbaijanians – Shiites. The total number of Moslem-Shiites in Belarus is about 5.000 persons, besides Azerbaijanians Shiism believers there are migrants from Afghanistan and Turkey.

6 mosques operate in the particular regions of Belarus. Grand Mosque in Minsk is still under construction. About 10 priests are working there, they are citizens of Belarus. Many of them are from Turkey, Palestine. Until 2005, many priests have studied in Islamic University in Libya, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, now – in Russia and Turkey. The recent interest in Islam is growing; the number of Muslim marriages (Nikah) also increased. During the period from April 2012 till April 2015, the information about Nikah according to the „Islam.by“¹² was the following: 16 marriages of Byelorussian girls with Muslim men from Syria, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Jordan and Egypt; 17 marriages declared to convert to Islam. The average age of Byelorussian women who marry Muslims is 25 years.

¹¹ The archive of the Commissioner for Religions and Nationalities.

¹² <http://www.islam.by/> [accessed: 10.03.2011].

Many Byelorussian women and men become Muslim: the average age of women is 31 years, of men – 39 years. It is obvious that the citizens of Belarus are interested in Islam mainly in large cities (like Minsk and Gomel), which are academic centers, with a fairly high number of students from Muslim countries. General statistics on Muslim marriages among citizens of Belarus are not available.

The council of muftis (Muftiat) offers some initiatives: creation of museums of the Tatar national culture in Belarus, reconstruction of some ancient mosques (including mosques in Dovbushky) as monuments of wooden architecture, conservation of ancient Tatar cemeteries – mizars; development of special tourist routes and creation of an electronic architectural and cultural catalogue– historical monuments of Tatar – Moslems; creation of electronic resources catalogue, also of hand-written heritage; activation of research work, establishment of annual scientific conferences concerning actual problems, competitions of young scientific workers (students, post-graduate students), scientific communities as members of Muslim religious associations and the Public Association of the Tatars.

The Tatar-Moslems' capital in Belarus is Ivie, where the culture is the reflection of multi-religious life of Belarus. An unusual monument was opened in the center of Ivie: four white steles with arches. In one – the image of Our Savior and the icon of the Holy Virgin. At the top you can find the words „I am the way the truth 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 – the symbolism of Muslim and the Koran, and the fourth stele – a decorated candlestick – Minor (symbol the State of Israel), and 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 symbolizes the unity of man and nature, communication between religions and mutual tolerance.

Contemporary research of religiosity

The growth of religiousness of the Byelorussian population occurred at the end of the 90s. According to sociological investigations (1994) in Belarus there were about 33% of the people religious, and in 1998 – 47,5%. Investigations of the last two years showed that the quantity of people who are religious is barely smaller than 60%. Basing on sociological data, among believers there are about 70% – Orthodox, about 15% – Catholics and fewer than 1% – Protestants, 1,5% – persons who identify themselves as believers without any confessional

distinctions¹³. The growth of the religious organizations occurred in the East and Central regions, as well as along the Trans-European corridor (Brest-Minsk-Orsha). Nowadays, the majority are of Christian confession, less than 3% – non-Christian (Jews, Moslems, Krishnas, Bakhai). In Belarus there are more than 3 thousand legal religious organizations. In total, there are 25 religions. The largest are the following: the Belarus Orthodox Church (BOC), the Roman-Catholic Church (RCC), and the New Protestants. Judaism and Islam are also regarded as historical religions in Belarus. In Belarus the religious identity includes language and ethnic aspects: 70% Orthodox – Russian-speaking Byelorussians, Russians, Ukrainians, 90% of the Catholics are Poles and some Byelorussians. Islam and Judaism are ethnic religions which are widely spread among the Tatar and Jewish population of Belarus. The leading centers of the basic religious communities are outside of Belarus: BOC – in Moscow, RCC – in Vatican. This factor is reflected in geopolitical orientations and political values of believers.

Research of the last years shows that ethnic and religious factors are dominating over the structure of identification processes (for example: „Orthodox – Russian and Byelorussians, Ukrainians, „Poles, Byelorussians – Catholics“, „Tatars – Moslems“, „Jews“, „Old Believers – Russian“, etc.). The citizens of Belarus know that the religious phenomenon is connected with ethnic culture and traditions, that the religion carries world outlook, integrating and social and regulatory functions. Ethnic and religious self-identification of the Byelorussian citizens are the following: 77% of Belarusians, 76,7% Ukrainians, 71,6% Russians, 6,3% Poles and 41,7% representatives of other nationalities, who identify themselves as members of the Orthodox Church. Among the Catholics there are 89,1% Poles, 9,3% Ukrainians, 8,3% – other nationalities, 5,8% Byelorussians and 3,4% Russians. The religious and ethnic factors play an important role in the multicultural society.

Sociological research of the inter-religious attitudes shows, that for at least 10 years the fraction of tolerant believers had increased up to 76% (in 1998 it was only 50%), among the non-believers – 84%. Sociologists emphasize that the level of tolerance grows in Belarus due to antagonizing relations between the Christian and Islamic regions. Sympathies towards the traditional Islam widely spread in Belarus, grow among representatives of all Christian confessions. Sociologists stress that the stably high level of mutual toleration with representatives of all religious groups is growing. However, it is possible that these values of

¹³The data of monitoring of the Commissioner for Religions and Nationalities.

tolerance are shaped in a greater degree due to multicultural space of Belarus, than due to work of religious groups and their leaders.

One of very clear parameters is the interpretation of the State's role. 63,6% of the Orthodox believers declare the State support for the Orthodox Church, for the Catholics and „Christians as a whole” amounts to 48,9% and 44,4% believe that they think about it. Only 33% of Moslems, Protestants, Jews consider, that the State shows the indifferent attitude to their religious group. 10% of them speak about discrimination of their religion on the part of the State. It is necessary to notice that this opinion is subjective and is quite correlated with the „etatism” which is widely spread in the Byelorussian public opinion. Etatism (confidence in the strong state) as the dominating factor of the Soviet ideology remains the dominating concept of the modern ideological program for all the Churches in Belarus. Believers consider the State as their basic patron and the basic object for complaints about infringement of the religious freedom.

Conservation of historical and cultural values of the Tatar-Muslim culture in Belarus is a necessary condition for adequate progress of this ethnic group. Mufti Abu-Bekir Shabanovich constantly emphasizes an indispensability of education for children and the youth with values of traditional culture and inter-religious dialogue. Values of tolerant behavior and respect for Islam heritage in Belarus are necessary for bringing up at non-Moslems in Belarus. Scientific research of the Tatar-Moslem history had intensified since the 90s of the 20th century: the monography *Religions in Belarus* (Minsk 1998) by such authors as V. Novitsky, V. Grigoreva, A. Filatova etc.; historical publications of mufti Ibragim Kanapatsky; research works of the Tatar manuscripts of M. Tarelko, E. Synkova (*When Idols Have Gone*, Minsk 2010); the catalogue *Manuscripts of the Belarussian Tatars from the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 20th Century from the Collection of CSB NAS of Belarus* (Minsk 2003); the encyclopedic materials about the Tatars in Belarus were collected by such authors as J. Adamovich, I. Kanapatsky, J. Jakubovsky. The concept of the Tatar Encyclopedia was published in J. Yakubovsky's article, printed in 1992 („Bairam”, № 2, 1992). The enthusiast V. Likhodedov collected a material about historical regions of Tatar-Moslems and published the book *Belarus and the Muslim World* (Minsk 2010) in Russian, Byelorussian, Arabic and English languages. However, some insufficiency is felt of serious research of the culture of the Byelorussian Tatar-Moslems and the popular literature which would be available to the mass reader in Belarus.

Some problems

Some problems connected with the peculiarities of migration flows in Belarus:

1. No border with Russia and favorable conditions for movement of goods and labor within the Customs Union. Extensive transportation network greatly accelerates the moving of cargoes and people;
2. Diplomatic and business contacts between Belarus and the countries of Asia and Africa became more intensive after the introduction of the EU sanctions against Belarusian regime. Close connection between Belarus and the most odious authoritarian regimes in Asia and Africa became the result of the sanctions. The search of markets for Belarusian goods in countries with low industrial development and way of life opened the doors for business-migrants, labor migrants and students from those countries.
3. Shortage of domestic labor due to demographic problems and „political” emigration of young people and middle-aged people to Europe.

All these features have contributed to some problems. A significant increase of the number of Salafi Muslims – the natives of Dagestan and Chechnya and the conflicts with local Muslim population who profess mainly Sunni Islam, Hanafi madhhab. Salafi Muslims spread the ideas of radical Islam. There are documents proving the cases of the distribution of extremist literature calling for violence against the local population and students from Islamic regions who study in Byelorussian universities. Salafi ideological centers are formed in Belarus to spread the literature of Islamic State and the Caucasus Emirate. New leaders are currently being prepared. The recent terrorist attack in France has led to a public discussion on the acceptable legal methods of imposing restrictions on religious rights of Salafi Muslims. Several books which contained extremist appeals were forbidden to be distributed.

For the first time the group of Salafi Muslims came to the attention of police after the attack (explosion) in the Minsk metro 11.04.2011. Study of their activities showed that they are not terrorists, but the fact of distribution of Salafi literature for training new leaders led to the opinion that a network of religious Salafi centers was created. Salafis are quite actively working with young people (Islam is very popular among young people in Belarus). The results of this work were several marriages of girls with migrants from Egypt and Syria, the departure

of young women to Syria and Egypt, and their participation in public events and political unrest afterwards – in the wars waged by the Islamic State. It is known that many young Europeans are fighting on the side of the Islamic State. The terrorist attack in France, the activities of the Islamic State showed the danger of radical Islam and the need for preventive work: limiting the spread of extremist literature, need for improvement of the quality of interaction with the traditional peaceable Muslim communities. The problem of acceptable restrictions on the rights, the study of the relevant legislation and enforcement of the EU-experiences become urgent for Belarus.

One of the most acute problems of the Muslim religious associations is the problem of religious education of the youth, formation of religious identity. Migrant-Moslems from the Arab countries which come to Belarus, propagate the traditional version of Islam, so a conflict between the traditional cultural wealth of migrant-Moslems with traditions of behavior and thinking of the Belarus Moslems occurs in Belarus.

The main directions of activity among immigrants from Asia and Africa are business and education in Byelorussian universities. They are often ordinary workers (especially refugees and immigrants from Central Asia). The official labor migration from the countries of Islamic Asia is small – about 6% immigrants. There are cases when people from the Islamic east work as engineers, doctors and so on. Immigration and integration in Belarus are quite difficult. The process of obtaining Byelorussian citizenship can last from 7 to 14 years. But the person who asks for a refugee status, can get a job. Active migration processes can quickly influence the social and cultural space: the temporary Diaspora communities appeared in Belarus.

Byelorussian citizens are very tolerant towards Islam, but they have negative attitude to migrants. According to opinion polls, the rating of unwanted migrants is the following: 54% of Belarusians have negative attitude to migrants from Arab countries; 43% – to migrants from Caucasus and Central Asia, 38% – from Africa, 31% – from Southeast Asia. More than 70% of Byelorussians have a negative attitude to the increase of the amount of migrants¹⁴.

The territory of Belarus is used as a transit corridor by illegal migrants. In 2013 there were 20 (12 in 2012) groups of illegal migrants, whose total number was 130 (74 in 2012) people, 243 criminal cases

¹⁴ О. Алампиев, *Интеграция иммигрантов из исламских стран в белорусское общество*, „Социология”, №2, 2013, p. 138-139.

(198 in 2012) were initiated because of the violation of the ban of entry to Belarus. 20.138 offenders (18.303 in 2012) were brought to administrative liability for the violation of legislation concerning legal status of foreigners. About 10.000 illegal migrants moved annually through Belarus into EU.

The activity of illegal migrants from military conflicts regions (Sri Lanka, Palestine, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Egypt, Syria, Nigeria, Caucasus) is also very negative. Illegal migrants usually come from Russia. A significant impact on migration processes have foreigners coming to Belarus at the invitation of educational institutions, commercial organizations, private individuals. Some of them try to legalize their stay through marriage with a Byelorussian citizen. Several diasporas, composed of immigrants from countries with high terrorist activity, formed in Belarus. Afghan Diaspora is the most numerous. Most of its members came to Belarus in the late 80s of the last century for study at educational institutions within the framework of an agreement between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union. The majority of migrants try to move to Europe. For the illegal movement of Afghans in EU-countries used the route: Afghanistan – Pakistan – Iran – Azerbaijan – Russia – Belarus – Lithuania (or Poland, or Latvia).

Afghans often transport heroin, so the Byelorussian police and border guards are especially careful in relation to this group of migrants.

Illegal migrants from Asia and Africa create hierarchical conspiratorial crime groups. The strongest of them were created by the natives of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Chechnya. These migrant workers came to Belarus; they have the experience of participation in military operations and „military partisan“ qualifications. They are often those illegal migrants who go to the EU.

Belarusian Mufti office is trying to work with Muslim migrants: through educational activities, crime prevention, integration into the life of the Byelorussian society.

Political and legal regulation of State-Church attitudes

The Instruction of Minister Council of Belarus *About the Order of Definitions of Days off for Believers of non-Christian Religions in Connection with Their Holidays* (1992) has provided possibilities to celebrate religious holidays. The most meaningful Muslim holidays have been named Ramadan, Uraza-Bairam, Kurban-Bairam and Mavlid. The foundation of the new state religious policy was the Law *About a Religious Freedom and the Religious Organizations* (1992) according to which

the religious organizations have received independence and a possibility of a religious activity; the Law has recognized equality of all religions. In the Constitution of Belarus (1994) it has been decided, that no religion has advantages in the country, religious discrimination is not allowed. The special Instruction of Minister Council of Belarus (1995) has approved the order of the invitations and activity of foreign clerics on the territory of Belarus. The right to invite foreign clerics was granted only to legal religious organizations as the mandatory coordination of the invitation process with the state body of internal affairs and religions. Amendments have been brought into 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 Byelorussian people” (article 16).

The Law *About a Freedom of Worship and the 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 Byelorussian 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 people of Belarus and the Evangelic-Lutheran Church, Jew and an Islam are also recognized”.

The Committee of Internal Affairs and Religions and Nationalities along with the Minister Council, the Commissioner for Religions and Nationalities of the Republic of Belarus was created in May, 2006. Functions of the Commissioner are the coordination of the activities of regional bodies of affairs and religions, giving advice, exercising control over observance of the legislation of worship freedom and activities of the religious organizations.

The primary objective of religious policy in Belarus is the stable conservation of the inter-Church situation without religious confrontation, the maintenance of the State towards the Churches and the inter-Church dialogue. The tendency to realize the actual dialogue dominates in the State-Church attitudes: Inter-Church Council was created under the authority of the Commissioner for Religions and Nationalities. Two muftis are members of the Council alongside with other leaders of religious associations. According to the Decrees of the President all legal religious organizations do not have to pay taxes. The Inter-ethnic Council operates under the authority of the Commissioner for Religions and Nationalities for the coordination of nationwide prob-

lems. Leaders of national and cultural associations of the Republic are included in the staff (including Tatar and other ethnic Muslim groups).

The history has given a chance to the Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, Moslems and Jews to meet on the Byelorussian territory. The occurrence of a new trend of the so-called „public-state-Church attitudes”, an interest of the religious organizations to joint programs of social cooperation will shape the future of the traditional Byelorussian tolerance and the multi-religious culture.

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KUTUZOVA NATALIA

**Islam within the religious space in Belarus:
centuries-old history and modern tendencies**

Abstract

The article is devoted to the history of Islamic communities in Belarus, their communication with the Christians, features of the modern revival of religious life.

Tatar-Muslims moved to the Byelorussian territory in the 14th century. Crimean Tatars, as well as Tatars from the Volga regions migrated to the Byelorussian territory. They were Muslims – Sunnites of the Hanafi madhhab. The legal status of Tatars was limited because the state religion in Grand Duchy of Lithuania was Christianity. The most ancient mosques till now are in villages of Nekrashuntsy near Lida (1415), Lovchitsy under Novogrudok (1420). The hand-written heritage of Byelorussian Tatar-Muslims includes 41 manuscripts along with fragments from the end of the 18th and the first half of the 20th century.

The revival of religious life of the Muslims began in Belarus in the 90s of the 20th century. Tatar-Muslim capital in Belarus is Ivie (Grodno region). The Byelorussian Muslim religious associations, the Public association of the Tatars „Zikr ul’-Kitab” plays the key role in the religious revival. Quantitative data and features of modern religious life are described in this article. One of the most acute problems of the Muslim religious association is the problem of religious education of the youth, formation of their religious identity.

Keywords: Islamic communities, religious life, Tatars-Muslims, Council of Muftis, religious revival.

KUTUZOVA NATALIA

**Islam w przestrzeni religijnej na Białorusi:
wielowiekowa historia i współczesne tendencje****Streszczenie**

Artykuł poświęcony jest historii społeczności islamskich na Białorusi, ich komunikacji z chrześcijanami i trendom współczesnego odrodzenia życia religijnego.

Tatarzy-muzułmanie byli przemieszczani na terytorium Białorusi od XIV wieku. Tatarzy krymscy, jak również Tatarzy z regionów nadwołżańskich migrowali na terytorium Białorusi. Byli to muzułmanie-sunnici z hanafickiej grupy madhhab. Status prawny Tatarów był ograniczony, bowiem religią państwową w Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim było chrześcijaństwo. Najstarsze meczety są do dziś w wioskach Nekrashuntsy pod Lidą (1415), Lovchitsy pod Nowogródkiem (1420). Ręcznie pisane dziedzictwo białoruskich Tatarów muzułmanów obejmuje 41 rękopisów wraz z fragmentami z końca XVIII i pierwszej połowy XX wieku.

Odrodzenie życia religijnego muzułmanów na Białorusi rozpoczęło się w latach 90. XX wieku. Stolicą Tatarów-muzułmanów na Białorusi jest Ivie (obwód grodzieński). Białoruskie muzułmańskie związki wyznaniowe, stowarzyszenia publiczne Tatarów „Zikr ul’-Kitab” odgrywają kluczową rolę w odrodzeniu religijnym. W artykule podano dane liczbowe i wskazano na istotne cechy społeczności islamskich na Białorusi. Podstawowym problemem muzułmańskiego związku wyznaniowego jest kwestia edukacji religijnej młodzieży, formowanie ich tożsamości religijnej.

Słowa kluczowe: społeczności islamskie, życie religijne, Tatarzy-muzułmanie, Rada muftich, odrodzenie religijne.