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BELARUS

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

In January, the Prosecutor General announced that no charges will be pressed against Minister of Interior, Ihar Shunevich, who referred to gay people as “dyryavye” (“holers” or “those with a hole”) on TV in December 2018.

On 15 May, during the live broadcast of the ‘Eurovision Song Contest’, TV host Yavhen Perlin made homophobic statements. When the stream showed couples, including gay couples, kissing during the performances, Perlin suggested this was inappropriate and made insulting jokes. His remarks stirred criticism on social media.

An article was published on sexual violence against children in July, including a statement by a state official of the Ministry of Interior, Dmitry Tsayun, saying that LGBT equals pedophilia:

“One of the crucial risk factors is the destructive impact of the views and ideas of the LGBT community, which are actively lobbied by Certain forces. Although science has not established a direct link between pedophilia and same-sex sexual relations, the figures speak for themselves.” - Dmitry Tsayun, Deputy Head of the Department for Drug Control and Anti-trafficking, Ministry of Interior

The project, whose platform published the article, was supported by UNICEF Belarus. Local civil society urged UNICEF to promptly remove the article, which they did. It is however still available on the Ministry’s website.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

On 24 August, filmmaker Nikolai Kuprich and two friends were beaten up in a homophobic attack in Minsk. Activists condemned the violence a few days later in a street action (see under Freedom of expression) and many joined the #ненавистьэтоненорма campaign on Twitter.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Several embassies in Minsk, including those of the UK, US, Sweden and Israel, flew the rainbow flag on IDAHOT on 17 May. The Ministry of Interior again condemned these actions.

On 2 July, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus expressed concern that restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom remain alarming in the country.

In the first public action organised by LGBT activists since 2014, a small group of ten people put up posters in Mink’s Oktyabrskaya Street, where a homophobic attack took place on 24 August (see under **Bias-motivated violence**). The posters featured the rainbow flag with the text “Together we are stronger than fear”. No one was fined or detained.

PUBLIC OPINION

Groups organising against “gender ideology”, reproductive rights, sex education, and LGBTI rights, including marriage equality, became stronger and more united this year. New voices emerged in the towns of Mogilev and Vitebsk.

On several occasions, these groups conducted visits to schools and encouraged teachers and students to join their efforts. They rely heavily on the resources of religious organisations.

In late September a nationwide petition was launched, with the support of the Catholic Church, urging the President to protect the traditional family and to ban the propaganda of “non-traditional” sexual relationships to minors.