

Weekly Top 10

WASHINGTON, D.C. January 17, 2020

TO: NCSEJ Leadership and Interested Parties

**FROM: Daniel Rubin, Chairman;
Aleksander Smukler, President;
Mark B. Levin, Executive Vice-Chairman & CEO**

Dear Friend,

Russian President Vladimir Putin caught the world's attention this week when he announced plans for sweeping changes to the Russian Constitution. Many experts speculate these changes will only further consolidate his power. Soon after, Prime Minister Medvedev and his cabinet resigned from the government. The new Prime Minister is Mikhail Mishustin, a former Tax Minister and until his nomination to be Prime Minister was head of the Federal Tax Service. He is expected to announce his new cabinet in the coming days.

The Lithuanian Parliament is considering possible legislation that would declare that the Lithuanian State and citizens did not collaborate in the murder of Jews during World War II and the Holocaust. This is similar to a law passed by the Polish Parliament a few years ago. Although this is only draft legislation that has not yet been introduced in Parliament, the Lithuanian Jewish community and others expressed their concern. As noted in last week's update, an accurate accounting of what took place during the Holocaust in Lithuania and other parts of Eastern Europe is vital to ensure that future generations understand the magnitude and scope of this crime against Jews and humanity.

On Monday, January 20th Martin Luther King Day will be observed across the country. Dr. King was a strong supporter of Soviet Jewry and their right to leave the USSR. Included in this week's update is a speech given by Dr. King, on December 11, 1966, to the American Conference on Soviet Jewry (predecessor of NCSEJ), in Atlanta, Georgia. Please take a moment to read his stirring words.

I also recommend a Jerusalem Post profile on Boris Lozhkin, President of the Jewish Confederation of Ukraine Boris Lozhkin.

Finally, a new play has opened in New York called **How Many Bushels Am I Worth?** The Play Illuminates a Soviet-Jewish Family's Decision to Immigrate to the United States. Below is a brief description from the production company:

It captures a Kiev family's agonizing decision in 1976 to flee the Soviet Union for the United States. Based on the life of co-playwright Soviet émigré Bena Shklyanoy, "How Many Bushels Am I Worth?" marks close to five decades of Soviet-Jewish immigration to America. The event, which opened in 2018 to critical acclaim in Chicago, is co-written by Kevin Olson and produced by AppleDoesNotFall.com and FirstHand Theatrical.

In NYC (Brooklyn), the show runs from January 16-26, 2020 at The Mark O'Donnell Theater at The Actors Fund Arts Center, 160 Schermerhorn St.

Use the promo code BUSHEL20PERCENT for a 20% reduction on the ticket price. For more information and to purchase tickets, go to: <https://appledoesnotfall.com/plays/>.

Sincerely,



Mark B. Levin
NCSEJ Executive Vice-Chairman & CEO

Russia Is at It Again

David Leonhardt

The New York Times | January 17, 2020

If the recent hacking of a Ukrainian gas company was done by the Russian military — as the initial evidence suggests — President Trump deserves some responsibility.

The connection between Trump and the hacking would not be direct; there is no evidence that Trump or any of his aides were aware of the specific hack. But he has repeatedly encouraged foreign countries to interfere in American elections against his opponents — which appears to be what happened in this case. No one should be surprised that those countries are doing exactly what Trump has encouraged.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Pain Still Acute as Hungary's Jews Mark Liberation of Budapest Ghetto

Marton Dunai

The New York Times | January 17, 2020

Hungarian Jews on Friday marked the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Budapest ghetto and the end of the Holocaust, which killed more than 500,000 Jews and destroyed a once-vibrant Jewish culture across Hungary.

"I lost 49 family members," survivor Eva Fahidi told a small crowd at the Holocaust Memorial Wall, part of the wall that once surrounded the ghetto in central Budapest. "I was 19 years old and suddenly so hated anything could be done to me."

[Read the full article here.](#)

A Jewish businessman in Ukraine

Michael Freund

The Jerusalem Post | January 16, 2020

In recent years, little attention has been paid to one of the more remarkable diplomatic turnabouts taking place in Israel's foreign relations, that of increasingly warm bilateral ties with Ukraine. For many Jews, mere mention of the country evokes some of our people's darkest periods, from the lethal pogroms of the mid-17th century to the mass murder at Babi Yar during the Holocaust. In addition, antisemitism remains a concern.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Zelenskyy's vision for Ukrainian national identity

Bohdan Hahaylo

Atlantic Council | January 15, 2020

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's unconventional and nuanced New Year's Eve address to the nation was one of the most significant speeches of his fledgling political career. He used the occasion to lay out his vision for an inclusive Ukrainian national identity transcending the barriers of language, ethnicity and memory that have so often served to divide Ukrainians since the country first gained independence in 1991. Zelenskyy's main message was the need for national unity. He challenged his audience to reflect on what it means to be Ukrainian today. He invited them to focus on the things that unite rather than divide Ukrainians. In a country more accustomed to polarizing narratives of empire and occupation, this was something new.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Think again

John E. Herbst

Atlantic Council | January 16, 2020

In a recent National Interest article, George Beebe dismisses US policy on Ukraine as "steeped in illusions" and argues for a "sensible alternative." It is a nice try, but what he comes up with does not pass muster.

Beebe disagrees with longstanding US policy to give Ukraine the opportunity to choose its own future, which includes trying to join NATO and the European Union. So, he has decided to label this bipartisan support for Ukraine "groupthink."

To be sure, "groupthink" is not a compliment. Groupthink led to policy disaster in Vietnam and Iraq,

Beebe writes, and here he is right. He points out that numerous postmortems determined that analysts “simply disregarded evidence that did not support their hypotheses” in the case of Iraq. Also a fair point. However, Beebe cannot make the same argument about Ukraine.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Anti-Semitic incidents decreased by 27% in Ukraine in 2019, Jewish group says

Cnaan Liphshiz

JTA | January 15, 2020

A Jewish organization in Ukraine said that the number of anti-Semitic incidents documented there last year decreased by 27 percent over 2018.

The United Jewish Community of Ukraine, one of several groups representing Ukrainian Jewry, said in a report published Monday that it has documented 66 anti-Semitic incidents in 2019 compared to 90 in the previous year.

It attributed the purported change to the election in May of Volodymyr Zelensky, a Jewish actor, as president.

The Jewish group that published the report is headed by Igor Kolomoisky, a nationalist Jewish billionaire who owns the television channel where Zelensky worked.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Jewish life in Lithuania before the Holocaust

Larry Butchins

The Jerusalem Post | January 15, 2020

If you ever wanted to step back into the past and know what a shtetl really looked like, you need go no further than Šeduva, Lithuania, a town in which Jews – including some of my wife’s ancestors – had lived for more than 250 years. The only difference is today there are no Jews left in Šeduva – only in the age-old cemetery and in the three slaughter pits just outside the town.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Lithuania wants to erase its Holocaust role. That’s deplorable

Pinchas Goldshmidt

The Times of Israel | January 16, 2020

The renowned author George Orwell once said, “The most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their own understanding of their history.”

Last week, the Lithuanian Government began its latest attempt to do just that: rewrite history. While the Jewish world was the obvious victim of attempts to exonerate the country from its role in the systematic attempt to eradicate Jews from European society at the beginning of the 1940s, it will also be to the detriment of Lithuanian citizens.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Martin Luther King Jr.’s Speech On Soviet Jewry

Read the original text of King’s December 1966 address to the American Jewish Conference on Soviet Jewry

Some years ago, John Donne wrote in graphic terms, “No man is an island entire of himself. Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a part be washed away by sea, Europe is less, as well as is the promontory world, as well as is the manner of thy friends of thine own self world.

Any man’s death diminishes me because I am involved in mankind. Therefore, never send to know for whom the bell tolls. It tolls for thee.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Jerusalem issues rare critique of Ukraine’s glorification of Holocaust deniers

Sam Sokol

The Times of Isarel | January 13, 2020

The Israeli Foreign Ministry engaged in a rare rebuke of a foreign country for Holocaust revisionism on Monday, issuing a statement condemning Ukraine for its “public glorification” of Holocaust

collaborators and “antisemitic ideologists.”

The statement, which was tweeted out from the official ministry Twitter account, came in response to a Ukrainian diplomat’s demand that Jerusalem stay out of “internal issues of Ukrainian politics” following the publication of a joint statement by the Israeli and Polish ambassadors to Kyiv decrying the “glorification of those who promoted actively the ethnic cleansing” of Poles and Jews.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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About NCSEJ

Founded in 1971, the National Coalition Supporting Eurasian Jewry represents the organized American Jewish community in monitoring and advocating on behalf of the estimated 1.5 million Jews in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, including the 15 successor states of the former Soviet Union.

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