

Weekly Top 10

WASHINGTON, D.C. March 13, 2020

TO: NCSEJ Leadership and Interested Parties

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

Dear Friend,

NCSEJ commends the Romanian government for appointing an official to combat anti-Semitism and commemorate the Holocaust. Silviu Vexler, a member of parliament and a member of the country's Chamber of Deputies, will now serve as Romania's high representative for fighting antisemitism, protecting the memory of the Holocaust and the development of Jewish life. His appointment received wide-ranging support in the country's parliament. Vexler introduced Romania's Law for Preventing and Combating Antisemitism in 2018, and the Law for the Establishment of the National Museum of Jewish History and the Holocaust in 2019. As Chairman of the Romania-Israel Parliamentary Friend Group, he has represented the Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania (FEDROM) in the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of Romania's bicameral parliament, since 2016.

Following the failed negotiations between Russia-led OPEC+ countries last Friday, Saudi Arabia now intends to boost its output to over 13 million barrels per day, while offering \$6 to \$8 per barrel discounts to consumers in Asia and northwestern Europe – key markets for Russia's oil exports. These developments break the de facto Russian-Saudi oil cartel and jeopardize the U.S. shale industry. Moscow and Riyadh, who have been allied since 2016 to help prop up oil markets, rejected calls on Friday to cut global crude production by the suggested 4%.

The Russian Duma (parliament) and the Federation Council, approved wide-reaching constitutional changes this past week, effectively allowing President Vladimir Putin to 'reset' his term limits and remain in power until at least 2036 after his current term ends in 2024. The Duma passed the legislation by a 383-0 vote with 43 abstentions. A nationwide vote on the proposed amendments is set for April 22. Putin would be 83 in 2036 and the move would make him the third-longest serving Russian leader in history.

Finally, NCSEJ is taking all necessary steps to ensure our work will continue through the Coronavirus Crisis. We are looking at all options that address the safety needs of our employees. We will keep you informed of any significant changes in our operations.

Sincerely,



Mark B. Levin
NCSEJ Executive Vice-Chairman & CEO

NCSEJ WEEKLY TOP 10 **Washington, D.C. March 13, 2020**

Coronavirus crisis: Ukraine needs IMF support not political purges

Anders Åslund

Atlantic Council | March 10, 2020

In 2019, Ukraine enjoyed a wonderful economic recovery. Finally, the National Bank (NBU) managed to drive down a stubborn inflation rate of 10 percent a year to 2.4 percent, which allowed it to cut its interest rate from 18 percent in June 2019 to the current 11.5 percent.

The government maintained a moderate budget deficit of 2 percent of GDP, and the current account

deficit was only 3 percent of GDP, which was more than covered by remittances. Remarkably, in one year, the borrowing cost of Ukraine's long Eurobonds slumped from 11 percent a year to 4 percent a year. The country seemed set for a period of significant economic growth. Former Prime Minister Oleksiy Honcharuk foresaw growth of 5 percent in 2020, rising to 7 percent per year in the ensuing years. But now he and his policy are gone.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Moldova's Most Notorious Oligarch Has Been In The U.S. Despite Sanctions, Officials Say
Mike Eckel and Liliana Barbarosie
Radio Free Europe | March 4, 2020

He's one of the most powerful, and most notorious, tycoons in Moldova's three decades of independence, a man linked to the "theft of the century" -- the disappearance of \$1 billion from Moldovan banks in 2014.

A longtime behind-the-scenes power broker, Vladimir Plahotniuc fled Moldova in June 2019 after being pushed out of parliament as part of a government shakeup brokered by Russia, the United States, and other European partners. He has dropped out of the public view since then, reportedly traveling under one or more assumed names and alternate passports.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Meet 'Barsi,' the ruthless economist directing Israel's drastic virus fight
Haviv Rettig Gur
Times of Israel | March 11, 2020

His friends and colleagues call him "Barsi," an unassuming nickname for an unassuming man, the sort of man who likes to wear gray sports coats over gray shirts. But don't be fooled by his mild manners and soft-spoken air. Moshe Bar Siman-Tov, Israel's point man in the fight to slow the spread of the coronavirus, is considered among the most ruthless and competent managers in the Israeli state bureaucracy. His professional story, like his handling of the coronavirus crisis, tells a tale that reveals much about the Jewish state's resilience and success over the years — and, perhaps, its overreliance on powerful bureaucrats.

Bar Siman-Tov, 43, is the first non-doctor to ever hold the post of director-general of Israel's Health Ministry, the nation's top public health professional. He is, rather, an economist, and a special kind of economist at that. "Barsi" is a member and a symbol of a small subsection of Israeli officialdom dubbed "the Treasury youths" by the rest of the state bureaucracy.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Israeli scientists: 'In a few weeks, we will have coronavirus vaccine' (JPOST)
Maayan Jaffe-Hoffman
The Jerusalem Post | March 10, 2020

Israeli scientists are on the cusp of developing the first vaccine against the novel coronavirus, according to Science and Technology Minister Ofir Akunis. If all goes as planned, the vaccine could be ready within a few weeks and available in 90 days, according to a release.

"Congratulations to MIGAL [The Galilee Research Institute] on this exciting breakthrough," Akunis said. "I am confident there will be further rapid progress, enabling us to provide a needed response to the grave global COVID-19 threat," Akunis said, referring to the disease caused by the novel coronavirus.

For the past four years, a team of MIGAL scientists has been developing a vaccine against infectious bronchitis virus (IBV), which causes a bronchial disease affecting poultry. The effectiveness of the vaccine has been proven in preclinical trials carried out at the Veterinary Institute.

[Read the full article here.](#)

A Purim lesson at the White House
Lela Gilbert
The Jerusalem Post | March 3, 2020

The first venue that comes to mind when Purim celebrations are being organized is not likely to be the White House.

But this year, the saga of Queen Esther, her faithful cousin Mordechai and the villainous Haman, first reached my ears at a White House briefing on antisemitism. That venerable story was recounted by

Elan Carr, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's special envoy for monitoring and combating antisemitism.

It's well known that at this time of year, Jewish communities around the world – and especially in Israel – celebrate the cherished biblical story, dressing their children in colorful costumes, lifting many joyous toasts to Esther's selfless courage, and noisily cursing the evil Haman.

Unfortunately, although a considerable amount of time has passed since the noteworthy events of the 5th century BCE in Persia, various efforts to exterminate the Jews continue to reinvent themselves, providing ample proof that such plots were not buried along with Haman. In fact, the chants of "Death to Israel" wafting across the world from today's Iran confirm that the more things change, the more they remain the same.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Auschwitz closes to visitors over coronavirus fears

Staff

Times of Israel | March 11, 2020

The Auschwitz Memorial and the site of the former Nazi camp have been closed to visitors due to concerns over the coronavirus.

The memorial announced on Wednesday that it would shut down until March 25.

The announcement came on the heels of the decision by the Polish government to close all museums and cultural institutions, as well as schools and universities, through March 25 in order to contain the spread of the coronavirus. Poland has at least 26 confirmed cases.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Ukraine shuts schools, mass events to prevent coronavirus spread

Artur Korniienko

Kyiv Post | March 11, 2020

Ukraine will close all schools and ban mass events starting on March 12 to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus, the government announced on March 11. There has been only one registered case of the infection in Ukraine.

COVID-19, a disease caused by the novel coronavirus, has been detected in 119,000 people and killed 4,290 people worldwide.

Ukraine will close all educational institutions until April 3 – including nurseries, schools and universities – and ban mass gatherings of more than 200 people. Events of "state necessity" such as parliamentary meetings can proceed, as can sporting events without spectators.

The government will also allocate Hr 100 million (\$4 million) to buy personal protective equipment from Ukrainian private companies – gloves, masks and protective suits – to supply doctors and other state employees. It will prohibit the export of such equipment until June 1.

Additionally, the government will purchase infrared screening equipment to measure the temperature of passengers at Boryspil International Airport.

[Read the full article here.](#)

U.S, Russian oil producers to feel the squeeze as Saudis open oil tap

Nidhi Verma and Jessica Jaganathan

Reuters | March 9, 2020

NEW DELHI/SINGAPORE, March 9 (Reuters) - Saudi Arabia's sudden lurch to aggressive discount exporter from chief cheerleader for output restraint is set to upend global oil trade flows and bring harsh financial pain for higher cost rivals such as Russia and the United States, analysts said.

At least four refiners in Asia have already signed up for maximum volumes of newly-cheap Saudi crude since the kingdom slashed export prices and signalled an output boost over the weekend after the collapse of the OPEC+ deal.

Other Middle Eastern producers are expected to follow suit.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Vladimir Putin Positions Himself to Become Russia's Eternal Leader

Joshua Yaffa

The New Yorker | March 12, 2020

To write about Russia for a living is, to an unavoidable degree, to be in the business of analyzing the thoughts, decisions, and machinations of one man, Vladimir Putin—which, inevitably, means often getting it wrong. The latest unexpected turn in Russian politics came on Tuesday, when, in a tragicomic bit of political theatre, Valentina Tereshkova, a former Soviet cosmonaut and a member of Russia's parliament, stood to offer an amendment to the country's constitution. The proposal put forward by Tereshkova, who was clearly put up to the job, was simple and brazen: to reset Putin's time as the President to zero, granting him the chance to run again in 2024, when his current, fourth term is set to end. "Given his enormous authority, this would be a stabilizing factor for our society," she declared.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Belarus Struggles to Find Alternative Oil Supplies as Standoff With Russia Lingers

Lisette Rauf Mammadov

Jamestown Foundation | March 5, 2020

Belarus continues to scramble in search of alternate oil sources two months after its traditional Russian suppliers halted flows through the Druzhba Pipeline (see EDM, January 22, February 13). The five suppliers that have provided Belarus with 90 percent of its oil for years cut off their exports on January 1. Since then, Belarus's state oil company Belneftkhim has signed purchasing agreements with companies from Azerbaijan and Norway—and with non-traditional Russian suppliers—to try to make up the 18 million tons of crude a year it is losing.

Azerbaijan's state oil company SOCAR has already agreed to supply 160,000 tons of oil to Belarus, and Belarusian Prime Minister Sergei Rumas met with SOCAR officials on March 2 to discuss additional purchases (Belta.by, March 3). Belarus will import SOCAR's crude through a pipeline running from Ukraine's main Black Sea port of Odesa to Brody in northwestern Ukraine. The oil will then be sent north to Belarus's Mozyr refinery, a joint venture of the Russian oil giants Rosneft and Gazpromneft.

[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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