

## Weekly Top 10

**WASHINGTON, D.C. March 27, 2020**

**TO: NCSEJ Leadership and Interested Parties**

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

Dear Friend,

Much of this week's update focuses on how countries and communities in the region are addressing the challenges of COVID-19. We will continue to keep you informed of the latest developments. We hope everyone stays healthy and safe.

Shabbat Shalom!

Sincerely,



Mark B. Levin  
NCSEJ Executive Vice-Chairman & CEO

### **NCSEJ WEEKLY TOP 10** **Washington, D.C. March 27, 2020**

#### **Russian Defense Ministry Preparing for Worst Case COVID-19 Scenario**

**Pavel Felgenhauer**

**The Jamestown Foundation | March 26, 2020**

On March 24, President Vladimir Putin canceled a visit to St. Petersburg and went instead to the new Kommunarka medical facility on the outskirts of Moscow that was hastily organized as the main specialized COVID-19 treatment center in the Moscow region. On the excursion, Putin (67) was escorted by the Kommunarka chief surgeon, Denis Protsenko, and Moscow Mayor Sergey Sobyenin. Putin donned a bright yellow full-body hazmat suit and respirator and was later rubbed down with sanitizer. Putin's press corps members as well as his official videographer were denied entrance. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov, thus, handed a nurse a smartphone and asked her to film Putin's inspection of the facility "as well as you can" and then to send the resulting video file, via Telegram Messenger (officially forbidden in Russia, but still widely used), to the only contact in the phone's address book—"Dima." The nurse was instructed not to return the phone, "but just dump it," evidently out of concern that the device might, in the course of the visit, become contaminated by the coronavirus (RIA Novosti, March 24).

[Read the full article here.](#)

#### **Coronavirus Inflames Russia-Belarus Quarrel**

**Artyom Shraibman**

**Carnegie Moscow Center | March 25, 2020**

Using proverbs such as "a friend in need is a friend indeed" to describe the relationship between two countries would be greatly oversimplifying matters. But it's true that crises are a test of bonds. The coronavirus pandemic has shown how little trust is left between Minsk and Moscow. The Russia-Belarus oil conflict may have receded from the headlines, but it has not been resolved. Officially, the dispute is over the small premium (\$10-12 per ton of oil) that Russian oil producers charge Belarusian refineries for deliveries of crude oil. Since Belarus is gradually due to start paying global prices for oil from Russia by 2024, after years of buying it at favorable rates, it no longer wants

to pay this premium. Russian suppliers, for their part, are not prepared to waive the premium completely, and instead suggest a gradual decrease through 2024, to reflect the gradual increase in the oil price.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **New archive reveals how Polish diplomats helped Jews escape Holocaust to Latin America**

**Camilla Tominey**

**The Telegraph | March 23, 2020**

They risked death at the hands of the Nazis by forging fake passports to help Jews escape Poland following Hitler's invasion.

Now 75 years on from the liberation of Auschwitz, a new cache of paperwork proving the bravery of a group of resistance fighters who saved hundreds from the gas chambers has been curated for the first time.

After nearly two years of negotiations, the Eiss Archive has now been handed to the Auschwitz Birkenau Museum in Oświęcim, Poland showing how the underground organisation led by Aleksander Ładoś, then Polish Ambassador to Bern in Switzerland provided Jews with Latin-American documents to evade the SS.

Known as the 'Bern group', Ładoś, his deputy Stefan Ryniewicz, consul Konstanty Rokicki and diplomat Juliusz Kuehl would provide lists of people who needed travel documents..

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Russia Pushes to Drastically Expand Its Influence Over Ukraine, Rest of Post-Soviet Space**

**Kseniya Kirillova**

**Jamestown | March 23, 2020**

In recent months, the Kremlin dramatically stepped up efforts to push its interests and political agenda across the post-Soviet space as part of various "negotiations" and "conflict resolution procedures." A particularly striking example of this can be seen in the results of the most recent Minsk negotiation process pertaining to the war in eastern Ukraine (Dzerkalo Tyzhnia, March 13).

The Russian and Ukrainian presidents' representatives, Dmitry Kozak and Andriy Yermak, respectively, met in Minsk on March 11. There, they agreed to create a new negotiating platform, to be called the Consultative Council, as part of the wider Minsk talks. The new platform, as proposed, would treat the Ukrainian government and Moscow's proxies in occupied Donetsk and Luhansk as coequal parties to an intra-Ukrainian conflict. Russia, meanwhile, would henceforth be considered an impartial observer in the proceedings (see EDM, March 19).

More generally, the move will provide support for the Kremlin's agenda for resolving the situation in Donbas. Namely, Moscow would like to see the incorporation of constitutional amendments on decentralization; a special status conferred to Donetsk-Luhansk; general amnesty for all militants involved in war crimes; and the passage of a special law on local "elections" in the occupied territories (see EDM, March 19).

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Hundreds of Russian-speaking Jews gather for Limmud FSU**

**Jewish News | March 22, 2020**

More than 600 Russian-speaking Jews from 25 countries gathered in Vienna, just before the coronavirus outbreak, for the annual Jewish learning and culture festival Limmud FSU.

The three-day event was attended by Austrian ministers and coincided with the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Austria's Mauthausen concentration camp, where there was a moving ceremony that included Racheli Kreisberg, the granddaughter of camp survivor and famed Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal.

Limmud FSU began in 2006 to serve Russian-speaking Jewish communities worldwide. This month's highlights included a musical Kabbalat Shabbat service featuring the Viennese Jewish community's chief cantor, Shmuel Barzilai.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Classic antisemitic allegations arise over coronavirus, says gov't report**

**Jeremy Sharon**

**The Jerusalem Post | March 25, 2020**

A report by the Strategic Affairs Ministry has highlighted the outbreak of antisemitism that has arisen alongside the coronavirus pandemic, in which classical antisemitic allegations have been made by anti-Israel organizations and individuals.

The report cited several examples of antisemitic allegations on social and news media based around the coronavirus pandemic and said that the global crisis was providing “fertile ground” for antisemitism.

Reports by the Anti-Defamation League and other organizations have demonstrated that far-right and white-supremacist elements are also using the pandemic to incite antisemitism.

Among the examples cited in the Strategic Affairs Ministry report was an opinion article by Kevin Barrett on Press TV, an Iranian-funded international propaganda outlet, in which he accuses Israel of having “engineered” the deadly virus and of trying to “amplify” the severe outbreak of the disease in Iran.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Central Asian States Can't Hide the Coronavirus Any Longer**

**Nathan Paul Southern and Lindsey Kennedy**

**Foreign Policy | March 20, 2020**

On March 10, Kazakhstan's chief doctor made a public announcement. While there were still no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the country, he said, cases might appear over the next five days. The source of his precision was not explained, and Kazakhs were understandably skeptical. “Everyone here is joking about this,” said one Almaty resident, a Kazakh academic who asked not to be named. “People think we already have those cases but the authorities are hiding facts. Otherwise, it is ridiculous that the country with the longest border with China has no cases.”

Watching from outside, experts on the region were just as incredulous. “Obviously this is impossible,” said Luca Anceschi, senior lecturer in Central Asian Studies at the University of Glasgow. Like China, he said, the tightly controlled flow of information in Central Asian states means “we're not getting any picture. Not even the full picture—no picture at all.”

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **In Corona's Shadow: Jewish Communities in Russia Update Regularly and Offer**

**HaModia | March 22, 2020**

While the entire world is caught up in a raging storm, and no one knows what tomorrow will bring, Russia's Jewish communities are an island of peace and security. As soon as the global crisis began with the Corona virus, the Chief Rabbi of Russia, Rabbi Berel Lazar stood at the forefront, giving clear instructions and daily updates, giving guidance in all practical matters while strictly adhering to Halachic guidelines.

As the situation progressed, the Chief Rabbi took significant steps, including those which at first seemed overly cautious. He did not remain indifferent, and his words are circulated every day in every possible way, to reach each and every Jew, in order to strengthen their faith and confidence in Hashem, who does not sleep nor slumber, along with strong practical steps that must be taken in order to stay safe, as is clearly stated in the Torah “Venishmartem meod lenafshoseichem”.

Additionally, Rabbi Lazar is giving online public Torah classes around the clock, attracting many young people, and allowing them to ask questions, thus giving them an opportunity to quench their thirst for Hashem's word.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Kyrgyzstan: Anxiety creeping, but few can afford luxury of COVID-19 panic**

**Nurjamal Djanibekova**

**EurasiaNet | March 20, 2020**

Authorities in Kyrgyzstan have imposed isolated lockdowns in areas that are home to the country's first six known carriers of novel coronavirus COVID-19, but many are trying to press on with life as normal, since doing otherwise may spell ruin.

All those who had been found to have been infected with COVID-19 as of March 20 are known to have recently returned from pilgrimages to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

The first three cases were reported on March 18. The men – who are aged 70, 62 and 46 – flew back to Kyrgyzstan on March 12 and were made to undergo a test before being allowed to self-isolate in their homes in the village of Blagoveschensk, in the Suzak district of Jala-Abad region.

Despite the instructions to self-isolate, one of the men reportedly hosted a feast to celebrate his return. Around 100 people are believed to have attended this event. A local official has said the trio may have been in contact with more than 1,000 people since they came back from their travels.

Since those coronavirus cases were confirmed, a state of emergency has been declared in the Suzak district. Entry points to the three villages in the district, which are collectively home to around 10,000 people, are being guarded by soldiers manning checkpoints.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **The First Days of COVID-19 in Ukraine**

**Yuriy Vakhel**

**The Kennan Institute | March 23, 2020**

Ukraine so far has not seen the levels of COVID-19 infection that countries like China, Italy, or Iran are experiencing. Yet in the absence of tests, and after a considerable reduction in epidemiological service, the country has been caught on its back foot. Between March 17 and 20, the Ukrainian government and local administrations launched quarantine measures that, as President Volodymyr Zelenskyy stated in his address, should help protect Ukrainians from the worst consequences of the virus. The effectiveness of these and other measures, however, almost certainly will be reduced by organizational lack of capacity, disarray, and citizens' fears and disbeliefs.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **RFE/RL Counters Disinformation To Help Combat Coronavirus In High-Risk Countries**

**Radio Svoboda | March 23, 2020**

WASHINGTON -- From coronavirus hotspots like Iran to China neighbors like Russia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Central Asia, audiences are relying on Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) as a source of trusted news and an alternative to inaction and rampant disinformation in the countries where they live.

"We are the local press in the countries where we work," said Jamie Fly. "Our reporters, and their families, live and work in these communities, and they personally feel the urgency of the situation and understand the grave threat posed by a lack of information or false claims." Fly said, "For many of our audiences, especially those subject to rampant disinformation circulated by authoritarian regimes, we are the difference between them being informed and prepared about the virus, or not."

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **How the Coronavirus Threatens Putin's Global Image**

**Thomas Graham**

**Council on Foreign Relations | March 25, 2020**

The official number of cases in Russia of the new coronavirus disease, COVID-19, exceeds 650, with just one reported death. As in other countries, the actual number is certainly higher. While Putin assured Russians just last week that the situation was "generally under control," he changed his tune this week, warning them to brace for a prolonged battle against a potentially devastating epidemic. In addition to the steps the authorities have already taken to contain the virus—closing borders, banning foreign visitors until May 1, and quarantining possible carriers, among other things—Putin declared that next week will be a paid nonwork week and urged everyone to stay home. He also announced a series of measures to guarantee income and preserve jobs to soften the economic consequences of containing the virus.


[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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