

## Weekly Top 10

**WASHINGTON, D.C. April 17, 2020**

**TO: NCSEJ Leadership and Interested Parties**

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

Dear Friend,

We have been holding a series of conference calls with leaders from the region. The latest was Webinar with the Israeli Charge d'Affairs to Russia and the head of the Bulgarian Jewish Community. Below is an update from our last webinar.

If you are not receiving notification of these calls and would like to join us, please contact David Pasmanik at [dpasmanik@ncsej.org](mailto:dpasmanik@ncsej.org)

Shabbat Shalom!

Sincerely,



Mark B. Levin  
NCSEJ Executive Vice-Chairman & CEO

**NCSEJ WEEKLY TOP 10**  
**Washington, D.C. April 17, 2020**

**UPDATE FROM THE REGION**

**NCSEJ Webinar with  
Dr. Alexander Oscar, President of the Organization of Jews in  
Bulgaria SHALOM  
April 13, 2020**

On April 13, 2020, NCSEJ Hosted a Webinar with Dr, Alexander Oscar, President of the Organization of Jews in Bulgaria SHALOM. He provided an update on the effects of COVID-19 in Bulgaria

***Dr. Alexander Oscar** is the President of the Organization of the Jews in Bulgaria SHALOM. Prior to that, he served two terms as Chairman of the Sofia, Bulgaria Jewish community. In addition to his leadership in the Bulgarian Jewish community, Dr. Oscar is a neuro-ophthalmologist.*

Bulgaria is one of the smallest and poorest countries in the EU. There are 6000 Jews in Bulgaria, the majority living in the capital, Sofia.

The Jewish community and Jewish presence in Bulgaria dates back to the second century. The majority came after the expulsion from Spain in the 1500's. In 1943 it was ordered that Jews from Bulgaria were to be deported by the Nazis. The Orthodox Church and civil society resisted and did not allow the Jews to be deported.

However, in Macedonia and in Northern Greece Bulgarian Jews were deported to concentration camps. After the Second World War Bulgaria became a hardline communist country. In 1991, 90% of the Jewish community left for Israel. Shalom was founded in 1990. With support from JDC, the Lauder Foundation, and other international Jewish organizations as

well as the State of Israel, today there is a Jewish school, kindergarten, and a social welfare network. The kindergarten started with five children 5 years ago. Today there are 80 children enrolled.

The Jewish Community started early with preventive measures against the Coronavirus even before the government acted. At the end of February, all events were canceled in the Jewish community. Because of the coronavirus, many members of the community are unemployed. The community is organizing their resources to help those most in need including delivering food to the elderly. They are doing their best to preserve the community physically, spiritually, and morally.

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## Q & A

### **What is the greatest challenge in the Bulgarian Jewish community?**

**Oscar:** The greatest challenge is getting over this crisis. We have a very flat curve so far. We have about 25 mortalities and now the goal is to buy time over the next several weeks. We need to not have a scenario similar to Italy or Spain because our health care system could not deal with all the cases. Due to the warming weather, people are starting to ignore the general rules and are going outside. The government is also afraid that because of the holidays people will start gathering outside which will tremendously increase the risk and the cases. At this stage we only need resources to help the needy people within the community. We will continue to function after the coronavirus epidemic subsides. As we see, in this situation will continue in May. In June, the government will slowly start decreasing the measures. We do believe we have the strength and the capacity.

### **Have you seen any indication that far right groups are blaming Jews in Bulgaria for the coronavirus?**

**Oscar:** There has been a rise in nationalism and far right groups in the last several years. The community has written a number of letters to the prosecutor general about their activities and threats on social media and other media outlets. They use the ignorance of people to easily manipulate them. There is not a significant threat at this time, but they have had problems with them.

### **Is there an ongoing influence of Russia on Bulgaria?**

**Oscar:** Bulgaria has always been involved in Bulgarian domestic politics, since the fall of the Ottoman Empire. The government is trying to diversify, but Bulgaria is 100% dependent on Russian oil. Bulgaria is part of NATO and the EU which is preserving its ability to not be totally dependent on Russia in other areas. The post-communist generation has a positive feeling about the EU and the USA. I do believe in the Euro Atlantic integration of Bulgaria. I predict that Russian influence will decrease over the next several years.

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## **Incidents of anti-Semitism in Russia**

### **The Russian Jewish Congress**

**SOVA | April 2020**

The novel coronavirus has penetrated more deeply into Moscow's population than official data show, private testing results among people without symptoms suggest.

Moscow, a city of 12.7 million people, is at the epicentre of Russia's coronavirus outbreak, having officially recorded 18,105 cases as of April 17, equivalent to just over 0.1% of its population.

Early results from the first commercial Russian tests suggest that a much higher proportion of people in Moscow are infected, and that the disease has spread among residents without symptoms.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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## **Moscow has more coronavirus cases than state testing shows, private lab data suggest**

**Reuters | April 17, 2020**

MOSCOW (Reuters) - The novel coronavirus has penetrated more deeply into Moscow's population than official data show, private testing results among people without symptoms suggest.

Moscow, a city of 12.7 million people, is at the epicentre of Russia's coronavirus outbreak, having officially recorded 18,105 cases as of April 17, equivalent to just over 0.1% of its population.

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[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **The president without a plan**

**Andrey Shingaryov**

**Meduza | April 17, 2020**

From April 3 through April 14, the official number of coronavirus cases confirmed in Belarus multiplied by more than nine times, rising from 351 to 3,281. The national Health Ministry said that growth was due both to the spread of the virus and to a significant increase in testing — more than 71,000 tests had been conducted as of April 14. April 3, meanwhile, was the day when the Ministry announced that all patients diagnosed with moderate or severe pneumonia would be tested for COVID-19; the decision followed a spike in infections in Vitebsk. As President Alexander Lukashenko explained on April 13, the situation in Belarus's fourth-largest city is now on the mend, but as little as half a week ago, up to 280 new cases were being recorded there every day. That makes for one pneumonia case per day per 1,350 residents. For comparison, Moscow Mayor Sergey Sobyenin has reported that last week, the Russian capital saw about 1,300 new pneumonia cases daily, or one case per day per 9,750 residents.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Putin Postpones 75th Victory Day Parade Over Coronavirus**

**The Moscow Times | April 16, 2020**

President Vladimir Putin on Thursday postponed a landmark military parade to mark the 75th anniversary of Soviet victory in World War II, as Russia struggles to contain the rapid spread of the coronavirus.

The "risks associated with the epidemic, whose peak has not passed yet, are extremely high," Putin said. "This does not give me the right to begin preparations for the parade and other mass events now."

He said the event would be held later in 2020.

Russia commemorates the Soviet Union's victory over the Nazis each year on May 9 with a massive military display that sees thousands of troops and tanks parade through Red Square and military jets fly in formation over the capital.

This year's parade was meant to be a major showcase for Putin, with world leaders and veterans from all over Russia invited to watch and take part in events over four days. Moscow had stopped short of postponing the parade as the number of coronavirus infections across the country grew, but the ambitious plans had seemed increasingly unrealistic in recent weeks.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Azerbaijan Hopes to Minimize Ramifications of Coronavirus Crisis**

**Vasif Huseynov**

**The Jamestown Foundation | April 16, 2020**

Thanks to having quickly adopted strict countermeasures, Azerbaijan, so far, appears to have succeeded in flattening the curve of new COVID-19 infections and slowing the domestic spread of the novel coronavirus responsible for this disease. As of April 14, 1,197 persons tested positive, 351 persons had recovered, 13 persons died, and officials carried out a total of 71,736 tests (Koronavirusinfo.az, April 15). The record number of daily increases in cases was recorded on April 8, with 105 new infections; but the rate has sharply decreased since then (on April 11, there were 67 cases; on April 12, officials marked 40 cases; on April 13, 50 cases were recorded; April 14—49 cases) (Marja.az, April 14). Tellingly, the number of recovered patients exceeded daily new infections on April 14 (62 versus 49, respectively). With restrictions on the movement of people in force since early March, it is believed that the peak of infection had already been reached.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **European Lockdown Hits Russia's Gas Market**

**Sergei Kapitonov**

**Carnegie Moscow Center | April 17, 2020**

It's a trying time for the two pillars of Russia's energy exports: oil and gas. The new

coronavirus pandemic has shattered demand on traditional markets, especially in Europe. Compared with the same day last year, electricity generation at gas-powered plants in northern Italy was down by 54 percent on the last Tuesday of March this year, by 37 percent in the Netherlands, and by 15 percent in western Germany. This is despite the fact that late March was colder this year in Europe than last year. One of the consequences of people staying at home rather than driving their cars and working from office buildings is a steep drop in demand for gas, totaling billions of cubic meters.

The gas market has seen low prices and an excess of liquefied natural gas (LNG) since the middle of 2019. According to forecasts by the International Energy Agency, gas production this year will reach a record of about 4 trillion cubic meters. Against this backdrop, the sharp fall in demand has sent prices into an uncontrollable tailspin.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **A referendum that must not be named**

**Stanislav Andreychuk**  
**Riddle | April 14, 2020**

On March 25, Vladimir Putin rescheduled a 22 April popular vote on constitutional amendments. The new date has not been set yet, but preparations for voting are in full swing. The vote was problematic from the start. Experts are challenging its legality, and the result will be called into question. One problem: the initiators of these amendments pushed for extra electoral legitimacy, even though they could have adopted them without voter involvement. Their approach to voting was unorthodox as well. They introduced a new formula not envisaged in the legislation. It's a one-time procedure because some legal amendments needed to hold this vote are valid only til the end of June. Theoretically, the deadline — for example, to the law on public procurement — can be moved to a later date because of the coronavirus pandemic. But the logic remains the same: no one except the president can trigger the vote again. This is Putin's unprecedented personal political initiative, paid for with 15 billion roubles of taxpayers' money.

If we look at the legal definition of a referendum ('a national vote on issues of national importance'), it is clear the upcoming vote is a referendum. However, in this plot, the word 'referendum' is like Lord Voldemort from the Harry Potter novels: 'He Who Must Not Be Named'.

It is possible to understand the government's reluctance to call the referendum a referendum if we analyse the difference between the proposed formula and the procedures defined in the electoral law.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Senior Romanian priest compares Jews to coronavirus in Easter greeting**

**Cnaan Lipshiz**  
**The Jerusalem Post | April 13, 2020**

A senior priest in the Catholic Church of Romania appeared to liken Jews to a virus in a filmed Easter greeting.

The reference was part of the April 9 message, sent out to national television stations, by Father Francisc Dobos, the spokesperson for the Archdiocese of Bucharest.

The disciples of Jesus, he said, reading from the Christian Bible, "feared the Jews, and here in the bracket we should read: feared the virus."

In an open letter, the head of a Romanian group devoted to fighting antisemitism wrote that Dobos's apparent effort to make his message more relatable by connecting scripture to present-day concerns and fears fell short.

"Unfortunately, what many of the listeners of your message will [hear will] be the comparison between Jews and a killer virus," said Maximillian Marco Katz, director of the MCA Romania Center for Monitoring and Combatting Antisemitism. "And so the traditional religious antisemitism is passed down from generation to generation: for over 2000 years."

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Polish leaders block resolution that would have stopped restitution of property lost during the Holocaust**

**Cnaan Lipshiz**  
**JTA | April 14, 2020**

(JTA) — Poland's ruling party took a stand on Wednesday against a far-right push to stop the restitution of property owned by Jews and others before the Holocaust.

Far-right activists had gathered enough signatures to present a draft resolution to the Sejm, the lower house of Polish parliament, that would prohibit the redistribution of “heirless property”—property that belonged to private individuals, many of them Jews, who were killed in the Holocaust and whose heirs, if they exist, never filed for restitution.

“It is forbidden to take any actions aimed at satisfying claims regarding heirless property, including negotiations, entering into settlements, recognizing claims and actions relating to heirless property, consenting to mediation, directing parties to mediation or payment of cash benefits,” the draft states. It also states that Nazi Germany, not Poland, is responsible for what happened in Poland when it was occupied by Germany.

Speaking for the right-wing ruling Law and Justice party, lawmaker Arkadiusz Mularczyk said the draft resolution was unnecessary, as “the problem of landless land in Poland does not really exist.”

[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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