

Weekly Top 10

WASHINGTON, D.C. May 8, 2020

TO: NCSEJ Leadership and Interested Parties

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

Dear Friend,

Today marks 75 years since the end of the Second World War, a hugely important and symbolic day for many across Europe, who are celebrating in lockdown. The date is important to Russian President Vladimir Putin, who normally enjoys a popularity boost coinciding with the event. With Russia officially in lockdown for the "May Holidays", Putin has lost a tool to counter his historically low rating during the Covid-19 pandemic. The one notable exception to these government cancellations of events is President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko, who has taken a laissez fair approach to the pandemic and will be holding a victory parade as scheduled.

This week the Moldovan Supreme Court declared a Russian-backed loan unconstitutional. The government had hoped the 10-year loan would help plug a growing budget deficit because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The opposition criticized the loan, saying that it poses a long-term "danger" because of provisions that would direct the money toward projects that favor Russian companies.

The Russian Jewish community lost one of the founders of the progressive movement in the former Soviet Union when Zinovy Kogan passed away on May 1. To those who knew him, "Zunya" was an activist during the Soviet Jewry movement and played an important part in the creation of the Reform Movement in Russia. He will be missed.

Lastly, we are holding a series of conference calls and webinars with leaders from the region. The most recent webinar was with Kazakh Ambassador to the United States, Erzhan Kazykhanov. If you are not receiving notification of these calls and would like to join us, please contact David Pasmanik at dpasmanik@ncsej.org

Shabbat Shalom!

Sincerely,



Mark B. Levin
NCSEJ Executive Vice-Chairman & CEO

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NCSEJ WEEKLY TOP 10
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Mourning the Passing of Zinovy ("Zunya") Kogan

Rabbi Joel Oseran
World Union for Progressive Judaism | May 5, 2020

Zinovy Kogan, founder and guiding spirit of the first Progressive movement congregation in the Former Soviet Union, congregation Hineini in Moscow, died in Moscow on Friday, May 1, 2020. That he passed away on Erev Shabbat certainly adds, according to Jewish tradition, to the honor he deserves as a passionate devoted Jew. That he passed away on May 1, International Workers' Day, which in the Former Soviet Union is one of the most celebrated holidays in the year, certainly testifies to his legacy as an activist and beloved man of the people.

Zunya, as he was affectionately called by all who knew him, was indeed both a devoted Jew and an activist who worked tirelessly to advance the causes he believed in. He was also a bit of a maverick personality who seemed to defy definition and categorization. I came to know Zunya in the late 1980's when the World Union, under the visionary leadership of the Executive Director Rabbi Richard Hirsch, began to formulate a plan to help the "Jews of Silence" rediscover their proud Jewish voice.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Moldovan Court Rules Russian Loan Violates Law
Radio Free Europe | May 7, 2020

CHISINAU -- Moldova's Constitutional Court has ruled that a 200 million-euro (\$216 million) loan agreement with Russia is unconstitutional.

"The court decision is final and cannot be challenged," the head of the Constitutional Court, Domnica Manole said on May 7, two weeks after the loan agreement was ratified by parliament.

The government had hoped the 10-year loan would help plug a rapidly growing budget deficit because of the coronavirus pandemic.

But the pro-Western opposition has criticized the agreement, saying that it poses a long-term "danger" because of obscure provisions that would channel the money toward unnecessary projects that favor Russian companies.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Covid-19 Crisis Could Spur Post-Soviet Fixes
Denis Corboy, William Courtney and Kenneth Yalowitz
The Moscow Times | May 8, 2020

Much of the post-Soviet space remains afflicted with authoritarian rule, inefficient economies, corruption and regional tensions. The Covid-19 crisis could be the kick in the pants that prods countries to address key issues, but they will need help. Targeted Western aid could help willing countries make progress, such as by improving public health and wider support for it, fostering governmental transparency and promoting interstate cooperation.

The pandemic has revealed public health shortcomings worldwide. EU countries were slow to heed warnings and react and some initially resorted to border tightening. The U.S. also has been slow to react, abetted by official overconfidence, confused guidance and federal-state disputes. In post-Soviet countries, especially in underserved rural and separatist regions, healthcare systems are mostly inadequate to the threat.

Five practical steps in the post-Soviet space could improve healthcare and effective governance.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Belarusians Worry About the Economy
Gregory Ioffe
The Jamestown Foundation | May 7, 2020

Belarus has been preoccupied in recent days with President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's decision not to cancel this year's annual May 9 Victory Day military parade, which marks arguably the country's most important public holiday. "I must say that we cannot cancel the parade," declared Lukashenka on Sunday, May 3. "I thought about it at length. Of course, this is an emotional and deeply ideological thing. It must be remembered that those people [World War II veterans] were dying, perhaps also from viruses and other diseases. But sometimes they did not [...] think about it. And they died for us, no matter how lofty it sounds. And just think what people will say... They will say we canceled because we were afraid." At the same time, the president warned the organizers that "no one should be dragged to this event," including not the relatively few surviving Belarusian veterans of the war (Tut.by, May 3). Lukashenka issued an invitation to foreign heads of states (particularly of post-Soviet countries) to come to Minsk

for the parade. But as the government newspaper Zviazda acknowledges, the Belarusian leader realizes that some of his foreign peers may choose not to come—not only out of fear of infection in the middle of a pandemic but also to “save face” or avoid looking hypocritical since they imposed quarantines and curfews in their own countries (Zviazda, May 5). “Let us hope someone arrives. But if they do not, we will hold a parade ourselves, as usual,” Lukashenka mused. At the same time, he called on Russian television to cover the ceremonies in Minsk.

[Read the full article here.](#)

The Georgian media struggles to cope with COVID-19

Giorgi Jangiani

The New Eastern Europe | May 7, 2020

After the first reported case on February 26th, the number of people confirmed to have COVID-19 has gradually begun to rise in Georgia. As of April 15th, 300 cases have been confirmed and 4990 people are being held in quarantine. Georgia’s National Center for Disease Control (NCDC) is expecting the situation “will get worse before it gets better.” The government has already taken strong measures to flatten the curve. It has imposed an overnight curfew, closed public transportation and banned gatherings of more than three people. Most businesses have been moved online, professionals are working from home and children are attending online classes. Under this extraordinary situation, the demand for news media content and TV programmes has drastically increased. However, this growing demand for information is raising concerns about the business models of Georgian media.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Russia’s coronavirus information center allegedly attempting to charge journalists for interviews

Meduza | May 8, 2020

In a newly released documentary about the coronavirus pandemic in Russia, journalist Irina Shikhman claims that an assistant to Dr. Alexander Myasnikov, the head of the country's government-run coronavirus information center, demanded 88,000 rubles (\$1,200) for an interview with the doctor.

Shikhman released the documentary on her well-known YouTube channel, Let’s Talk? (in Russian, A pogovorit?). She claims that the film’s producers requested comments from the Moscow Mayor’s Office, the Moscow region’s Health Ministry and Russian Health Ministry, but received no responses. The film’s producers then decided to reach out to Dr. Myasnikov.

“[Myasnikov] transferred us to his assistant, and he, in turn, said that a 30 minute Skype interview will cost us 88,000 rubles. In response to my question [of] what are we paying for, this person in a government position told me: ‘For his time.’ We saved a recording of the conversation,” Shikhman says in the documentary.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Europe marks 75th anniversary of end of World War II

Commonspace.eu | May 8, 2020

Europe is today marking the end World War II seventy five years ago. Celebrations throughout the continent are subdued since most of Europe is under some form of lockdown due to the coronavirus.

After nearly six years of war that ravaged the continent and brought it to its knees, the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany to the Western Allies and Russia was signed in the early hours of 8 May at a ceremony in a schoolhouse in Rheims, which was the temporary headquarters of the Supreme Allied Commander, General Eisenhower. For Germany, General Alfred Jodl signed the surrender document at 02:41.

To mark Victory in Europe Day (VE Day), President Macron will lay a wreath at the tomb of the unknown soldier in Paris in a closed ceremony. In the United Kingdom Prince Charles will lay a wreath in Scotland and there will be a flypast by the Royal Air Force

Chancellor Merkel will also lead a ceremony at Germany's central War Memorial. In Berlin, residents have been given a special public holiday.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Hungary makes lockdown exception for Israeli kosher slaughterhouse workers

Zev Stub

The Jerusalem Post | May 8, 2020

The Hungarian government is allowing Israelis working in the kosher food industry to enter the country, despite a nationwide lockdown due to COVID-19, in order to allow them to work at one of the only kosher slaughterhouses in Europe that remains open.

The orthodox Jewish communities in Europe have seen a significant decrease in the supply of kosher meat and poultry during the pandemic. Since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, countless workers in the kosher food industry have been unable to fly to kosher slaughterhouses. Even in a scenario in which flights are available, the workers must first enter quarantine for a two-week period, which only serves to create more of a delay for the employees to get to work. Moreover, many of the slaughterhouses, most of which are located in Poland and Spain, have been forced to close as they have not been logistically prepared for the pandemic.

In light of this, the Hungarian government, in cooperation with the Nezer Hakashrut kosher food company and the Hungarian Jewish Communities Association (EMIH), has over the past month, built a procedural basis that includes full health monitoring of the health status of kosher food workers in Israel before they even arrive in Hungary. In this process, 6 shochtim (kosher slaughterhouse workers) have arrived almost two weeks ago and six more arrived earlier this week.

[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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