

Weekly Top 10

WASHINGTON, D.C. July 19, 2019

TO: NCSEJ Leadership and Interested Parties

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

Dear Friend,

This week, NCSEJ participated in two high-level conferences in Washington hosted by the U.S. government.

On Monday, [the Department of Justice held a full-day Summit on Combating Anti-Semitism](#) at its headquarters, featuring speeches by Attorney General William Barr and the top leaders of the departments of Education, the Treasury, and the FBI. Beginning Tuesday and ending Thursday, Secretary Mike Pompeo and U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom Sam Brownback hosted the [second annual State Department Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom](#), which included speeches by the Vice President, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair. On Wednesday at the Ministerial, I was a featured presenter on the [Best Practices in International Religious Freedom Advocacy](#) panel.

This Sunday, Ukrainians head to the polls in snap elections, called in May by newly-inaugurated President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, to secure his party's position in the country's parliament (the Verkhovna Rada). [Zelenskyy's Servant of the People party is expected to win a plurality](#), with the latest polls crediting it with between 40% and 50% of the vote — not quite enough for an outright majority. We'll have more to report next week, after the polls close.

On Thursday, [Bulgaria's Prosecutor-General delivered a letter, co-signed by Bulgaria's Jewish community president](#), the Interior Minister, and the Deputy Foreign Minister, to his country's parliament, urging it to sharply increase penalties for hate crimes, after a spate of anti-Semitic and other hate crimes that they called "isolated" but at the same time, "an indicator of a dangerous trend."

Finally, last week we learned that [Jewish activist Mark Talisman passed away unexpectedly on Thursday, at 78](#). With Mark's passing, the community lost one of our real giants, someone who accomplished so much for Jews around the world and in Israel. As chief of staff to Rep. Charles Vanik in 1972, Mark was instrumental in helping pass the [Jackson-Vanik Amendment](#), which tied U.S. trade relations to a country's emigration policy.

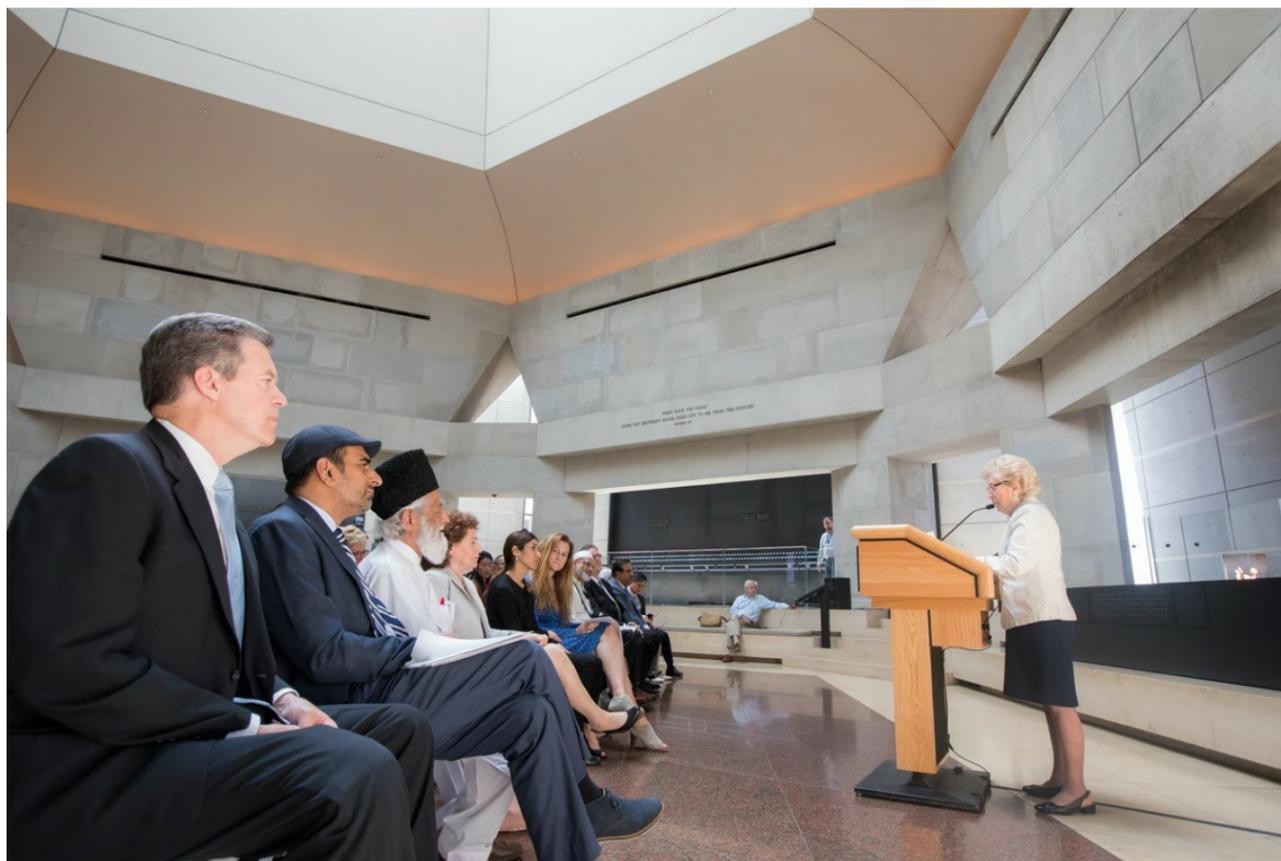
I had the opportunity to work closely with Mark on many issues related to the Soviet Jewry movement, during his eighteen years as head of the Jewish Federations of North America's Washington Action Office. His work impacted the lives of Jews in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. He will be sorely missed.

Sincerely,





CEO Mark Levin speaking at the State Department Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom
(photo: U.S. Department of State)



Deputy Director Lesley Weiss (4th from left) and Ministerial participants at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, as her mother Irene Weiss, a survivor, speaks. *(photo: U.S. Department of State)*

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Survivors of massacres speak out against bigotry

By Carol Morello and Souad Mekhennet

Washington Post, July 16, 2019

Survivors of massacres at a synagogue, a mosque and churches, speaking at a State Department conference on religious freedom Tuesday, urged the rejection of bigotry, racism and hatred and spoke of the need to overcome the divisions they create.

The opening remarks at the Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom at times sounded like a call to Americans to end the polarizing demonization that can lead to violence.

The State Department's conference runs through Thursday, when foreign ministers and other senior officials from more than 100 countries are scheduled to discuss what governments can do to

promote religious freedom. Pompeo initiated the first conference on the topic last year, and the second gathering is more than twice as large.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Pompeo and Brownback Address Religious Freedom Summit

By Jeffrey Cimmino

Washington Free Beacon, July 17, 2019

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom Sam Brownback addressed the second-ever Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom on Tuesday.

Pompeo welcomed the foreign delegations and representatives, noting that "despite our many differences, everyone here agrees on the need for religious pluralism."

"And we all agree that fighting so that each person is free to believe, free to assemble, and to teach the tenets of his or her own faith is not optional - indeed, it is a moral imperative that this be permitted," Pompeo said.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Top Trump officials headline conference focusing on the 'new anti-Semitism'

By Andrew Silow-Carroll

JTA, July 15, 2019

WASHINGTON — U.S. Attorney General William Barr called anti-Semitism a "cancer" at a Department of Justice summit on the topic notable for its focus on anti-Israel activity and for speeches by the top leaders of the departments of Education, the Treasury and the FBI.

Monday's Summit on Combating Anti-Semitism, held at the DOJ headquarters here, featured panel discussions and an audience of about 150, mostly men representing various Jewish organizations and government agencies that deal with some aspect of hate crimes and civil rights.

The conference was bracketed by speeches by Barr and three other top officials of the Trump administration: Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, Secretary of the Treasury Steve Mnuchin and FBI Director Christopher Wray.

[Read the full article here.](#)

JDC aiding Jews affected by munitions blast in Kazakhstan

By Cnaan Liphshiz

JTA, July 17, 2019

A munitions explosion in Kazakhstan that forced thousands to flee their homes left several elderly Jews in need of urgent assistance, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee said.

The local Jewish community of Shymkent and JDC provided relief to nine Jews. Zelik Mordukhai, a local Jewish leader, also delivered aid to non-Jewish evacuees.

Kazakhstan is home to an estimated 9,600 Jews and JDC provides social services to over 1,200 poor Jews Kazakhstan.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Bulgaria's Parliament urged to toughen penalty for preaching fascist or anti-democratic ideology

Sofia Globe, July 18, 2019

A letter has been delivered to all five parliamentary groups in Bulgaria's National Assembly, calling on them to table amendments to the Penal Code to increase the prison term for crimes related to fascist or other anti-democratic ideology from three to five years, the Prosecutor's Office said on July 18.

The letter was signed by Prosecutor-General Sotir Tsatsarov, the president of the Organization of the Jews in Bulgaria "Shalom" Associate Professor Alexander Oscar, Interior Minister Mladen Marinov and Deputy Foreign Minister Georg Georgiev, who is Bulgaria's National Co-ordinator for Combating Antisemitism.

The signatories said that the reason for the letter was a recent succession of manifestations of fascist ideology in incidents in Bulgaria.

[Read the full article here.](#)

First Jewish Youth Center Opened in Russia's Far East

By Mussi Sharfstein

Chabad Lubavitch, July 15, 2019

250 members of the Jewish community of Birobidzhan, Russia, celebrated the opening this month of Chabad's 25 million ruble (\$400,000), 6,500 square feet Jewish youth center. The region is more than 5,000 km (approx. 3,000 mi) in distance from Russia's capital and shares land borders with Mongolia and Japan, among other countries. The vastly different geographical and cultural landscape also services its own unique historic Jewish communities, many of which are over 100 years old.

"This is the first such center in Russia," said the country's Chief Rabbi Berel Lazar who flew in for the event from Moscow, "but by no means will it be the last."

[Read the full article here.](#)

Kremlin's Rejection of United Russia Is Rejection of Politics Itself

By Andrey Pertsev

Carnegie Moscow, July 16, 2019

For the first time in the history of elections to the Moscow city parliament and the existence of United Russia, the ruling party has not nominated a single candidate. There are, of course, United Russia members among those running for the capital's parliament, but they are running as independents.

United Russia had hoped until the last that it would be represented by some candidates, but the Moscow mayor's office spoke out against the party officially backing its candidates, persuading the Kremlin that it was better to take part in elections in which nearly 10 percent of the country's population can vote without the involvement of a party whose ratings are falling.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Half of FSU Jews in rural areas have experienced antisemitic attacks

Jerusalem Post, July 19, 2019

Almost half of the Jews who live in small towns or rural areas across the Former Soviet Union have experienced antisemitic attacks first hand, according to a study by the Institute for Euro-Asian Jewish Studies (IEAJS).

According to the research, Jews who live in big cities are much less likely to have encountered antisemitism, with 15-26% saying they have, as opposed to 47% of those from rural areas or small towns.

The study was carried out with the support of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress.

[Read the full article here.](#)

At Oświęcim/Auschwitz: Honoring Those Who Died By Remembering How They Lived

By Maciek Zabierowski

Jewish Heritage Europe, July 17, 2019

The Chevra Lomdei Mishnayot synagogue is the only Jewish house of prayer still standing in Oświęcim, out of around 20 Jewish prayer sites from before the Holocaust. Opened around 1918, it served the Hassidic community until the war when it was closed down and turned into a German ammunition warehouse.

The synagogue was restored, and since 2000, it has been carefully maintained by the Auschwitz Jewish Center (AJC), an American-Polish non-profit founded by businessman and philanthropist Fred Schwartz (z"l) and operated by the Museum of Jewish Heritage - A Living Memorial to the Holocaust in New York City. The AJC also runs a Jewish Museum next door and cares for the neighboring Kluger Family House where the last Jewish resident of Oświęcim, Szymon Kluger (1925-2000), was born and lived. His passing marked the end of a permanent, living Jewish presence in the town.

The AJC is currently working on a new commemoration project — that of the site of the town's Great Synagogue, which was the central Jewish house of worship from its establishment in the 1860s until the war.... We firmly believe that the Jews of Oświęcim deserve to be remembered not because of Auschwitz but precisely despite it. To let them be forgotten would be to admit posthumous victory to

the Nazis and their collaborators.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Donors suspend funds for Poland's Jewish museum

By Monika Scislowska

Associated Press, July 16, 2019

WARSAW, Poland — A Jewish association says some private donors to Poland's renowned Jewish history museum have suspended funding out of concerns about the government's failure to renew the term of its director.

A special commission in May approved Dariusz Stola for another five-year term, but Culture Minister Piotr Glinski hasn't yet officially reappointed him.

Piotr Wislicki, head of the co-funding Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland, told The Associated Press the museum is running smoothly under acting director Zygmunt Stepinski, who was Stola's deputy, but many donors, including in the U.S. and Israel, have suspended hundreds of thousands of dollars in contributions out of concern for its future.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Ukraine parliamentary election: What you need to know

By Natalia Liubchenkova and Alice Tidey

Euronews, July 19, 2019

Ukraine will head to the polls on Sunday to elect a new parliament, three months after former comedian, Volodymyr Zelenskyi, was elected president.

Zelenskyi dissolved parliament after his landslide victory against Petro Poroshenko in April, bringing elections forward by several months.

Lack of support in parliament has meant the political outsider has been unable to enact his agenda or appoint cabinet ministers, which have to be approved by lawmakers.

[Read the full article here.](#)

After laying low, one pro-Russian party flies high

By Bermet Talant

Kyiv Post, July 12, 2019

One of the paradoxes of Ukrainian politics is that, in the sixth year of Russia's war against Ukraine, the second most popular party in the race for parliament is a Kremlin-favored political alliance led by a tycoon and close friend of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Opposition Platform — For Life pushes for good relations with Russia and opposes Ukraine's drive to join NATO and the European Union. Its leaders travel to Moscow, meet with Russian officials and appear on the state's propagandistic TV news programs. They claim the United States controls the Ukrainian administration and refuse to admit that Russian-led forces in eastern Ukraine are waging a war that has killed some 13,000 people since 2014. And that's just the party's facade.

A closer look at the Opposition Platform reveals that it is less about Russia and more about resurrecting the old Ukraine, where politics was a get-rich scheme that had little to do with serving the country.

[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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