

Weekly Top 10

WASHINGTON, D.C. January 3, 2020

TO: NCSEJ Leadership and Interested Parties

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

Dear Friend,

Please see below the links to this week's news updates. We wish you a good Shabbat.

Sincerely,



Mark B. Levin
NCSEJ Executive Vice-Chairman & CEO

NCSEJ WEEKLY TOP 10 **Washington, D.C. January 3, 2020**

Educating the next generation about the Holocaust in the former USSR

Alan Rosenbaum

The Jerusalem Post | January 2, 2020

While most people are familiar with the figure of six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust, many are not aware that more than one-third of that number were Soviet citizens who lived in the occupied Soviet territories following the German invasion during the early summer of 1941. Many were killed as the Nazis passed through towns and cities as part of their occupation of Soviet territory, which began in June 1941.

An innovative partnership between Yad Vashem and the Genesis Philanthropy Group is educating both the Hebrew-speaking Israeli public, as well as Russian-speaking Jews in Israel and around the world to provide greater awareness, understanding and knowledge about the fate of the Russian Jews under Nazi occupation.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Local Jews recall a different life in former Soviet Union

Sari Lesk

The Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle | January 2, 2020

Leo Soroka's coworker wanted to know: was he Russian or Ukrainian?

Soroka moved to the Milwaukee area from Ukraine in 1992 after the Soviet Union collapsed. A few years later, when asked about his nationality, Soroka answered that he was Jewish.

"He wouldn't understand," Soroka said. "For him, Jewish is just religion, it's not nationality. So people here cannot comprehend why we are calling ourselves Jewish, because we're not practicing. Especially in the beginning, we were not practicing at all."

Soroka and his wife, Olga, left the former Soviet Union after about three decades in an environment where they were the subjects of antisemitic practices. The attitude was present in the Soviet Union for years. After World War II, the Sorokas and others who have since immigrated to the U.S. said they faced a variety of forms of discrimination as a result of their nationality.

The Sorokas said Jews in the Soviet Union were identified from birth.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Dispelling the fear of Novy God

Edith Druyan-Ohayon

Israel HaYom | January 2, 2020

The ushering in of a new year, let alone a new decade, brings with it a flurry of traditional reports: The first baby born on the new year, Australia ushering the new decade ahead of everyone, etc. And in Israel, like every year, the debate over Novy God – the designation of the Russian New Year's Eve and New Year's Day – is once again raging.

But why is it that the same flipping of the page on the Gregorian calendar has earned a political and religious context?

[Read the full article here.](#)

In row over Holocaust history, Israel and Poland issue joint critique of Ukraine

Sam Sokol

Times of Israel | January 2, 2020

Israel and Poland, which have clashed repeatedly in recent years over differing interpretations of the history of the Second World War, came together on Thursday to issue a rare joint condemnation of Ukraine over its efforts to rehabilitate nationalists who collaborated with the Nazis.

The criticism came one day after Ukrainians marked the 111th birthday of Stepan Bandera, the wartime leader of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), a violently anti-Semitic organization that collaborated with the Nazis. Among Holocaust historians, the consensus is that the OUN and its military offshoot, known as the UPA, were responsible for the deaths of thousands of Jews and up to 100,000 Poles during the war (estimates vary).

In a joint letter to civic leaders in Lviv and Kyiv, Israeli ambassador Joel Lion and his Polish counterpart, Bartosz Cichocki, expressed concern regarding efforts to honor Bandera and Andryi Melnyk, the head of a competing faction of the OUN.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Increasing the power of civil society in Ukraine

Oksana Khomei

The New Eastern Europe | December 22, 2019

Since 2014 Ukraine has chosen to pursue a path of European integration in both its domestic and foreign policies. The civil society sector itself has been actively pushing for an ambitious reform agenda, related to the implementation of the commitments envisaged by the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Israel takes issue with Nazi sympathizers named by Ukraine as national heroes

Itamar Eichner

Ynet | December 28, 2019

On the first night of Hanukah, Benyamin Badalov ascends the platformed bimah in Bukhara's central synagogue to recite the evening prayer.

Among the handful of worshippers to attend, the tall 15-year-old, dressed in Nike trainers, sweats and an off-white yarmulke, is the youngest man in the room by decades.

"This is our future cantor," says Abram Iskhakov, 70, the synagogue's current cantor and the president of the Bukhara Jewish Community. "The youth don't come, they go to Israel and America, but he comes."

Once home to more than 23,000 Jews, the ancient Silk Road city of Bukhara now has around 200. Thousands of Bukharian Jews emigrated because of antisemitic policies under the Soviet Union, and still more due to Uzbekistan's bleak economic prospects after its independence in 1991. The emigre community is far larger than its wellspring, with more than 50,000 Bukharian Jews in New York and more than 100,000 in Israel.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Polish PM accuses Putin of lying about outbreak of WWI

Vanessa Gera

Times of Israel | December 29, 2019

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — Poland's prime minister said Sunday that Russian President Vladimir Putin has been lying in remarks blaming Poland for the outbreak of World War II, and argued that Putin is doing it to deflect from recent Russian political failures.

Putin has said on several recent occasions that Poland bears responsibility for the outbreak of the war, deepening tensions between the two Slavic nations. On Friday, the Russian ambassador to Poland was summoned to the Polish Foreign Ministry in protest.

World War II began in 1939 when Poland was invaded first by Nazi Germany, then by the Soviet Union two weeks later. The dual occupation came days after the two totalitarian states signed a pact with a secret protocol to carve up Poland and the Baltic states. Some six million Polish citizens were killed in the war.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Jews Are Going Underground

Debra Lipstadt

The Atlantic | December 29, 2019

In a month of terrible anti-Semitic attacks, including a stabbing yesterday of multiple people at a Hanukkah celebration at a rabbi's home in Monsey, New York, the news that most depressed me did not involve violence. It was not something done to Jews but something Jews did. A synagogue in the Netherlands is no longer publicly posting the times of prayer services. If you want to join a service, you have to know someone who is a member of the community.

Do not misunderstand me. I was and am in a fury over the multiple assaults, culminating in the Monsey attack, which was the worst since the murders in Jersey City, which, some readers might not realize, was less than three weeks ago.

In Europe and the United States, Jews have been repeatedly assaulted on the street. Tombstones were desecrated in Slovakia. In London, anti-Semitic graffiti was painted on synagogues and Jewish-owned stores. A Belgian daily newspaper accused a lawmaker who is Jewish of being a spy for Israel. A Polish town refused to install small brass plates that commemorate Holocaust victims. In Italy, the town of Schio did the same because, the mayor said, they would be "divisive." (Divisive to whom?) This intolerance is coming from right-wing extremists, progressive leftists, and other minorities who, themselves, are often the object of persecution. Anti-Semites seem to think it is open season on Jews. And maybe, given the many incidents, they are right.

So why has the news that a synagogue in the Netherlands stopped posting the time of services upset me above all? Because it is vivid proof that anti-Semitism is driving Jews underground in the West.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Why Is Russia in Syria?

Jakub Grygiel

The American Interest | January 2, 2019

Russia recently announced that it will spend \$500 million to fix and update the commercial port of Tartus in Syria. In 2017 Moscow had renewed its lease over the port, signing an agreement with Damascus in a clear show of support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. But Russian (and before 1991, Soviet) naval presence there dates back to the early 1970s. A remnant of a much vaster Soviet string of bases developed from the 1970s on, Tartus is now the only port Russia has outside of those on its own shores. What to make of this renewed Russian effort to have a Mediterranean presence? Given Russia's economic weakness—and long land borders—why is Moscow so focused on Syria and in particular on having a naval footprint there?

[Read the full article here.](#)

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.

