

Weekly Top 10

WASHINGTON, D.C. May 15, 2020

TO: NCSEJ Leadership and Interested Parties

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

Dear Friend,

Last night, like many of you, I watched the Embassy of Israel's Independence Day celebration. It was a wonderful combination of music, food, and inspirational messages from ordinary individuals and celebrities. Israel Independence Day events remind me of the impact that Jewish émigrés from the former Soviet Union have had on the Jewish State.

Hundreds of thousands of Jews from Russia, Ukraine, the Caucasus and Central Asia changed the landscape of Israel and the Middle East in a matter of a few years. It is estimated that 20-25% of Israel's population is from the former Soviet Union. Russian-speaking Jews have contributed to every facet of Israeli life. Aliyah was one of the cornerstones, if not the foundation of the Soviet Jewry movement and we continue to marvel at the results.

Yesterday, NCSEJ hosted a webinar featuring community leaders from Latvia and Lithuania. Dmitry Krupnikov, Deputy Chairman of the Latvian Council of Jewish Communities and Faina Kukliansky, Chairwoman of the Lithuanian Jewish Community provided updates on their communities' response to the COVID-19 epidemic, the current state of the communities, Holocaust remembrance, and progress on restitution and heritage issues.

NCSEJ works with both leaders and communities on these and other issues. Mr. Krupnikov and Ms. Kukliansky are in regular and frequent contact with their respective governments to ensure community concerns are addressed.

Mr. Krupnikov mentioned in his presentation a Latvian film about Zanis Lipke, who saved 55 Jews during the Holocaust. It is called The Mover and is in English. The link is <http://nkc.gov.lv/en/get-to-know-a-film/new-films/the-mover/>. There is also a museum in honor of Zanis Lipke in Riga.

Former NCSEJ Executive Director Martin A. Wenick died of Coronavirus complications last week. Marty was 80 years old and would have celebrated his 81st today.

Before coming to NCSEJ, Marty had a distinguished career in the State Department. He served in Afghanistan, the Soviet Union, Italy and, Czechoslovakia. Marty was well acquainted with the Soviet Jewry movement before his time at NCSEJ. During his posting in Moscow in the early 1970s, he met with Jewish refuseniks and community members — sometimes at great risk to both the Jewish activists and himself.

I had the opportunity to work with Marty for more than three years at NCSEJ and thereafter when he became Executive Vice President of HIAS. Marty was a colleague and a good friend who, together with his wife Alice, became family friends.

Marty was a smart, caring, dedicated, and warm personality. He was never afraid to express his opinions, even when it went against the grain. Marty made a difference in both his professional and personal life. His was a life well lived and he will be missed.

Shabbat Shalom!

Sincerely,



Mark B. Levin
NCSEJ Executive Vice-Chairman & CEO

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NCSEJ WEEKLY TOP 10
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Martin Wenick, 80, leader of Soviet Jewry fight

Ben Harris

JTA | May 13, 2020

(JTA) — Martin Wenick, a leader of the fight to free Soviet Jews who has later instrumental in helping them resettle in the United States, died on May 7 due to complications of COVID-19. He was 80.

Wenick spent 27 years as State Department diplomat before taking over in 1989 as the head of the National Conference for Soviet Jewry, a coalition of Jewish organizations working to support Jews struggling to survive under Communism. A fluent Russian speaker, Wenick had been stationed in Moscow in the early 1970s, where he followed the plight of Jews denied visas to emigrate.

After his retirement from the State Department, Wenick spent three years leading NCSJ. After the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of restrictive emigration policies for Russian Jews, Wenick became the executive director of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, the lead Jewish agency helping to resettle 140,000 Soviet Jews in the United States.

“He was a great leader of HIAS, and I will always be grateful for everything he taught me, for the example he set, and for the opportunities he gave me,” said Mark Hetfield, HIAS’ president and CEO.

Wenick grew up in a secular Jewish family in New Jersey and attended Brown University.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Kyiv and Moscow Square Off Over Legal Arrangements for the Black Sea

Paul Goble

The Jamestown Foundation | May 14, 2020

Moscow’s continuing efforts to reduce the Black Sea to the status of a de facto Russian lake (see EDM, January 23) have forced Ukraine to seek increasingly inventive means of pushing back. Recently, some Ukrainian commentators have begun calling for a Timor Sea-type resolution for the territorial delimitation of the Black Sea that would involve Georgia and other littoral states as well as the Russian Federation (Svpressa.ru, May 8). Additionally, some have called on Kyiv to come out strongly in favor of the position, floated by the Turkish government, that a new canal bypassing central Istanbul would not fall under the terms of the 1936 Montreux Convention, effectively annulling that nearly century-old accord (Topcur.ru, May 9; see EDM, March 31).

These exchanges have so far remained mostly at the level of expert commentaries rather than official declarations. Yet, they provide a window into the thinking in Kyiv, where officials are clearly hopeful that they can invoke international law against the Russians (see EDM, November 12, 2015, March 1, 2017, June 12, 2018, May 30, 2019). Moscow believes it can block any moves in that direction in either case. However, the act of publicly raising these “lawfare” ideas sets the stage for Ukraine to advance its position not only on those two issues but also, and perhaps most importantly, on the future status of Russian-occupied Crimea. Indeed, a revision of Montreux cannot help but provide Ukraine with new possibilities to enlist Western support.

[Read the full article here.](#)

For Russia’s poor regions, lockdown is a luxury

Anastasia Mironova

Riddle.io | May 12, 2020

There are at present more than 230,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Russia. It is entirely

clear that if Moscow had shut down all public activities more promptly, the country's rate of infection could have been significantly slowed down or even reduced. This pandemic may well have revealed the most fatal flaw in the system of governance Vladimir Putin has constructed over the past two decades. That flaw is an unnatural imbalance in resources. This lopsided economy has led to catastrophe: the authorities were unable to shut Moscow down, simply because too many people depend on the capital.

In the United States, however, the authorities were able to shut down New York. The American economy proved resilient enough not to collapse as a result; surrounding states have been able to keep their heads above water. It is hard to fathom just how many Americans would have perished from this virus had the country been unable to isolate New York, the epicentre of the epidemic.

But it is very easy to fathom just how many people are getting ill and dying here in Russia.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Coronavirus spread in Russia appears to be slowing, though new daily cases hover at 10,000

Meduza | May 15, 2020

On the morning of May 15, Russian officials announced that the country recorded 10,598 new coronavirus infections in the past day (up 4.2 percent from the day before) bringing the nation's total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases to 262,843 patients. The only country in the world with more registered coronavirus patients is the United States, where more than 1.4 million people have tested positive for the disease.

Another 113 people reportedly died from the disease, raising Russia's total number of fatalities officially caused by COVID-19 to 2,418. As many as 58,226 people in Russia are known to have recovered fully, including 4,696 in the past day.

Russia says it's conducted more than 6.4 million coronavirus tests, so far, including 225,000 in the past day.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Georgia will not extend the state of emergency beyond 22 May

Cmmonspace.eu | May 15, 2020

The Georgian government will not extend the State of Emergency when it expires on May 22. This was stated by prime minister Giorgi Gakharia at a Government meeting on Friday (15 May)

Gakharia said that he was ready to go to Parliament afterwards and answer any questions about the conduct of the government during the State of Emergency that has been in place since 23 March as part of the government's response to deal with the coronavirus pandemic.

Some restrictions however will remain in place. The prime minister added,

"I would like to emphasize here that this does not mean that the restrictions imposed will be completely and suddenly lifted. These are some limitations that epidemiologists believe we need to maintain in order to maintain the high level of risk control we have today."

[Read the full article here.](#)

Central Asia Caught in Economic Perfect Storm amid Oil Price Collapse and COVID-19 Pandemic

Azad Garibov

CACI Analyst | May 12, 2020

At the beginning of 2020, Brent oil was traded slightly above US\$ 60 per barrel. By March 30, it had fallen to US \$22.8, a price last seen in 2002. Despite the historic decision by OPEC+ to cut production, Brent is still traded below US\$ 30 as of May 12 and will average \$33/b in 2020 according to EIA forecasts. The low and volatile prices will have serious consequences for Central Asia, an important oil producing region.

The pandemic-related economic slowdown also reduced gas consumption in China, by far the most important market for Central Asian gas exports. Previously expected to rise 8.6 percent on a yearly basis, Chinese gas consumption dropped by 17 percent in February compared to the same month in 2019. On March 5, Reuters reported that PetroChina suspended some natural gas imports, mostly from unspecified piped natural gas suppliers. Of China's piped gas imports, 98.3 percent or 45 billion cubic meters (bcm) came from Central Asia in 2018. Kazakhstan has announced that its gas exports to China fell by 20-25 percent, as the country received a force majeure declaration from Beijing on gas import reduction on March 6.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Moldova: The consequences of failed Russian credit. What next?

Dennis Cenusă

The New Eastern Europe | May 15, 2020

In order to stop Russian credit viewed as damaging to Moldova's medium and long-term interests, the country's opposition resorted to the Constitutional Court's legal weapon of constitutional control over the legislative activity, which curtailed parliament's eagerness of signing an agreement with Moscow at any costs. The court approved all three of the opposition's complaints without exception, arguing that the credit conflicted with the constitution. However, this decision could backfire.

Immediately after the decision was announced, President Igor Dodon suggested that the court is acting similarly to a "captured state", adopting political orders instead of acting independently. Soon after that, the President of the Venice Commission Gianni Buquicchio condemned the "attacks" against the Moldovan Constitutional Court and emphasized the need of effective separation of powers. This narrative is strengthening geopolitical divisions in public debate and has also affected the credibility of state institutions. There is very little time until the EU becomes involved in this situation too. European institutions acknowledge that the court is an independent institution and needs protection from political interference. The Socialists and Igor Dodon argue that the court is a "public enemy" after it cancelled the Russian credit. Any internal or external political support for the Constitutional Court will simply benefit the Socialists' narrative that the court is a politicised institution.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Ukraine Passes a Critical Anticorruption Bill

Andrew Kramer

The New York Times | May 13, 2020

MOSCOW — The Ukrainian government cleared an important anticorruption hurdle Wednesday when Parliament passed a bill preventing insiders from siphoning off international aid money through bank bailouts.

The vote was seen as opening the door to International Monetary Fund lending, desperately needed for Ukraine's nose-diving economy, and became a rare success for President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Mr. Zelensky, a former comedian elected president last year, had inspired high hopes with his commitment to weeding out corruption. But those hopes were dimmed this spring when former officials went public with accusations of backsliding and insider dealing, an old scourge in Ukraine.

The new bill opening the way for fresh lending from the I.M.F., for example, came even as courts in Ukraine ordered a state bank to pay oligarch-linked offshore companies \$259 million to settle a contentious lawsuit, suggesting the money might enter one door and leave through another.

[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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