

Weekly Top 10

WASHINGTON, D.C. April 1, 2022

TO: NCSEJ Leadership and Interested Parties

**FROM: James Schiller, Chairman;
Mark B. Levin, Executive Vice-Chairman & CEO**

Dear Friend,

The Biden Administration announced yesterday further assistance to Ukraine in the amount of \$500 million in direct budgetary aid. This is in addition to the more than \$15 billion of humanitarian and security aid given over the last few weeks.

We learned from our Kyiv Representative yesterday that the director of the Jewish community of Ivano-Frankivsk was stabbed by an assailant yelling anti-Semitic epithets. The attack happened during the distribution of meals to the needy. The director was released from the hospital and the perpetrator was arrested and criminal proceedings were opened against him. We will keep you informed of any further developments.

We congratulate Deborah Lipstadt on her confirmation as Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism with the rank of Ambassador. NCSEJ and other Jewish organizations were instrumental in helping to pass the Global Antisemitism Review Act in 2004 which established the position of Special Envoy to monitor and combat antisemitism in the State Department. We were part of the recent coalition supporting the elevation of the position to the rank of ambassador. We look forward to working with Ambassador Lipstadt on fighting global anti-Semitism, particularly in the countries of Eastern Europe and Eurasia.

NCSEJ was pleased to attend the Living Legacy Conference luncheon yesterday sponsored by the American Friends of Lubavitch. At the event, Rabbi Levi Shemtov noted the presence of former Yeshiva students who had been imprisoned in Rostov over a visa issue fifteen years ago. He thanked Deputy Director Lesley Weiss and me for the pivotal role we played in securing their quick release and transfer out of Russia to Ukraine. It was a pleasure to meet the former students.

Sincerely,
Mark B. Levin
NCSEJ Executive Vice-Chairman & CEO

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The Battle for the Mural – and the Future of Belarus

Sarah A. Topol
New York Times | March 30, 2022

As his family slept, the man spent his nights planning. There were about 40 security cameras among the three buildings in central Minsk, maybe even more. He had long ago calculated their blind spots. He knew there was only one place in the shared courtyard they didn't see. It took him a day to map out the best approach. The group had decided that they would act in the evening, when there would be enough people on the street so that their actions would not arouse suspicion but not so many that someone would be likely to report them to the police. He wasn't afraid for himself as much as for the rest of them. If they got caught, it would be his fault.

They positioned their spotters to watch for the Belarusian security services, the *siloviki*. They agreed on a plan to create an emergency diversion if they arrived.

On the morning of Feb. 25, he took a white piece of cloth the size of a flag and painted it quickly. It would take four hours to dry. When it was ready, he folded it deliberately, carefully aligning the fabric to make sure it would take the least amount of time to unfurl. He attached carabiners to the corners and put it in a bag.

As he made his way to the fence next to the utility shed, the man felt only anger — a voice in his head that demanded to know *how can a person be afraid to do something like this?* When he reached the fence, he hooked up the carabiners, then threw the cloth over the top. It unfurled in seconds. He fastened the bottom and stepped back. Weeks of planning ended in minutes. In the purple light, the banner was ethereal and simple — the logo of their group, a peace sign and the words NO WAR.

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Azerbaijan opens tourism office in Tel Aviv
Jerusalem Post Staff
Jerusalem Post | March 31, 2022

Last week, the Azerbaijan Tourism Board (ATB) announced the opening of its official representation at Herbert Samuel Dock in Tel Aviv. The new office reflects the ATB's strategy to embrace the opportunity for change and invites travelers to take a new look at what Azerbaijan has to offer in this new era.

"We are delighted to announce the opening of our new representative office in Tel Aviv. This office will serve to establish fruitful collaborations with our Israeli counterparts, while increasing awareness about Azerbaijan among Israelis, maintaining day-to-day management and administration related to tourism promotion, along with detailed market research, and bring Azerbaijan and Israel even closer," said Florian Sengstschmid, Chief Executive Officer of the Azerbaijan Tourism Board.

The new office will be working with all of the major travel agents, tour operators and airlines that are currently resuming their direct three-hour flights to Baku.

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Ukraine starts spring sowing campaign in 20 regions
Ukrinform | March 31, 2022

Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal said this in a video address, Ukrinform reports.

"The sowing campaign has already started in 20 regions of Ukraine.

This is really good news, because on the same day last year, the sowing campaign began in only 15 regions," Shmyhal said.

According to available data, the projected area of sowing is 6 million hectares of land. This is 80% of the area sown last year.

"Today, our farmers are no less courageous and loyal to their front. As the future food security of the country and the world depends on them. We thank them for their courage and dedication to their work," Shmyhal said.

The head of government added that due to the state order for social products, the food industry would expand new capacities and hire new workers, in particular this relates to 300 such enterprises.

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Putin Signs Decree Creating Ruble Payment System For Russian Gas To Bolster Currency **RFE/RL Russian Service** **Radio Free Europe | March 31, 2022**

President Vladimir Putin has signed a decree forcing some purchasers of Russian gas to set up a special account to pay for their supplies as the country tries to cope with the impact of Western sanctions imposed because of Moscow's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine last month.

Putin said after signing the decree that, from April 1, buyers of Russian gas from what Russia deems "unfriendly" countries would have to set up special "K-accounts" to transfer their payments. Once the payment is received, the funds will be exchanged into rubles. The entire payment facility will be set up and run through Russia's Gazprombank, a subsidiary of state energy giant Gazprom.

Putin also said any country refusing to use the payment mechanism will be in violation of their contracts and face "corresponding repercussions."

European leaders have rejected paying for deliveries in rubles, saying such a move would undermine sanctions imposed on Moscow because of the war in Ukraine.

It is not clear if Russia can demand that buyers with contracts already agreed upon use the mechanism.

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War in Ukraine: Uman Jews Deny Russian Claim Synagogue Used to Store Arms **Sam Sokol** **Haaretz | March 30, 2022**

Ukrainian rabbi Shlomo Wilhelm of Zhytomyr says that reports in the Israeli media claiming that Jews of his city ran away because of antisemitism are false.

Wilhelm spoke to the *Jerusalem Post* on Wednesday and denied the report. "This is a complete, utter lie; there were no beatings and nothing of the sort. The only reason we left is this damn war: because of the sirens and missiles that fell nearby. There is no other reason for us to leave Ukraine."

The rabbi asked the following from the media: "Please publish this everywhere: The report is a complete lie that harms the Jewish community in Zhytomyr and Ukrainian Jews in general. The Jews of Ukraine are leaving solely because of the war. To say that there has been no antisemitism in recent years - this is a complete lie."

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Putin Still Thinks Ukraine Will Collapse, Making Diplomacy an Empty Exercise

Anshel Pfeffer

Haaretz | March 31, 2022

The headlines in recent days regarding any progress in the Russia-Ukraine peace talks that took place Tuesday in Istanbul should all be taken with a great deal of skepticism – especially the optimistic ones talking of a breakthrough toward a cease-fire agreement.

Most of the Ukrainian proposals made in the talks are not new, and the Russian openness to discussing these proposals is mainly due to their need for more time to redeploy their forces for a new offensive.

The main components of the Ukrainian position in the talks – accepting “neutrality” and the fact that Ukraine will not join NATO; alternative security guarantees from Western powers; and a willingness to negotiate with Russia on the future of the annexed Crimean Peninsula and the separatist enclaves in the Donbas – have already been raised publicly by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in recent weeks and been largely ignored by the Russians.

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In Ukraine, Israeli medical staff and Jewish volunteers help thousands cope with war's effects

Cnaan Liphshiz

Jewish Telegraphic Agency | March 25, 2022

(JTA) — Israeli physicians and Jewish groups are assisting thousands of non-Jews across Ukraine deal with the effects of the Russian invasion into that country.

Near Lviv in Ukraine's west, a field hospital set up this week by the Israeli government with physicians and nurses from the Schneider Children's Medical Center near Tel Aviv has treated at least 160 patients, most of them children, since it opened Tuesday, according to the Jewish News website on Ukrainian Jewry.

There are 66 beds and dozens of staff and volunteers working alongside the medical staff from the Schneider Center at Israel's Kohav Meir hospital — a name that means “shining star” in Hebrew but is also a reference to Golda Meir, an former Israeli prime minister who was born in Kyiv and is seen as an inspiration by many Ukrainians.

Israel and the United States are among a handful of countries that have set up field hospitals in Ukraine. The Israeli one is set up to treat about 150 patients daily, according to Israel Hayom.

Most of the patients have issues unrelated to the fighting but have lost access to medical treatment because of it.

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Once branded 'alarmist' over Russian fears, Baltic states call for more military support

Phil McCausland

NBC News | March 31, 2022

TALLINN, Estonia — Each new bomb and missile that strikes Ukraine casts a long shadow across this country and the other Baltic states that share a border with Russia.

Unlike Ukraine, however, these states — Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania — are members of NATO and are close allies of the United States. For years, they have raised the alarm that Russia is their most existential threat. Yet, they feel they received little response prior to the invasion of Ukraine.

Now, unless they get further support from their allies, some worry they could be the next target of the Kremlin and the very bombs and missiles that it has used to level Ukrainian cities.

Estonian Foreign Affairs Minister Eva-Maria Liimets told NBC News on Tuesday that Russia is not a direct threat at the moment, but her nation's defense and its future as a liberal democracy depend on the clear support of its allies, especially Washington.

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NC's close ties to Ukrainian neighbor will be tested as war's impact spills over

Richard Stradling

The News and Observer | March 31, 2022

Smokehouse, a restaurant in Chisinau, the capital of the Eastern European country of Moldova, has become a distribution point for food, diapers and other supplies for refugees fleeing the war in neighboring Ukraine.

Smokehouse used to serve American-style Tex-Mex and BBQ, including pulled pork sandwiches with sides of mac and cheese, baked beans and corn succotash.

"That's where all the Americans go," Elaine Marshall, the N.C. Secretary of State, said in an interview. "And all the Tar Heels in particular, we go there. You would not be a stranger at this restaurant."

Marshall has visited Moldova more than a dozen times over the last 20 years. She's the driving force behind an unusually deep relationship between a state and a foreign country, one that many North Carolinians would be hard pressed to find on a map.

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