



# NewsWatch

## December 2010

### NCSJ Board of Governors Meets in Washington, D.C.

On June 15, 2010, NCSJ Executive Committee and Board members were joined by diplomats, government officials, Jewish community leaders, and other interested parties for the Spring Board of Governors meeting. NCSJ Chairman Richard Stone gave opening remarks.

#### STUDENT PROGRAM

NCSJ Director of Community Services and Cultural Affairs Lesley Weiss reported on the NCSJ Student Leadership Trip in March from Stanford University to Kyiv. The trip was part of NCSJ's Student Leadership Program, which helps nurture the next generation of Jewish leaders in America and the former Soviet Union (FSU).

Kyiv program participant Margarita Lopatina described the group's meetings with Ukrainian Jewish leaders and with officials from the U.S. and Israeli Embassies and the Ukrainian government. During the week-long trip, American students

learned about Ukraine's flourishing Jewish community, which includes synagogues, day schools, and Jewish community centers. The Ukrainian Jewish participants explored their connection to the worldwide Jewish community and discussed how to advocate for democracy, civil society, and a strong Israel.

*Continued on page 2*



*Student Leadership Program participant Margarita Lopatina addresses the NCSJ Board (all Board photos: Ron Sachs/CNP)*

### NCSJ Leads Mission to Baku, Azerbaijan, Moscow, St. Petersburg

From October 10-19th, NCSJ Chairman Richard Stone and President Alexander Smukler led a mission to Azerbaijan and Russia, visiting the cities of Baku, Moscow and Saint Petersburg.

#### AZERBAIJAN

In Baku, the NCSJ delegation met with senior government officials and Jewish community leaders. The delegation visited the local synagogue, Jewish community center, and the new Ohr Avner Jewish day school.

In meetings with Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov and Chair of the State Committee for Work with Religious Associations Hidayat Orujov, the delegation discussed the tolerant religious environment in Azerbaijan. The delegation also met with Sheikh ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazade, chairman of the Caucasus Muslims Department and co-chair of the Commonwealth of Independent States Interreligious Council. Government officials in every meeting spoke of their support for the growth and development of Azerbaijan's Jewish community.

The delegation was briefed by Adam Sterling, Chargé d'Affaires of the U.S. Embassy in Baku, who discussed

Azerbaijan's strategic importance to the United States and the West. Azerbaijan is an important partner in the war on terror, he said, and has supported U.S. efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. The delegation also met with Israeli Ambassador Michael Lavon-Lotem, who said that anti-Semitism is almost non-existent in Azerbaijan and that Azerbaijan has a good relationship with Israel.

*Continued on page 3*



*NCSJ and Azerbaijani Jewish leaders at the Or Avner day school*

## Board of Governors Meeting

Continued from page 1

The program was coordinated in conjunction with Stanford University and Kyiv Hillels and funded by the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life and Culture, Koret Foundation, and the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco.

### JACKSON-VANIK

NCSJ Executive Director Mark Levin updated the attendees on the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which links the granting of preferential trade treatment to a country's emigration policy. Congress passed the Amendment, which is directed toward non-market economies, as part of a trade bill in 1974. Levin discussed his recent testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Subcommittees on Europe and on Trade and Non-Proliferation, in support of Congress graduating the Russian Federation from the Amendment.

NCSJ has publicly supported Russia's graduation since 2001 and clearly states its support in meetings with the White House, State Department, and with Members of Congress, he said. He noted that NCSJ also supports the graduation of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Moldova from the Amendment.

### COMMUNAL PROPERTY

Herbert Block, Assistant Executive Vice-President of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), spoke about the restitution of Jewish communal property. Block defined Jewish communal property as properties that made up the infrastructure of pre-Holocaust Jewish communities. An estimated 21,000 such properties existed before World War II in Central and Eastern Europe. To date, about 20% of these properties have been restituted to Jewish communities or covered by government compensation.

Block mentioned the recent Terezin Declaration, a follow-up to the 2009 Holocaust-Era Assets Conference, which lays out guidelines and best practices for addressing restitution and compensation. Of the 47 countries participating in the Assets

Conference, 43 agreed to the declaration, he said. Belarus and Russia have not agreed to these principles. Both JDC and NCSJ are members of the World Jewish Restitution Organization, an umbrella organization that seeks restitution and compensation for private and communal Jewish properties.



Chairman Richard Stone (left) and keynote speaker Dan Russell



Hudson Institute Senior Fellow Zeyno Baran speaks on Turkey

### OSCE CONFERENCE

Fred Turner, Chief of Staff for the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (U.S. Helsinki Commission), briefed the attendees on the Organization on Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) conference in Astana, Kazakhstan scheduled for June 28-30, the fifth high-level meeting convened by the OSCE on tolerance and non-discrimination. NCSJ Director of Community Services and Cultural Affairs Lesley Weiss subsequently attended the conference.

This year marks the 35th anniversary of the signing of the Helsinki Final Act and the 20th anniversary of the Copenhagen Document, which included the first reference to anti-Semitism in an international human rights document.

### TURKEY'S INFLUENCE

Zeyno Baran, Senior Fellow and Director of the Center for Eurasian Policy at the Hudson Institute, spoke about Turkey's expanding influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia. In the last decade, she said, Turkey has taken an increasingly active role in the international community, shifting alliances away from the Western/Euro-Atlantic community to operate with more independence. Turkey has also become more conservative; polls show reverses in attitudes toward gender equality and reduced tolerance for non-practicing Muslims.

Baran also discussed Turkey's negative tone and rhetoric towards Israel, which has been increasingly seen as anti-Semitic. She said that Turkey has become much more active in the broader Eurasian region.

### KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Daniel Russell, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, discussed the "reset" in U.S.-Russia relations.

## NCSJ Mission to Azerbaijan, Russia

Continued from page 1

### RUSSIA

In Moscow, the delegation met with Nikolay Uspensky, Russian National Security Council Advisor at the Kremlin and Mikhail Margelov, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Russian Federation Council. Topics discussed included U.S.-Russia relations, Russian foreign policy on Iran and the Middle East, the Russian perspective on the Middle East peace process, and the state of xenophobia



NCSJ and Jewish leaders with Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov

and anti-Semitism in Russia. The delegation was also briefed by U.S. Ambassador John Beyrle and Israeli Ambassador Dorit Golender.

The delegation celebrated Shabbat at the historic Choral Synagogue with Chief Rabbi of Moscow Pinchas Goldschmidt. The delegation also visited the Marina Roscha Synagogue with Chief Rabbi of Russia Berel Lazar.

In Saint Petersburg, the delegation visited the JDC community center Yesod, and met with several Jewish community groups, including Hillel and ORT. The delegation also met with noted community leader Evgenia Lvova to discuss current community needs.



NCSJ and Jewish leaders with Sheikh ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazade

## NCSJ Meets with Foreign Minister, Senior Diplomats at Lithuanian Embassy

On November 16, NCSJ joined with other American Jewish organizations in a meeting with Foreign Minister Audronius Azubalis at the Embassy of the Republic of Lithuania in Washington, D.C. Azubalis was joined by Lithuanian Ambassador Zygimantas Pavilionis and senior diplomat Rolandas Kacinskas.

The Jewish organization participants included Lesley Weiss, NCSJ Director of Community Services and Cultural Affairs, Arie Bucheister, Restitution Specialist at the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, and Dan Mariaschin, Executive Vice President of B'nai B'rith International.

The meeting took place just prior to the embassy premier of a photographic exhibition titled "Sounds of Silence: Traces of Jewish Life in Lithuania," which depicts synagogues, cemeteries and other Jewish sites.

Topics of discussion included Lithuania's positive relations with Israel, investi-

gations of Jewish World War II partisans, and draft compensation legislation on Jewish property restitution.

Azubalis talked about the work of the Speaker of the Seimas (parliament) to push the compensation legislation through its successful first reading, where it received a large "aye" vote. Azubalis said that enacting the legislation would be an important step for the country and that passage is possible this year.

He also said that no formal charges have been presented in the investigation of Jewish World War II partisans and that there is no chance the cases will move forward. Weiss, Bucheister and Mariaschin urged that the cases be formally closed.

Pavilonis and Azubalis said that the Seimas has named 2011 as "The Year of Remembrance for the Victims of the Holocaust in Lithuania" and mentioned programs they hope can be conducted with diaspora Jewish communities.



(l-r) FM Azubalis; Ina Navazelskis, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum; Lesley Weiss, NCSJ; and Dan Mariaschin, B'nai B'rith International, at a reception following the meeting (embassy photo)

## JFNA Marks 'Operation Exodus' Anniversary at General Assembly

In November, in New Orleans, Louisiana, the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) hosted its annual General Assembly (GA). During the opening session, JFNA National Chairman Emeritus Joel Tauber presented a video and a brief history celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Operation Exodus campaign, which raised over \$900 million to resettle Soviet Jews in Israel and North America.

NCSJ played a leadership role in publicizing the campaign and raising money to help the State of Israel resettle almost one million Jews. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, then-NCSJ Chairman Shoshana Cardin and then-Executive Director Martin Wenick led numerous Federation leadership missions to the former Soviet Union in support of the campaign, one of the greatest repatriation efforts in Jewish history. Former NCSJ Chairman Richard Wexler chaired the Operation Exodus campaign in 1993-1994.

NCSJ was represented at the GA by Chairman Richard Stone, Vice-President Stephen Greenberg, Executive Director Mark Levin, and Director of Community Services and Cultural Affairs Lesley Weiss. The GA is an annual conference attended by key Jewish Federation lay leaders, donors, and professionals, as well as the leadership of JFNA's partner organizations and other important national Jewish organizations.

Visit [www.jewishfederations.org/operationexodus](http://www.jewishfederations.org/operationexodus) for more information on the history and impact of Operation Exodus.



*Jewish émigrés from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe prepare to make aliyah as part of Operation Exodus*

### **Save the Dates!**

### **NCSJ Upcoming Board of Governors Meetings**

**Tuesday, June 14, 2011  
Tuesday, December 6, 2011**



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