

Remembering the hundreds of innocents Russia murdered five years ago today

National Post Alexandra Chyczij

Alexandra Chyczij

Today marks the fifth anniversary of the downing of the Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 over Russian-occupied eastern Ukraine. It has been confirmed that a Buk missile, fired by a unit of the Russian Federation's 53rd Antiaircraft Missile Brigade, brought down this civilian airliner, murdering 298 passengers and crewmembers. Among the victims there was a Canadian, Andrei Anghel, a 24-year-old medical student from Ajax, Ontario.

On July 17 we remember them and the heart-wrenching scenes broadcast from the crash site — a child's toy splayed out in the field where pieces of the plane hit the ground; the pillaging of human remains and baggage by Russian militiamen; the protracted delays in returning victims' remains to their families; the grief of those who would never see their loved ones again; the outrage as the Russians vetoed a UN investigation into this crime.

Five years on the perpetrators of this act of terrorism have not been brought to justice.

That seemed to change on June 19, when the Public Prosecution Service of The Netherlands announced that four men, three Russian citizens and one Ukrainian, all connected to the Russian Federation's state security services, should be brought to trial. But these indicted men are unlikely to ever see the inside of a Dutch courtroom for the Russian Federation is not co-operating with those who seek justice. Instead Moscow is actually being emboldened by appeasers eagerly scurrying to get back to "business as usual."

Despite Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine on June 25 a majority of delegates to the Parliamentary Assembly of Europe (PACE) — including those of Germany, Italy and France — voted to restore the Russian Federation's privileges, apparently all but forgetting the latter's illegal occupation of Ukraine's Crimea and flagrant disregard for the rules-based international order. Unconscionably, three of The Netherlands's delegates — senators Henk Overbeek, Ria Oomen-Ruijten and Tiny Kox — voted in favour of restoring Russia's membership, apparently indifferent to the memory of their fellow citizens, the 189 Dutch victims blown apart on MH17.

Given its increasing reliance on Russian oil and gas, which will only be furthered by the near-future completion of the Nord Stream II pipeline, we can only anticipate the further enervation of western Europe.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian soldiers are defending Europe against Russian aggression and taking active measures to bring those responsible for the MH17 horror to justice. On June 27, Ukrainian special forces captured Lieutenant-Colonel Vladimir Tsemakh in a daring raid in the Russian-occupied town of Snizhne. He commanded an air defence unit when MH17 was destroyed. Now in Kyiv, Tsemakh will stand trial and we will learn much more about who murdered the innocents aboard MH17.



Armed pro-Russian separatists stand guard in front of the crash site of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17, near the village of Grabove, on July 20, 2014. Bulent Kilic/AFP/Getty Images

To paraphrase Winston Churchill, it seems as if the time has come, yet again, for the New World to come to the defence of the Old. In 2018 a Republican Senator from Colorado, Cory Gardner, introduced Bill S.2780 — if adopted this legislation would require the U.S. State Department to make a determination within 90 days about whether the Russian Federation should be designated as a state sponsor of terror under U.S. law. As Senator Gardner wrote recently in *The New York Times*: “We must take every diplomatic step necessary to protect our allies and our democracy, and to deter a revanchist Russia that is intent on rewriting history and threatening our way of life.” Canada should follow suit.

Of course, outing the Russian Federation for what it is, a rogue state, and identifying who is responsible for Russian crimes against humanity — the KGB man in the Kremlin — won’t bring back any of the victims of MH17, or of the ongoing war crimes perpetrated by the Russian invaders of eastern Ukraine. But at least we will not have forgotten them, including a Canadian, Andrei Anghel, whose life was violently cut short at the Kremlin’s command.

National Post

Alexandra Chyczij is National President of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress.



Toys lie amongst the wreckage at the crash site of the Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 near the village of Grabove, on July 20, 2014. Bulent Kilic/AFP/Getty Images