

## Weekly Top 10

**WASHINGTON, D.C. July 26, 2019**

**TO: NCSEJ Leadership and Interested Parties**

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

Dear Friend,

On Sunday, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's *Servant of The People* party [won a substantial majority of seats in the Verkhovna Rada](#), Ukraine's parliament. Control of the parliament by the president in power marks a historic first for Ukraine, and Zelenskyy has now consolidated enough power, if he chooses, to make real, systemic changes in the country. The new Members of Parliament themselves are also worthy of mention: their average age is just 41, and a majority of them have little to no political or governmental experience. A large number of the new MPs are entrepreneurs, giving hope to investors that the country will start pursuing more liberal economic policies.

The makeup of the new MPs is generally seen as good for Ukraine, although unfortunately among those elected was Volodymyr Viatrovykh, a member of the *European Solidarity* party. [Viatrovykh has been criticized as a historical revisionist](#), for marginalizing and suppressing facts about the role of Ukrainian nationalists during the Holocaust.

Also this week In Ukraine: following Russia's announcement that it would release Ukrainian sailors its forces captured in the Kerch Strait in September, the situation has become more complicated. The release of the Ukrainian sailors is now reportedly being jeopardized by [Ukraine's seizure of a Russian tanker on Thursday](#). It should be noted that while 15 Russian crewman were briefly detained by Ukrainian naval authorities, they were quickly released.

The city council of Vilnius, Lithuania [voted to rename a street that formerly honored a Nazi collaborator](#) accused of inspiring Holocaust-era murders. The street had been named after Kazio Skirpos, who founded the Lithuanian Activist Front, which collaborated with Nazis to kill Jews during the Holocaust. Vilnius Mayor Remigijus Simasius said he was pleased with the vote, and "a city that is open and respectful to all people...can't display extraordinary signs of respect to someone like Kazys Skirpa."

[Moscow experienced a 20,000 person-strong protest](#) earlier this week, demanding "free and fair" local elections. The protests came about when about 30 opposition candidates were refused registration by election authorities. Many experts view their denial of registration as a ploy by Putin's *United Russia* party to stymie competition. Notably, well-known Russian opposition politician Aleksei Navalny was arrested during these demonstrations. Navalny was denied candidacy in Russia's 2018 presidential elections, and since 2011, has been repeatedly arrested and jailed for hundreds of days as punishment for his opposition activities.

Sincerely,



Mark B. Levin  
NCSEJ Executive Vice-Chairman & CEO

**NCSEJ WEEKLY TOP 10**  
**Washington, D.C. July 26, 2019**

**Landslide Victory for Zelensky's Party in Ukraine: What Next?**  
**By Konstantin Skorkin**  
**Carnegie Moscow Center, July 23, 2019**

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has once again triumphed over the country's old elites in the parliamentary elections held on July 21: the newly formed parties of the last five years ran into

yet another electoral revolution. Zelensky's Servant of the People party turned out to be the unrivaled favorite in the campaign, and its candidates resolutely defeated representatives of local elites in the single-member districts.

As a result, Zelensky won't just have a parliament that is under his control; he'll also have a weak opposition in the form of the parties of Kremlin associate Viktor Medvedchuk's Opposition Platform and militantly anti-Russia former president Petro Poroshenko's European Solidarity party, which are highly unlikely to be able to come to any agreement between themselves, thereby giving the president free rein.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Lithuania's capital votes to rename street honoring anti-Semitic Nazi collaborator**

**By Cnaan Liphshiz**

**JTA, July 25, 2019**

Following years of protests, the city council of Vilnius in Lithuania voted to rename a street honoring a Nazi collaborator accused of inspiring Holocaust-era murders.

During Wednesday's vote, which passed 21-16, a handful of nationalist protesters picketed city hall in defense of keeping the name Kazio Skirpos Street. Mayor Remigijus Simasius said he was pleased with the result.

In "a city that is open and respectful to all people, we can't display extraordinary signs of respect to someone" like Kazys Skirpa, the mayor said.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Ukraine seizes Russian tanker in Black Sea in response to flotilla clash last year**

**By Matthew Bodner and David L. Stern**

**Washington Post, July 25, 2019**

MOSCOW — Ukraine seized a Russian tanker anchored in the Black Sea on Thursday, freeing the crew but holding onto the vessel in apparent retaliation for Russia's capture of Ukrainian ships and sailors last year.

The release of the 10 crew members from the ship Nika Spirit appeared to slightly lower tensions after the tanker seizure, but Ukraine's move underscored the ongoing diplomatic and military flash points between the two nations.

It also posed a major test for Ukraine's newly elected president, Volodymyr Zelensky. The actor-turned-politician has pledged to seek peace efforts with the Kremlin after more than five years of conflict between Ukrainian forces and pro-Moscow separatists in eastern Ukraine.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Senate legislation would help care for Holocaust survivors**

**By Marcy Oster**

**JTA, July 24, 2019**

Bipartisan legislation was introduced in the Senate that will prioritize health care and nutrition services for Holocaust survivors.

The bill, the Trauma-Informed Modernization of Eldercare for Holocaust Survivors Act or "TIME for Holocaust Survivors Act" increases the chances that survivors could age in their own homes.

More than 300 national, state and local organizations – most Jewish organizations including Jewish federations, Holocaust education organizations and synagogues – signed a letter of support for the legislation.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Yad Vashem invites Polish president to Auschwitz liberation event**

**Invitation comes two years into Israel-Polish tussle over Holocaust memory.**

**By Herb Keinon**

**Jerusalem Post, July 23, 2019**

Against the background of continuing friction between Israel and Poland over the memory of the Holocaust, Yad Vashem invited Polish President Andrzej Duda to join other world leaders at a major event in January to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz.

The Jerusalem Post has learned that Warsaw has not yet decided whether Duda will attend. Among the world leaders expected to participate are US President Donald Trump and French President Emmanuel Macron.

The one-day event at Yad Vashem is scheduled for the end of January.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Head of Ukrainian group glorifying Nazi collaborators set to enter parliament Times of Israel, July 22, 2019**

A senior Ukrainian official widely reviled by Jewish groups for his rehabilitation of Nazi collaborators is set to enter parliament, marking a potentially significant shift in the former Soviet republic's approach to Holocaust memory.

Best known for his efforts to rehabilitate historical figures such as Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevych, Nazi collaborators whose men killed thousands of Jews during World War II, [historian Volodymyr] Viatrovykh has displayed public antipathy toward Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine's newly elected Jewish comedian turned president.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **"In Our Synagogue" - film shot in the Khust synagogue and based on a Kafka story, wins Odessa Film Festival award Jewish Heritage Europe, July 21, 2019**

A film called "In Our Synagogue" and shot in part in the synagogue in Khust, southwest Ukraine, has won the International Federation of Film Critics (FIPRESCI) Best Short Film prize, in the National competition program, at the Odessa International Film Festival.

The 30-minute, black-and-white film, a co-production of Ukraine and France but principally financed by the Ukrainian government, is the debut film of the young Ukrainian filmmaker Ivan Orlenko and is based on an unfinished story by Franz Kafka by the same title, about a mysterious animal that lives in a synagogue. It was shot entirely in Yiddish.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Thousands Rally In Moscow For Barred Opposition City-Council Candidates RFE/RL, July 20, 2019**

MOSCOW -- More than 20,000 people, including Aleksei Navalny and other prominent opposition figures, rallied in Moscow to demand free and fair local elections, according to White Counter, an NGO that tracks participation in protest events.

The protest on July 20 follows the recent refusal of the electoral authorities to allow about 30 opposition candidates -- including Ilya Yashin, Lyubov Sobol, and Dmitry Gudkov -- to register for city council elections.

Official police figures put the number of participants at 12,000.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Hebrew inscriptions revealed at Great Synagogue dig sites in Vilnius, Lithuania JNS, July 23, 2019**

Hebrew inscriptions were discovered for the first time since the beginning of the excavation project to expose the Great Synagogue of Vilna, Lithuania, which was burned during the Holocaust and demolished by the Soviets.

According to the researchers, Jon Seligman of the Israel Antiquities Authority and Justinas Račas of the Kultūros paveldo Išsaugojimo pajėgos of Lithuania, who have conducted excavations in Lithuania every summer for the last four years, "the large and significant inscription, dated to 1796, was part of a stone Torah-reading table that stood on the magnificent bimah of the synagogue in Vilnius."

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Tarnow Jewish Cemetery wall vandalized with antisemitic graffiti By Ilanit Chernick Jerusalem Post, July 22, 2019**

One month after the Jewish cemetery in Tarnow, Poland was rededicated, its wall has been vandalized with antisemitic graffiti.

In a statement, Jewish Heritage Europe posted a photograph of the graffiti, which read: "Jews eat children, Jadowniki eats Jews."

Jadowniki is a village located close to Tarnow in southern Poland.

[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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