



Weekly Top 10

WASHINGTON, D.C. August 9, 2019

TO: NCSEJ Leadership and Interested Parties

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

Dear Friend,

The Senate struck a rare bipartisan chord this week in Washington, [when 88 Senators issued a letter](#) to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, urging him to push Poland to pass 'comprehensive legislation' for Jewish property seized during the Holocaust. Poland is the only European Union member which has yet to pass comprehensive legislation on this issue, although it has been brought up as a priority by the government in the past. Notably, among the letter's signatories are the chairs of the Foreign Relations and Armed Services committees — the two panels which play an important role in Poland-U.S. Relations.

The Lithuanian Jewish Community (LJC) and synagogue [re-opened their doors on Thursday](#) following a brief closure. On Tuesday, LJC Chairwoman Faina Kukliansky halted all operations after the synagogue and community center began receiving threatening anti-Semitic phone calls and letters. The threats were in response to a decision last week by Vilnius Mayor Remigijus Šimašius to [order the removal of a plaque honoring Jonas Noreika](#) – a high-ranking police officer who is believed to have overseen the murder of Jews – from an external wall of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences. Upon learning of the closure, NCSEJ immediately contacted Ms. Kukliansky, the Lithuanian Embassy in Washington, and the U.S. State Department to urge a resolution of the situation.

On Tuesday, U.S. Ambassador to Russia John Huntsman Jr. [resigned from his post in Moscow](#). The two-time diplomat, who previously served as U.S. Ambassador to China under Barack Obama, was appointed in 2017 when Trump took office, and has served in what has been a particularly difficult period in Russia-U.S. relations. Former Ambassador Huntsman has maintained a difficult balancing act during his tenure – overseeing the [expulsion of U.S. diplomats in March](#) of last year, while also charged with promoting U.S. businesses in Russia. NCSEJ had the opportunity to meet with Ambassador Huntsman late last year in Moscow during our 2018 Mission Trip to Russia and the Baltic States. Huntsman plans to return to state politics in his native Utah.

Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to remind you that NCSEJ's biannual Board of Governor's Meeting will be held this year in Washington on Tuesday, December 10 from 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Sincerely,



Mark B. Levin
NCSEJ Executive Vice-Chairman & CEO

NCSEJ WEEKLY TOP 10 **Washington, D.C. August 9, 2019**

Ukrainian Oligarch Kolomoyskiy Says He Plans On Being A 'Nuisance' To Many **RFERL | August 7, 2019**

Ihor Kolomoyskiy, the Ukrainian billionaire with ties to President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, says he plans on being "a nuisance for many" in the country for at least the next five years.

Kolomoyskiy, who faced investigations and government pressure in Ukraine during the presidency of Zelenskiy's predecessor, Petro Poroshenko, has lived outside of Ukraine for almost two years, splitting his time between Israel and Switzerland.

In a wide-ranging interview with the RBK media group, his first with a Russian media outlet in the last five years, Kolomoyskiy played down his relationship with Zelenskiy, who he said he had seen only once since the president's inauguration.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Putin Can't Afford to Speed Up Russia's Economy

Leonid Bershidsky

Bloomberg | August 7, 2019

Even as President Vladimir Putin has turned Russia into an aggressive, backward-looking police state, competent economic management has saved the nation from an economic collapse. It's still helping, and, according to the International Monetary Fund's new assessment, some recent government moves that have not been appreciated in Russia are likely to lead to improved growth. But behind this good news, Putin has a problem: More significant improvements would require disturbing the fragile political balance that ensures his power.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Jon M. Huntsman Jr. Resigns as U.S. Ambassador to Russia

Andrew E. Kramer

NY Times | August 6, 2019

Jon M. Huntsman Jr., the United States ambassador in Moscow who carried out President Trump's policies during a highly turbulent period of sanctions and investigations into Russian electoral interference, resigned on Tuesday.

The move had been expected amid reports that Mr. Huntsman, a former Utah governor, would return to politics in his home state.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Don't Write Off the Donbas Yet

Alexander Khrebet

Atlantic Council | August 6, 2019

It's tempting to write off the Donbas as backward, hopelessly Soviet, fodder for pro-Russian political parties, and inhospitable to new ideas and the forces reshaping Ukraine. But that would be a terrible mistake.

The results of the recent parliamentary elections show that reform parties have potential in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Pro-Western parties should be doing something they have never done before: contesting the Donbas.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Summer of Discontent Unsettles Putin's Rule

Pavel K. Baev

Jamestown Foundation | August 5, 2019

Last Wednesday's (July 31) phone call from United States President Donald Trump probably offered little respite to Russian President Vladimir Putin. Since the start of this year's unusually cold summer, every promising opportunity in foreign affairs was spoiled for the Russian leader with some domestic disturbance.

The glitzy St. Petersburg Economic Forum in early June was ruined by international indignation over the arrest of investigative journalist Ivan Golunov (who was released) and US investor Michael Calvey (who was not). The long-expected meeting with Trump at the G20 summit in Osaka, Japan in late June was overshadowed by the catastrophic flooding in the Irkutsk region. The visit, in the Vatican, with Pope Francis in early July happened only a couple of days after the tragic accident involving the secret nuclear mini-submarine AS-31 in the Barents Sea. The grandiose naval parade at the end of July made almost no headlines, with media attention captured instead by the severe suppression of street protests in Moscow.

[Read the full article here.](#)

U.S. Senate Increases Pressure on Poland Over Confiscated Jewish Property

Amir Tibon

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate is increasing pressure on Poland over the country's handling of property confiscated from its Jewish citizens during and after the Holocaust. On Monday, 88 senators sent a letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, asking him to "help Poland resolve the issue" of compensation for Jewish citizens and their descendants.

The letter notes that Poland is "the only country in the European Union that has not passed a comprehensive law for the restitution of private property" that was taken away from Jewish citizens. The Polish government has previously committed to the passage of such legislation, but hasn't done so thus far. Now, an unusually large group of senators from both parties are calling on the Trump administration to make sure Poland fulfills its commitments.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Russian Disinformation Distorted Reality in Ukraine. Americans Should Take Note

Sam Sokol

Foreign Policy | August 2, 2019

As the 2020 U.S. presidential election approaches, pundits in the United States are naturally looking back to 2016 in an effort to predict just what form Russian interference will take this time around—especially after former special counsel Robert Mueller's testimony on Capitol Hill last month, during which he warned, "They're doing it as we sit here." To understand the threat, Americans would do well to look at previous Russian disinformation campaigns. To gain a fuller picture of just what Russian interference could look like in 2020, it is necessary to look back at the Kremlin's hybrid war in Ukraine from 2014 to 2016.

Branding the post-revolutionary government a "fascist junta," the Russians took every opportunity to portray it and the Ukrainian state as purveyors of xenophobia, racism, and, especially, anti-Semitism. While the Jewish issue wasn't one of particular concern to most Russians or Ukrainians, by identifying his enemies as Jew haters, Russian President Vladimir Putin was able to portray Ukrainian leaders as German-style fascists. In the post-Soviet sphere, where the memory of World War II is still a potent political force, this was a savvy, if immoral, move.

[Read the full article here.](#)

In Ukraine, a Rival to Putin Rises

Andrew E. Kramer

New York Times | August 4, 2019

KIEV, Ukraine — He's a quick-witted politician who understands the power of television, has broad public support at home and, perhaps not so important, sometimes takes off his shirt in public. And he is not President Vladimir V. Putin, Russia's paramount leader of nearly 20 years.

This is Volodymyr Zelensky, the former comedian who became Ukraine's president in May and has followed his unconventional rise to power with an equally unexpected display of diplomatic flair. Aides to Mr. Zelensky insist that his focus is domestic overhaul, and that he is not striving to become the anti-Putin in a region where the Russian leader has faced much criticism but few competitors for star power.

But a rivalry is already apparent. Ukraine's relationship with Russia, which seized part of its territory in 2014 and has continued to back a wider separatist uprising, is the pivot around which many of Europe's most pressing security problems revolve. Mr. Zelensky has approached it with a combination of calculated assertiveness and strategic generosity, reaching out to Russian speakers whom his nationalist predecessor could not hope to win over.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Overdue Recognition: the little-known story of how the Bulgarian Tsar saved nearly 50,000 Jews during the Holocaust

Ilan Preskovsky

South Africa Jewish Life | August 2019

Considering the tumultuous history of the country in the early (and indeed later) 20th Century, it is perhaps fitting that Tsar Boris III of Bulgaria was a complicated man and a, perhaps, even more complicated leader. He allied himself with Nazi Germany during World War II and even allowed a pair of his ministers to draft and enact laws in Bulgaria that would have much the same effect as Germany's Nuremberg laws in heavily restricting Jewish rights. He also did nothing to stop initial deportations of some eleven thousand Jews from Bulgaria-occupied Thrace and Macedonia to the

death camps of Treblinka and Majdanek. All of this on top of the fact that, since a coup in 1935, he became de-facto dictator of the oft beleaguered country until his death in 1943.

And, oh yes, he also saved nearly fifty thousand Bulgarian Jewish lives.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Netanyahu to Immigrants from Ukraine: 'Here is Your Home'

Aryeh Savir

Jewish Voice | July 31, 2019

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday was at the Ben Gurion Airport to welcome 121 new Olim (immigrants) from Ukraine at a special reception ceremony held at the foot of their plane.

The Olim, who arrived on a special flight organized by the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, known in Israel as the Keren L'Yedidut, were deeply moved by the welcoming committee, which included Absorption Minister Yoav Gallant and IFCJ president Yael Eckstein.

The 121 new immigrants were the first of 308 new immigrants from Ukraine who are arriving in Israel during the summer.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Graves, guilt and genius: Inside Lithuania's struggle with its checkered past

Raphael Ahren

Times of Israel | August 4, 2019

VILNIUS, Lithuania — Last month, during a government-sponsored trip to Lithuania, I visited the old Jewish cemetery in Kaunas, the country's second-largest city. I was excited that we managed to spontaneously add an unscheduled stop to our already-jam packed itinerary, but the burial ground's shameful state left me nearly speechless.

If local anti-Semites wanted to vandalize the cemetery, they couldn't possibly make it any worse than it already is: abandoned and neglected, with countless toppled tombstones, some broken into pieces, many lying on the earth overgrown with grass, about to be swallowed by the ground.

The Lithuanian official who accompanied me during my three days in the country must have regretted taking me here. She helplessly looked on as I passed by thousands of dilapidated graves, shaking my head in utter disbelief that a Jewish cemetery in a country that seeks to promote its rich Jewish heritage could be left in such decrepitude.

[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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