

## Weekly Top 10

**WASHINGTON, D.C. September 4, 2020**

**TO: NCSEJ Leadership and Interested Parties**

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

Dear Friend,

Shabbat Shalom!

Sincerely,



Mark B. Levin  
NCSEJ Executive Vice-Chairman & CEO

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### **NCSEJ WEEKLY TOP 10 Washington, D.C. September 4, 2020**

**Lithuania to deport activist against glorification of alleged Holocaust culprits  
Cnaan Liphshiz  
The Times of Israel | September 4, 2020**

JTA — Lithuanian state police have arrested a university lecturer from Spain for criticizing the glorification of alleged Holocaust perpetrators, a fellow activist said.

Miquel Puertas, who several years ago taught the language and history of his native Spain at the Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, Lithuania, was arrested on August 25 to be deported to Spain, Stanislovas Tomas, a human rights lawyer from Lithuania, wrote Tuesday in his blog on The Times of Israel. He is being kept until he can be put on a direct flight to Spain, Tomas wrote.

Puertas is a persona non-grata in Lithuania for his critical writings on the state honors conferred there on alleged Holocaust perpetrators, including Jonas Noreika, a governor for the German occupation during World War II who allegedly organized the wholesale murder of Jews and participated in the theft of their property.

This memorial plaque to Nazi collaborator Jonas Noreika was removed from the Library of Academy of science in Vilnius in July 2019, but demonstrators reinstalled a new one in September. (Alma Pater/Wikimedia Commons via JTA) Lithuania's State Security Department and Justice Ministry did not immediately reply to written queries about Puertas's case emailed to them by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

The veneration of Nazi collaborators, including killers of Jews, is a growing phenomenon in Eastern Europe, where many consider such individuals as heroes because they fought against Russian domination.

[\*\*Read the full article here.\*\*](#)

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### **Jewish man beaten at supermarket in Uman, Ukraine**

**Cnaan Liphshiz**

**The Jerusalem Post | September 2, 2020**

An Orthodox Jewish man was beaten in the face at a supermarket in the Ukrainian city of Uman.

The incident happened Monday evening as the man, who has not been named in the Ukrainian media, left the store with a friend. Two men approached the Orthodox shoppers and one hit the victim in the nose, causing some bleeding. The alleged attacker and his friend fled, the head of the United Jewish Community of Ukraine, Michael Tkatch, wrote on Facebook.

Police are investigating whether the incident was an anti-Semitic assault. Pilgrimages to Uman, which is home to the grave of Nachman of Breslov, an 18th-century luminary and founder of the Breslov Hasidic movement, were supposed to have been curtailed this year due to coronavirus restrictions.

About 30,000 pilgrims, mostly from Israel, arrive there each year ahead of Rosh Hashanah. Clashes between locals and pilgrims are a common occurrence during the pilgrimage period

[\*\*Read the full article here.\*\*](#)

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### **How might West respond to Russia over Navalny poisoning?**

**Reuters | September 3, 2020**

(Reuters) - Chancellor Angela Merkel has said Germany will consult its NATO allies about how to respond to findings by a German military laboratory that Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny was poisoned with a Soviet-style nerve agent.

Russia is already under international sanctions, including over its annexation of the Crimea peninsula from Ukraine in 2014 and its backing for rebels fighting pro-government troops in eastern Ukraine.

Moscow denies involvement in the incident in which Navalny fell ill after boarding a flight in Siberia and Russian authorities and doctors have said they could find no evidence Navalny was poisoned.

Below are some measures that might be considered against Russia, based on proposals mooted in previous cases when the West considered sanctions against Russia. Some proposals were rejected out of concern for the economic harm they could also inflict on Western countries and companies doing business with Russia.

[\*\*Read the full article here.\*\*](#)

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### **New Memoir Reveals Natan Sharansky's Life as a Jewish Activist**

**Johnathan Kirsch**

**The Jewish Journal | September 2, 2020**

From Russia came the first pioneers of the Jewish state in modern Israel, including Chaim Weizmann, David Ben-Gurion, Ze'ev Jabotinsky and Golda Meir, all of whom were born as subjects of the czar. Yet the fall of Imperial Russia in 1917 barred the gates to the millions of Jews who remained behind in the Soviet Union for another seven crucial decades.

One of those who found himself trapped behind the Iron Curtain was Natan Sharansky, whose life story and life's work are told, compellingly and endearingly, in the newly published memoir "Never Alone," co-authored by Sharansky and historian Gil Troy (PublicAffairs). It's a book whose time has come precisely because Sharansky reminds us that what was at stake for the earliest

pioneers of the Jewish state — a safe haven for Jewish democracy — is at risk today.

Born in 1948 in the Ukrainian city then called Stalino, Sharansky was a perceptive young man who soon came to understand what it really meant to live in a totalitarian state. He recalls, for example, the day when a letter arrived at his home from the publisher of “The Great Soviet Encyclopedia.” After Joseph Stalin’s death, when Stalino abruptly was renamed Donetsk, the much-feared head of the NKVD (People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs) had been purged by Nikita Khrushchev. “My father soon received [a] publisher’s letter addressed to every subscriber, instructing him to cut out the three-page article praising [Lavrentiy] Beria in the B volume, destroy it, and replace it with some new B entries sent along to fill the space,” he explains. “Subsequently, as politicians rose or fell out [of] favor, as scientists were exiled or rehabilitated, every reader had to scramble to keep up with the shifting official line.”

One principle of Soviet rule, however, did not change. Both Judaism and Zionism were forbidden to Soviet Jews during Stalin’s lifetime and long after. Sharansky’s parents used Yiddish as “a secret code” but dared not teach it to their children. “You’re such a good guy,” one of his friends at school told him. “It’s a pity you’re a Jew.” When Meir arrived in the Soviet Union in 1948 as the first ambassador from the new State of Israel, Jewish crowds shouted: “Am Yisrael chai!” If a Soviet Jew applied to emigrate to Israel, however, the application was refused — and those who were denied later came to be known as “refuseniks.”

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Domestic Geopolitics: Belarusian Protests and Russia’s Power Transition** **Alexander Baunov** **Carnegie Moscow Center | September 1, 2020**

Russian President Vladimir Putin has finally broken his silence of more than two weeks regarding the protests in Belarus sparked by a contested presidential election there. On the weekend, a state TV channel aired a lengthy interview with him, in which it was acknowledged that since there are protests, there must be some problems. It was made clear, however, that the solution to those problems must not change the global power balance to the detriment of the Kremlin. The relationship between Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko and his people is an internal matter—so long as it remains within the geopolitical status quo. If it changes that status quo in a way that does not benefit Russia, it will stop being an internal matter and will warrant intervention. Crucially, the forcible removal of a dictator who is not pro-Western is in itself viewed as a disturbance of that balance, and would turn the problem from an internal affair into an external one.

What’s happening in Belarus is now being willfully reduced to the all too familiar formula of a choice between a dictator and pro-Russian stance versus the opposition and a pro-European path. By supporting Lukashenko in his interview, Putin once again confirmed that the legitimacy of any foreign regime is calculated not by the transparency of procedures or the popularity of the leader, but by whether or not the previous distance between that country and the West is preserved. If it is, then that regime is legitimate. If that distance is decreased, then the regime’s legitimacy is in doubt.

Putin’s attitude toward the Belarusian regime sheds light on how he sees his own power and its inherent potential for the use of force. Authority in Russia is legal so long as it is indomitable: i.e., so long as it retains its independence from the West. The use of force is justified if its end goal is maintaining that distance, while challengers who want to reduce the distance are dangerous idealists or traitors.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Lithuania’s campaign to help Belarus’s protesters offers more than just words** **Olga Irisova** **The New Eastern Europe | September 3, 2020**

At a meeting in Berlin on August 25th, EU foreign ministers agreed to impose sanctions on up to 20 senior Belarusian officials following the country’s contested presidential elections and subsequent crackdown on protesters. Despite this, the decision still resembles more of a ‘declaration of intent’. This is because the exact list of persons subject to these new sanctions has yet to be agreed upon. Such an agreement will take at least another week.

However, not everybody will be happy with this delay. Some EU member countries, such as Belarus’s neighbours Lithuania and Poland, have been pushing

for a quicker and more assertive response from Brussels. On August 24th, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Linkevičius told Politico that the bloc's reaction to the crisis has been too slow, stating that "It is not enough to judge, to assess, to condemn, there should be actions". According to the representative, "simple rhetoric is not enough, this has been proven more than once during previous crises." At the same time, some countries in "old Europe" are adhering to a more cautious approach, fearing that the EU's adoption of an active role in the crisis may provoke an aggressive reaction from Moscow. This approach partly fails to understand the circumstances of countries that find themselves in Russia's sphere of influence. Naturally, Lithuania, like other countries once occupied by the USSR, understands better than others the injustice of examining developments in Belarus through the lens of the Kremlin.

Indeed, Lithuania has been one of the few countries that has taken a consistently tough stance against Alyaksandr Lukashenka's human rights violations and aggressive response to peaceful protest. This has resulted in the country offering practical help, as well as statements of support. As Linkevičius has stated, "we (Lithuania) are trying to help those who are in danger, we are trying to take an active role in consolidating the EU countries and strengthening the European position. (...) We must do our best to reassess relations with this country (Belarus), because there must be some political consequences." Vytis Jurkonis, project director of the Lithuanian branch of Freedom House, has stressed in this regard that "Lithuania has the political will to help Belarusians, and not only at the level of statements".

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation releases new investigation he filmed before his poisoning** **Meduza | September 3, 2020**

Alexey Navalny's non-profit, the Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK), has released a new investigation titled "Tomsk held captive by a deputies' mafia," which looks into the business activities of high-ranking local officials and municipal deputies from the ruling party, United Russia.

The documentary explains how government officials and municipal deputies control the firms that provide public utilities to local residents in Tomsk. What's more, it reveals that these firms often hire contractors from companies owned by these very same officials, without any competition.

According to the FBK, the city's electricity supply is controlled by the leader of the local United Russia branch, Vladimir Reznivok, while the water supply is controlled by the head of United Russia's faction in the city council, Kirill Novozhilov. The largest housing and public utility company in Tomsk is controlled by deputy Sergey Panasyuk.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Amidst Controversy in Israel over a Pilgrimage to Ukraine, Some Reflections on Religion, Superstition, and Visiting Tombs** **Mosiac | September 2, 2020**

In 1768, with Poland in the midst of a bloody civil war, pro-Russian forces attacked the city of Uman in present-day Ukraine. The town's Jewish and Polish residents fought side by side, but, after thousands were killed, the Poles made peace, and thousands more Jews were massacred. In 1810, the ḥasidic rabbi Naḥman of Bratslav came there to spend his final months, and thereafter pilgrims flocked to his grave every year on the holiday of Rosh Hashanah. These pilgrimages have, since the fall of the USSR, been massive gatherings, bringing thousands of Jews—most ḥasidic, but some secular—to the town, especially from Israel.

Because of the coronavirus pandemic, the journey to Uman has become a political hot potato, as ḥaredi politicians have tried to get travel restrictions waved for the pilgrims, while Ukrainian authorities have sought to restrict Israelis from entering their country. Meanwhile, one Israeli pilgrim has tested positive for COVID-19, and another was recently attacked by a local. An Israeli columnist has condemned the annual ritual as idolatrous.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Here's looking at EAEU #4: Belarus backs itself into trade corner** **Chris Rickleton** **Eurasia.net | August 25, 2020**

When Alexander Lukashenko claimed his contentious victory in the Belarusian presidential election last month, partner nations in the Eurasian Economic Union were among the first to offer their congratulations.

Even Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, who came to power on the back of the type of pro-democracy protests that have been playing out in Minsk and elsewhere in Belarus, joined that chorus. And never mind that Lukashenko had in April 2018 congratulated Pashinyan's political foe, Serzh Sargsyan, on his appointment as prime minister – the very act of constitutional trickery that precipitated his downfall.

The hypocrisy underscores the cold strategic underpinnings of a bloc that is as much about politics as it is about trade. Questions still linger, however, about what the evolving situation in Belarus implies for the EAEU.

Speaking to Moscow-based publication Eurasia.Expert, Yerevan-based analyst Alexander Iskandaryan argued that one consequence would likely be the dilution of the ruling system's domestic authority, which would in turn weaken its ability to negotiate with external partners – namely Russia.

“The situation in Belarus influences integration processes in the EAEU and [the Collective Security Treaty Organization] because the situation will, with a high level of probability, enfeeble the authorities,” Iskandaryan said. “Whoever is in power in Belarus will understandably enjoy a lower degree of legitimacy than what came before.”

The impact on trade of Lukashenko's shrinking domestic and international options is already plain to see. In late August, three Baltic neighbors to the north – Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia – announced that they were slapping travel bans on Lukashenko and dozens of other top Belarusian officials.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Russia and Turkey: Behind the Armenia-Azerbaijan Clashes?** **Avinoam Idan** **CACI | August 31, 2020**

The violent gunfire that erupted between Armenia and Azerbaijan in July appears to have no connection with the ongoing conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region. This event took place far from Nagorno-Karabakh, in the Tovuz region. The strategic importance of the Tovuz region is its location on the energy export pipelines route from the Caspian Sea to Turkey and Western markets. It would seem that the players involved here are none other than Russia and Turkey, in active conflict vis-a-vis the war in Libya. The gunfire can be interpreted as a Russian message to Turkey, regarding its energy supply security from the Caspian Sea. If so, this is not the first time Russia has used Armenia to further its interests in the region.

[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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