

Weekly Top 10



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WASHINGTON, D.C. February 7, 2020

TO: NCSEJ Leadership and Interested Parties

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

Dear Friend,

[U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met with Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko](#) and other senior officials on Saturday in Minsk at a time of continued rapprochement with the former Soviet republic. At the same time, the Belarussian government is in the midst of an energy dispute with Russia -- who is pressuring the country to form a union state by leveraging the nation's oil supply. During his visit, Secretary of State Pompeo said that the United States is willing and able to provide Belarus with 100% of its oil and gas, in an effort to ween the European nation off of Russian oil and political dominance.

On Sunday, February 9, [Azerbaijani citizens will vote in a snap parliamentary election](#). In October, President Ilham Aliyev dismissed his chief of staff, Ramiz Mehdiyev, and replaced a set of top officials linked to Mehdiyev's "old guard" with younger technocrats. Azerbaijan's National Assembly then agreed to dissolve the legislature and hold new elections on Feb. 9. We will update you on the results of the election next week.

On Thursday, NCSEJ hosted Željka Cvijanović, President of Republika Srpska. Colleagues from AJC and B'nai B'rith International joined the meeting. They discussed the current political situation in the Balkans and Srpska's annual Holocaust commemorative event.

Also this week NCSEJ attended a reception at the Embassy of Croatia marking the beginning of Croatia's Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Croatian Ambassador, Pjer Šimunović, Croatia's State Secretary for European Affairs, Andreja Metelko-Zgombić, and Ambassador Philip T. Reeker, Acting Assistant Secretary of European and Eurasian Affairs, delivered remarks.

The Trump Administration announced the formation of a new international organization that promotes religious freedom. More than 25 governments participated in the inaugural meeting yesterday in Washington.

Lastly, I would like to highlight two stories from the past week. First, from The Hill, "[Politicizing the Holocaust is a Danger to Us All](#)" argues that making Holocaust victims and their memory pawns in geopolitical rivalries is morally objectionable. Second, from JTA, "[In Moldova, Jewish teens go to schools to dispel anti-Semitic stereotypes](#)" tells the story about how young Moldovan Jews are now are using friendly classroom dialogue to counter anti-Semitic prejudices and stereotypes.

Sincerely,



Mark B. Levin

NCSEJ Executive Vice-Chairman & CEO

NCSEJ WEEKLY TOP 10
Washington, D.C. February 7, 2020

Scholars urge transparency to restore Yad Vashem credibility after Putin fiasco
Sam Sokol

Times of Israel | February 7, 2020

Israel's national Holocaust memorial must explain how it allowed several video clips that were widely panned for promoting a revisionist narrative of World War II to be screened at last month's event marking the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, several prominent Holocaust scholars and activists told The Times of Israel.

Yad Vashem apologized Monday for "inaccuracies" and "partial" facts presented at the World Holocaust Forum in Jerusalem, after being criticized for overly emphasizing Russia's role in ending the war and avoiding information Moscow finds unpalatable. However, the institution is refusing to explain precisely who produced the videos or what procedures were followed to vet their content — information that critics said is crucial to restoring the institution's reputation.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Pompeo visited Ukraine. Good. What next?

Steven Piefer

Brookings | February 3, 2020

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo spent January 31 in Kyiv underscoring American support for Ukraine, including in its struggle against Russian aggression. While Pompeo brought no major deliverables, just showing up proved enough for the Ukrainians.

The U.S. government should now follow up with steps to strengthen the U.S.-Ukraine relationship, which has been stressed by President Donald Trump's bid to drag Ukraine's leadership into U.S. politics.

[Read the full article here.](#)

The Russian Comedian Who Fled to Israel So He Can Stand Up to Putin

Liza Rosovsky

Haaretz | February 5, 2020

With 107,000 followers on Instagram and millions of views of his performances on YouTube, Aleksandr (Sasha) Dolgoplov may not be the most popular comedian in Russia, but he's definitely one of the most intriguing. Dolgoplov, 25, represents a new generation of Russian stand-up artists — those who have grown up on social media and shows in small clubs, and have never set foot in the studios of state-owned television stations or the halls that have been the usual venues for popular, establishment comedy shows since the days of the Soviet Union. Few members of this younger generation engage in political satire, and even fewer dare to criticize not only the government in Moscow but also Russian society, as openly as Dolgoplov.

He looks younger than his age, and somewhat fragile. During his act he laughs at chauvinists and homophobes, and nonchalantly mentions the open relationship he had with his former wife and his bipolar disorder. He is biting and crass, but at the same time exposed and vulnerable — and he shatters the tough and dour Russian masculinity that President Vladimir Putin embodies.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Politicizing the Holocaust is a danger to us all

Eugene Finkel

The Hill | February 2, 2020

On Jan. 23, dozens of leaders including Vice President Mike Pence, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), Prince Charles of the United Kingdom and the Presidents of France, Austria, Germany and Russia

gathered in Jerusalem to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and to attend the Fifth World Holocaust Forum.

But instead of a somber commemoration, the event turned into a heated memory fight between Russia and its Eastern European neighbors. In his address, Russian President Vladimir Putin used the tragedy of the European Jews to promote his foreign policy objectives. Putin's speech included false claims about the percentage of Soviet Jews among the Holocaust victims and equated death camps with the siege of Leningrad. Putin also highlighted the role played by local collaborators in Eastern European countries that currently have hostile relations with Russia.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Kremlin: Belarus Has Every Right to Develop Ties With U.S.

Reuters via NYTimes

February 4, 2020

MOSCOW — Belarus has every right to develop ties with the United States, the Kremlin said on Monday, following an unusual trip to Moscow's traditional ally by U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Pompeo flew to Minsk on Saturday, seeking to "normalize" ties at a time when Minsk's relations with Moscow have come under strain.

[Read the full article here.](#)

In Warsaw, elderly Poles who rescued Jews during the Holocaust have a free taxi service

Cnaan Liphshiz

JTA | February 4, 2020

WARSAW, Poland (JTA) — Outside one of this city's many brutalist apartment buildings, passersby stop to stare at and photograph a London-style taxi emblazoned with large Star of David symbols. Some seem puzzled by the out-of-place sight. Others look delighted to encounter something they've seen or heard about in the news: One of Warsaw's four limousines that for the past year have been providing free transportation to dozens of senior citizens who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust.

The project, called the Silent Hero Taxi Service, has changed the lives of many of these aging rescuers. They're making daily use of an amenity that has become indispensable in a sprawling, congested city with relatively poor public transportation services.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Kozak to Replace Surkov as Putin's Top Aide on Ukraine (Part One and Two)

Vladimir Socor

Jamestown | January 30, 2019

Russian President Vladimir Putin apparently intends to replace Vladislav Surkov with Dmitry Kozak as principal executant of Putin's policies toward Ukraine, including Ukraine's Russian-occupied areas. Surkov and Kozak have also covered other "frozen-conflict" theaters in their respective portfolios until now. The Kremlin has not issued official announcements about replacing Surkov with Kozak or redistributing their portfolios as yet. Nevertheless, it is the consensus view among observers in both Ukraine and Russia that the stage is set for Kozak to take over the lead from Surkov on Ukraine policy. Surkov is closely associated with Putin's own implacable hostility toward Ukraine as a nation-state. However, Putin has apparently decided to create the semblance of a dialogue as a second track in the relationship with Ukraine. This necessitates sidelining Surkov to impress Kyiv, albeit without changing the substance of Moscow's policies.

[Read Part One here.](#)

[Read Part Two here.](#)

Collapsing the Russian Tripod

Neil Barnett and Andrew Foxhall

The American Interest | February 6, 2020

Political warfare is back. The West is waking up to the realization that authoritarian states are seeking not only to weaken it, but also to intimidate, undermine, and coerce individuals, businesses, and institutions that obstruct or threaten their interests. Scholars have followed Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig's work in describing China's and Russia's efforts to wield "sharp power" against their adversaries. What bears closer examination is just how much these efforts are guided by the countries' intelligence and security services.

Moscow and Beijing have weaponized previously benign activities like diplomacy, investment flows, infrastructure development, foreign asset purchases, and media. University campuses have become battlegrounds of covert influence and interference. These activities complement more aggressive forms of political warfare operations, such as espionage, cyber-attacks, and intellectual property theft. For its part, the West at large gave up on political warfare operations after the end of the Cold War, complacently believing that the ideology that birthed them—communist authoritarianism—had been consigned to the “dustbin of history.”

[Read the full article here.](#)

Belarus Leader Bemoans Russia's Halt on Oil Supplies

AP Via NYTimes

February 6, 2020

MINSK, Belarus — The leader of Belarus complained Thursday about Russia's halt on oil supplies ahead of talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin to discuss closer economic ties between the two countries.

Russia last month only supplied 25% of the oil it promised Belarus, President Alexander Lukashenko said at a Cabinet meeting.

“We were given firm assurances,” Lukashenko said. “This year, Russia promised on the government level to ship 24 million tons of oil to Belarus - 2 million tons a month. In January, 500,000 tons were supplied.”

Russia suspended oil supplies to Belarus after Dec. 31 amid negotiations on economic ties that stalled as the two countries failed to reach an agreement.

[Read the full article here.](#)

The legacy of shame from The Yalta Conference

Amotz Asa-EI

The Jerusalem Post | February 6, 2020

The Crimean riviera was still a string of war-torn resorts when World War II's victors gathered 75 years ago this week in the nearby Livadia Palace, the last czar's white-marbled summer retreat.

Retreat, by then, was Germany's daily lot, as its surrender was less than four months away. The question was who would advance and where. And so, the conclave's host, Joseph Stalin, and his guests, Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt, spent seven days mapping the postwar global order, while seeking agreement on whom to punish and whom to prize.

The punishing part was easy; the three had already agreed to carve up Germany between them, and now heeded Britain's demand that France also get a slice of Hitler's estate.

The question was what would happen to the rest of Central Europe. Stalin's guests wanted free democracies; he wanted Soviet puppets. The focal point was Poland, and what they did to it is instructive to this day, not only for Poland but for any threatened country, particularly the Jewish state.

[Read the full article here.](#)

'Serious threat' to Warsaw Jewish museum as Poland withholds director's reappointment for nine months

Liam Hoare

The JC | February 6, 2020

The functioning of Warsaw's Museum of the History of Polish Jews (Polin) is under threat because a minister is holding up its director's reappointment, the institution's partners claim.

Dariusz Stola's reappointment was recommended last May through a competition organised by the Ministry of Culture, the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute (JHI) of Poland, and the Mayor of Warsaw.

The director has previously clashed with Poland's far-right populist government over issues of history and memory, including a law that criminalised accusing “the Polish nation” of complicity in the Holocaust.

He has been Polin's director since 2014, the year its core exhibition opened.

[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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