

## Weekly Top 10

**WASHINGTON, D.C. August 28, 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. August 28, 2020**

**Ukraine bans foreigners through September, foiling Rosh Hashanah pilgrimage**  
**TOI Staff**  
**The Times of Israel | August 26, 2020**

Ukraine on Wednesday announced it would seal its borders to foreigners through September to curb rising coronavirus infections, blocking Israeli and Jewish pilgrims from traveling to the city of Uman for the Rosh Hashanah holiday.

Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal also signaled the government would impose a ban on large gatherings in Uman during the Jewish new year.

“Unfortunately, we will have to make a decision to ban such mass events in the city of Uman. This is our responsibility, and we should not create additional huge risks for Ukrainians, and not only for them, but also for citizens of other countries,” he was quoted saying during a cabinet meeting by national news agency Ukrinform.

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

## **Russia Rejects Calls for Investigation of Navalny Poisoning**

**Andrew E. Kramer**

**The New York Times | August 25, 2020**

MOSCOW — The Russian government said Tuesday that it was willing to launch a vigorous investigation into the recent sickening of a leading opposition figure, but only if it could be proved that he was poisoned.

On Monday German Chancellor Angela Merkel endorsed the conclusion of doctors at a Berlin hospital that the dissident, Alexei A. Navalny, had indeed been poisoned on a flight from Siberia, and called for an immediate investigation. For the time being, though, that does not seem likely to happen.

“We don’t understand on what grounds our German colleagues are in such a hurry to use the word poison,” Russia’s presidential spokesman, Dmitri S. Peskov, told reporters on a conference call. “A substance has not been identified.”

Mr. Navalny, 44, who for almost a decade has challenged President Vladimir V. Putin politically and criticized his entourage for corruption, became one in a series of Kremlin opponents to collapse suddenly into a coma after drinking tea. Doctors at the Siberian hospital that initially treated Mr. Navalny said laboratory results showed no signs of poisoning, while the hospital’s head doctor pointed to a metabolic disorder caused by low blood sugar as the most likely cause.

At the request of his family, Mr. Navalny, still in a coma, was evacuated to Germany by air ambulance on Saturday, and on Monday doctors at Charité Hospital in Berlin said he had been poisoned.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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## **Putin says Russia has set up force to aid Belarus leader if needed**

**Gabrielle Tétrault-Farber, Andrei Makhovsky**

**Reuters | August 27, 2020**

MOSCOW/MINSK (Reuters) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Thursday the Kremlin had set up a police force to support Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko at his request, although it would not be deployed unless unrest there spun out of control.

The remarks were the strongest signal yet that Russia is prepared to use force if needed in Belarus, where mass demonstrations have taken place since an Aug. 9 election that the opposition says was rigged to prolong Lukashenko’s 26-year rule.

“We have of course certain obligations towards Belarus, and the question Lukashenko raised was whether we would provide the necessary help,” Putin told state television.

“I told him Russia would fulfil all its obligations. Alexander Grigorivich (Lukashenko) asked me to create a reserve police force and I have done that. But we agreed this would not be used unless the situation got out of control.”

The Belarusian opposition Coordination Council said Moscow’s move to set up such force violated international law.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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## **Insider resistance, Siberian-style**

**Meduza | August 25, 2020**

or five years, the Irkutsk region was a “red” region — in other words, it had a governor from the Russian Communist Party (KPRF). Sergey Levchenko had won a competitive race against a candidate from the national ruling party, United Russia, but last year, he resigned from his post. Levchenko had been planning to compete for a second term, but he faced pressure to quit from the federal government. Acting Governor Igor Kobzev, who was appointed to replace him, was imported to Irkutsk by federal officials from a city more than 3,000 miles away. Local mayors and even United Russia officials aren’t excited about what he’s brought to the table, and he’s up for election on September 13. Meduza correspondent Andrey Pertsev traveled to Irkutsk to see how this independent-minded area of Siberia is taking on a Kremlin-backed leader and why the opposition might actually win.

[Read the full article here.](#)

**Dictator's Dilemma: Why Lukashenko Is Still Clinging On**  
**Andrei Kolesnikov**  
**Carnegie Moscow Center | August 22, 2020**

Subjects should recognize themselves in their ruler, says the grand duke in Thomas Mann's 1909 novel *Royal Highness*. And perhaps once, the average Belarusian did recognize their self to some extent in President Alexander Lukashenko. But in the quarter century for which he has ruled the country, the image of that average Belarusian has changed, just as the social structure of Belarusian society has changed—despite artificial attempts to preserve elements of the Soviet system.

This is why, entirely unexpectedly for Lukashenko, even the working class has risen up against him, prompting the Belarusian dictator to describe this particular aspect of the current crisis as a “stab in the back.”

One fifty-something worker at a tractor factory found himself in a verbal duel with Lukashenko, and won it with the simple truth. “People are tired [of you],” he told the seemingly eternal president. In this respect, watching events in Belarus is like looking in a mirror for Russian President Vladimir Putin. The recent protests in Khabarovsk can certainly be seen as reflecting Putin fatigue, and in the coming years, it risks becoming the main emotional driver behind any kind of protests, which quickly become politicized, even if they originate over a local matter such as construction or environmental issues.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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**Protests in Bulgaria: EU values, wherefore art thou?**  
**Radosveta Vassileva**  
**The New Eastern Europe | August 25, 2020**

In my article ‘Bulgaria: will Borissov’s government survive this summer?’, I raised awareness of a series of corruption scandals which shook Bulgaria in 2020 and raised the eyebrows of Bulgarian civil society. Pictures of Prime Minister Boyko Borissov sleeping with exorbitant amounts of cash, leaked recordings of conversations in which he ordered who should be charged by the Prosecutor’s Office, whose authenticity was later proven by two independent forensic analyses, and an investigation into alleged money-laundering in Spain paint a rather gruesome picture of the deplorable state of the country’s rule of law. At the time of writing of the article, however, I was still pessimistic about the chances of mass protests erupting in Bulgaria for the mere reason that Bulgarians are notoriously patient with bad governments. Bulgaria, for instance, is the only former-communist country in Europe in which the communist regime fell under its own weight rather than because of a revolution.

On July 9th 2020 the last drop in the sea of discontent was provided in a raid against Bulgaria’s Presidency by Bulgaria’s Prosecutor’s Office. President Rumen Radev is the only political opponent of Borissov who has a high position in the State and while Bulgaria is a parliamentary republic, a critical voice, albeit with limited influence, could be a nuisance for a government dedicated to autocratic policies. To many, the raid illustrates disregard for the separation of powers.

Thousands of Bulgarians, both right-wingers and left-wingers, have been protesting against Boyko Borissov’s government and General Prosecutor Ivan Geshev, asking for their resignations and early elections for more than a month. Nevertheless, as the protesters’ demands are not being met, anger builds both against Borissov and against Brussels’ nonchalance.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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**Russia’s response to Belarus crisis: possible lessons from Abkhazia**  
**Neil Hauer**  
**Meduza | August 27, 2020**

The country that has everyone’s attention in the post-Soviet world these days is Belarus. It began with the brazen falsification of the election that reported an 81% victory for 26-year incumbent Alexander Lukashenko. Then, protests on a scale far exceeding anything in Belarus’s history of independence have swept the country. At the time of writing, it is unclear if or when Belarus’s mass protests will succeed. That said, it’s entirely possible we are watching a revolution unfold in a place that seemed until recently to be an unlikely candidate.

With history unfolding by the day and no clear indications of what might come next, many have looked for similar precedents to try and chart the possible course of events in Belarus. Others are looking for parallels to gauge the reaction of its neighbor: Russia. Most suggestions involve the 2014 Maidan protests in

Ukraine that drove Viktor Yanukovich from power. Or, Armenia's 2018 'Velvet Revolution' that saw Serzh Sargsyan toppled in a matter of days. There are some useful parallels to consider in both. Yet there is another former Soviet territory that could prove more instructive in understanding Russia's possible response: the breakaway Republic of Abkhazia.

Lying on the northeast shore of the Black Sea, Abkhazia and its roughly 150,000 inhabitants have existed in a state of limbo since breaking away from Georgia (of which it remains de jure a part) following the conclusion of the war between the two in 1993. It is even more dependent on Russia than Belarus is: roughly half of Abkhazia's government budget comes in the form of Russian subsidies. Tourism (the vast majority of which comes from Russia, whose citizens can enter Abkhazia without a foreign passport) forms as much as 35% of its GDP. Russia's military effectively controls Abkhazia, whose local security services are largely subordinated to their Russian counterparts. Yet Abkhazia, much like Belarus (whose ephemeral post-World War I independence was brought to an end by the Red Army), has a complicated historical relationship with Russia. When the territory was finally subdued by the Russian Empire in the 1870s, more than half of its population was forced into exile in the Ottoman Empire, a fact whose resonance is attested to by the name of the capital Sukhum's main seaside promenade, Naberezhnaya Mukhadzhirov (from the Arabic word muhajir, meaning 'migrant'). Like Belarus, Abkhazia does not consider itself a mere appendage of its patron: Abkhaz society and elites have ambitions of true independence, a status that runs contrary to the Kremlin's preference of a quiescent satrapy.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **In Russia, Anti-Semitism Has Long Been the Opiate of the Intellectuals**

**Gary Sual Morson**

**Mosiac | August 25, 2020**

In his 1938 article "Christianity and Anti-Semitism," the Russian Orthodox philosopher Nicholas Berdyaev observed that "for us Christians, the Jewish question does not consist in knowing whether the Jews are good or bad, but whether we are good or bad." Berdyaev, a fervent believer in what he called "the Russian idea," here acknowledged a stain on the Russian conscience. In his view, the Russian psyche harbored a deep-seated hatred of Jews that has had disastrous consequences not only for the Jews but also for the Russian soul.

As Berdyaev knew, Jews had suffered endless persecutions in the century preceding the revolution. The blood libel—the myth that Jews murder Christian children to use their blood in making Passover matzah—was used to justify persecution and led to brutal pogroms. In the second decade of the 20th century, this accusation was leveled against a Russian Jew named Menahem Mendel Beilis, who was eventually acquitted after a very public trial (1911-1913). That trial, as Elissa Bemporad observes in her new study *Legacy of Blood*, left a lasting impression on Russian Jewry.

How did such an absurd myth persist so long?

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Kyrgyzstan: Election season starts with a surprise exclusion**

**Chris Rickleton**

**Eurasia.net | August 25, 2020**

Campaigning for Kyrgyzstan's parliamentary elections has not even begun yet, but the contest has already witnessed a surprise upset.

The Central Election Commission, or CEC, decided on August 25 to deny registration to the Kyrgyzstan Party, a loyal and pliant partner in the current ruling coalition.

Making the move even more dramatic was the fact that the CEC had appeared late on August 24 to take the party's side in a squabble with rival parties over alleged late submission of documents for the vote.

Less than 24 hours later, the CEC omitted the party on a completely different pretext.

At present, 16 parties have pre-qualified to compete in the vote taking place on October 4.

While they are already trading blows, the campaign does not officially get

underway until September 4.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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**Report: Russia, Israel to collaborate on COVID vaccine  
Or Kish  
Israel HaYom | August 25, 2020**

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke on the phone Monday and agreed to cooperate on the efforts to find a vaccine against the coronavirus, Russia's Tass news agency reported.

According to the report, the two leaders also discussed the situation in Syria, Israel's neighbor to the north where Russia has a considerable military presence, as well as the recent rapprochement between the United Arab Emirates and the Jewish state.

Earlier this month, Russia became the first country to officially register a coronavirus vaccine. The Kremlin said that medical workers, teachers, and other at-risk groups will be the first to be inoculated.

Moscow's Health Ministry further said that the vaccine was expected to provide immunity from the coronavirus for up to two years.

Russian officials have said that large-scale production of the vaccine will start in September, and mass vaccination may begin as early as October.

[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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