

Weekly Top 10

WASHINGTON, D.C. September 11, 2020

TO: NCSEJ Leadership and Interested Parties

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

Dear Friend,

Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny [is reportedly able to speak again](#) as he continues to make progress in his recovery from his suspected novichok poisoning. Navalny, the unofficial face of the Russian opposition movement, is being treated at a Berlin hospital after falling ill last month during an internal flight in Russia.

[The political situation in Belarus remains tense and unchanged](#), with long-time president Alexander Lukashenko [re-affirming today he will not give up his power in the country](#). Lukashenko has been president of the Republic of Belarus since political independence following the fall of the former Soviet Union. On Wednesday, we heard an excellent analysis of the crisis in Belarus from State Department Deputy Assistant Secretary George Kent as part of our Update on the Region Webinar series

Today is the 19th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family members who still mourn the loss of their loved ones.

Shabbat Shalom!

Sincerely,



Mark B. Levin
NCSEJ Executive Vice-Chairman & CEO

[If you enjoy these Newsletters, please consider making a donation to NCSEJ to help us support the Jewish communities of Eurasia during these uncertain times.](#)

NCSEJ WEEKLY TOP 10
Washington, D.C. September 11, 2020

How to Win Votes and Mobilize People in Russia
András Tóth-Czifra
Institute of Modern Russia | September 10, 2020

This year, the single day of voting will see 18 Russian regions holding direct gubernatorial elections and 11 regions legislative elections. Dozens of cities and towns across the country will also elect municipal assemblies and, in some cases, mayors. Given the proximity of the 2021 Duma election, the worsening public mood in the face of the economic downturn and the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Kremlin's eagerness to use novel means of coercion to maintain the political status quo, the regional elections this year are well worth watching very closely.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Zelensky to 'Post': Israel requested restrictions on Uman pilgrims
Herb Keinon
The Jerusalem Post | September 9, 2020

Israel requested that Ukraine impose restrictions on Jewish pilgrims to the grave of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov this Rosh Hashanah because of the novel coronavirus, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said in an interview with The Jerusalem Post.

Asked for his opinion on the long simmering dispute in Israel over the issue, Zelensky said that Ukraine is "very proud of this gathering" and does "everything to welcome our guests."

Unfortunately, he added, "this year, as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, we had to implement very strict policies at the request of Israel to ensure the safety of both the citizens of Ukraine and our visitors coming from all around the world." Zelensky, who said he would like to see greater security cooperation between his country and the Jewish state as Israel's technology could "play an important role in protecting Ukrainian citizens," told the Post that Ukraine was exploring the "possibility" of opening "a trade office in Jerusalem," though moving the embassy to the capital is "currently not on our agenda."

[Read the full article here.](#)

Navalny's condition improving, police guard stepped up: Der Spiegel
Reuters | September 10, 2020

BERLIN (Reuters) - Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny has made further progress in his recovery after what Germany said was poisoning with a Soviet-style Novichok nerve agent, and is able to speak again, Der Spiegel magazine reported on Thursday.

The Kremlin critic is being treated in Berlin's Charite hospital after falling ill on a Russian domestic flight last month.

Germany says Navalny was the victim of an attempt to kill him and has demanded an explanation from Russia. Moscow has said it has seen no evidence that Navalny, 44, was poisoned.

Der Spiegel magazine said Navalny's police protection had been stepped up in the expectation that he would be receiving more visitors as his condition improved.

"Der Spiegel and Bellingcat understand that Navalny can speak again and can likely remember details about his collapse," the magazine wrote, crediting its investigative website partner. "His statements could be dangerous for people behind the attack."

There was no immediate comment by the hospital treating Navalny. A Berlin police spokesman had no comment. Navalny's spokeswoman, Kira Yarmysh,

tweeted that “the story is exaggerated and contains many factual inaccuracies” in apparent reference to the Spiegel piece.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Belarus at Moscow’s Mercy All Over Again

Grogory Ioffe

The Jamestown Foundation | September 8, 2020

Alexei Dzermant is a Belarusian champion of closer amalgamation with Russia and the author of the upcoming book *Belarus-Eurasia: Borderland of Europe and Russia*. “There is one thing the white-red-whites ought to be appreciated for,” he writes, “Their active role in this political crisis has facilitated Belarusian-Russian integration” (Facebook.com/alaksiej.dziermant, September 3). “White-red-whites” refers to the current protesters in Belarus who widely exhibit the country’s previous flag with those respective colors. While Dzermant’s formula disregards some essential causal links, it deftly summarizes the hitherto evolution of the situation of Belarus: the magnitude of anti-regime protest has been unprecedented and, as a side effect, Russia is more of an ultimate decision-maker in Belarus than ever before since 1991 (Minskdialogue.by, September 4).

Sunday, September 6, marked the 29th day of street protests in Minsk, thus warranting several critical observations. First, the opposition recently obtained the original August 9 presidential election vote counts from 1,310 out of Belarus’s 5,767 precincts. The precincts in question represent all Belarusian regions and account for 32.2 percent of last month’s turnout. Svetlana Tikhanovskaya won 81 percent of the vote in those 1,310 precincts. For the incumbent president to end up with the official result of 80.8 percent of the vote, Tikhanovskaya would have had to have won 2.97 percent of the total vote in all the remaining voting places—a dubious outcome (Tut.by, August 20).

Second, by responding to the vote-rigging and subsequent police crackdown, the protesters evinced solidarity and consequently may have pushed forward Belarus’s unaccomplished nation-building. At the same time, a feeling of their irretrievable distrust in the authorities deepened. These reactions have been entirely homegrown. Yet, the activity of the Telegram channel NEXTA, managed from Warsaw, Poland, played an enormous role in the protest rallies’ coordination and logistics. Given the magnitude and sophistication of this operation, it is hard to believe that the channel’s personnel consist of just four Belarusian emigrants in their early 20s, as is portrayed by the media (Forbes.ru, August 16).

[Read the full article here.](#)

In Belarus, China Is Neither at Odds With Russia nor Wedded to Lukashenko

Temur Umarov

Carnegie Moscow Center | September 7, 2020

For Lukashenko, Chinese President Xi Jinping’s August 10 message congratulating the Belarusian leader on his victory in the previous day’s presidential election was the best gift for which he could have asked. The support of the world’s second largest economy was highly welcome, since Belarus’s post-election crisis was making Lukashenko increasingly dependent on Russia, much to his chagrin.

Ideally, the Belarusian president would like to not only balance East and West but also exploit the divisions between Moscow and Beijing. But there are few such divisions, with China’s efforts to expand its presence in Eastern Europe, including Belarus, designed to avert a clash with Russia.

Belarus’s cooperation with China has always been informed by its relations with Russia and the West. Hence the original impetus for Minsk’s pursuit of a closer Sino-Belarusian relationship: the 2000s’ oil wars with the Kremlin and EU sanctions.

In 2005, Lukashenko told Xinhua, China’s official news agency, the reason for his newfound attraction to Beijing: “So long as we [Belarus] develop such relations with China, we cannot be isolated.” That same year, he paid a state visit to the PRC, returning with a stack of memoranda and a mountain of promises.

Sino-Belarusian trade began to grow, increasing from more than \$180 million in 2000 to \$2 billion in 2008. In 2005, Belarus appeared for the first time in a Chinese Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation Ministry report on outward direct investment, and by the end of the decade, Chinese investments in Belarus’s economy totaled \$24 million.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Western pressure intensifies towards the Georgian Dream. Is Georgian democracy backsliding?

Soso Dzamukashvili

The New Eastern Europe | September 10, 2020

On July 9th, the US Congress Appropriations Committee adopted the State and Foreign Operations Funding Bill for the 2021 fiscal year. The bill states that Washington will allocate no less than 132 million US dollars in aid to Georgia next year. The funding will be directed at the projects and activities run by the US Department of State, USAID and other international programmes. The document notes that 15 per cent of the financial aid will be withheld in the case of a negative assessment of the Georgian government's activities by the US state secretary. In order to avoid this potential problem, the Georgian Dream should seek to limit the national oligarchic influence on decision making, as well as legal and regulatory activities. Furthermore, the document urges the incumbent party to take effective steps towards the consolidation of democratic institutions and defines specific criteria which should be fulfilled by Georgia in order to avoid possible restrictions on financial aid. The criteria include the effective implementation of electoral reform, respect for the independence of the judiciary system and a variety of policy reforms that ensure accountability and transparency. At the same time, the document mentions desires for unfettered access to public information, the protection of civil rights and opposition parties, and media independence. Interestingly, the legislation explicitly states that financial aid for programmes aimed at strengthening democracy, the rule of law and the development of media and civil society will remain a separate issue.

The United National Movement, European Georgia and other opposition parties were alarmed by this decision and referred to it as unprecedented. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, however, responded that the government is committed to strengthening democratic institutions and that it is too early to properly discuss the document. This is because it is supposedly still in a "preliminary form". However, on July 25th, the US Congress adopted the bill by 224 votes to 189. Moreover, the US systematic pressure on the Georgian government only increased on June 27th, when Mike Pompeo held a phone call with Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia. During the call, the American politician highlighted "the importance of holding free, fair, and transparent elections in Georgia this October". The US secretary of state also urged the prime minister to strengthen the independence of Georgia's judiciary and hinted that foreign direct investment (FDI) may depend on this matter. Pompeo also cautioned Gakharia "against politicisation of Georgia's judicial and electoral processes."

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

Russia says West trying to victimize Moscow over Navalny

The Washington Post | September 10, 2020

MOSCOW — Russia's top diplomat on Thursday accused the West of leveling accusations of poisoning top Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny without providing evidence, staunchly denying any official involvement.

Navalny, the most visible opponent of Russian President Vladimir Putin, was flown to Germany two days after falling ill on Aug. 20 on a domestic flight in Russia. German chemical weapons experts have determined that the 44-year-old was poisoned with a Soviet-era nerve agent, prompting Berlin to demand that Russia investigate the case.

The German hospital treating him said Monday that Navalny's condition has improved, allowing doctors to take him out of an induced coma.

Russian authorities have prodded Germany to share the evidence that led them to conclude "without doubt" that Navalny was poisoned with a military nerve agent from the Novichok group, the same class of Soviet-era agent that British authorities said was used on former Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter in Salisbury, England, in 2018. Russian doctors said they had found no trace of poison in Navalny's system.

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

Choosing life: Social distancing in Warsaw Ghetto

Ben Cohen

Mosaic | September 9, 2020

The Polish resistance fighter Jan Karski recalled his agonized reaction as he walked around the Warsaw Ghetto for the second day in a row in mid-1942, about one year before the historic Jewish uprising: "I was told that these were human beings. They didn't look like human beings."

Karski's description of what passed for life in the ghetto was marked by a constant sense that he could not quite believe what he was seeing. As he accompanied a Jewish leader through the teeming streets, Karski asked his companion why there were so many unattended bodies lying around. He was told that because most Jews couldn't afford to pay the mandatory tax to bury their loved ones, they were compelled to leave them in the street. "Dirty streets, nervousness, tension," Karski remembered. "Stench, stench, dirt, stench — everywhere suffocating."

There was another element in this assault on Karski's senses. On his first day in the ghetto, two Jewish leaders — one a Zionist, the other a Bundist — underlined for Karski the spirit of resistance that was emerging among its inhabitants. "Both of them, particularly the Zionist leader, he was again whispering, hissing. Something is going to happen," recalled Karski. "The Jews in the Warsaw ghetto are talking about it, particularly the young elements. ... They speak about a declaration of war against the Third Reich."

Thousands of Warsaw Ghetto Jews participated in the military rising against the Nazi occupation in early 1943. For that reason, almost 80 years later, the Warsaw Ghetto is perhaps the most salient reminder we have that, among the myriad ways in which Jews resisted Nazi occupation, self-defense and the creation of a Jewish fighting force were unmistakably present.

For Karski, who visited the ghetto in the bitter weeks before the deportation of over 250,000 of its inhabitants in the summer of 1942, this was proof that the Jews "wanted to die fighting."

"We can't deny them this kind of death," he reflected — an observation that boosts our own prevailing understanding that, in choosing the time and manner of their deaths, the downtrodden ghetto inhabitants who resurfaced as resistance fighters were able to reclaim something of their own lives and of what it is to be human.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Kyiv rabbi makes history receiving Ukraine parliament Medal of Honor Cnaan Liphshiz The Times of Israel | September 9, 2020

JTA — Ukraine's parliament presented a Kyiv rabbi with its Medal of Honor — apparently a first for a Jewish religious leader.

Yonatan Markovitch, an emissary of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement, received the Medal of Honor of the Parliament at a ceremony Monday. The rabbi's office noted the history-making aspect in a statement.

The medal is given to "outstanding individuals in the world of science, culture, and art," the parliament's website said, as well as to the public leaders who made an important contribution to Ukrainian public and the state.

Markovitch, 53, has served in his native Ukraine for over 20 years. His family immigrated to Israel in 1972, and he was a major in the army there. He moved back to Kyiv, the capital, with his family in 2000.

[Read the full article here.](#)

The ideology of political opposition in Russia Sergey Belanovsky, Anastasia Nikolskaya Riddle.io | September 10, 2020

This article is based on a series of interviews conducted by the Belanovsky Group with representatives of the Russian non-systemic opposition in July-August 2020. In total, 60 people were interviewed belonging to the following parties and movements: PARNAS, Yabloko, Open Russia, New People, the Anti-Corruption Foundation, and the Voice of the Far East. Some of the respondents do not identify themselves with any movement but cooperate with local branches of opposition structures (sometimes with several). Research geography – Moscow, St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, Nizhny Novgorod, Rostov-on-Don, Tomsk, Khabarovsk. Both ordinary members of the movements and their leaders / ideologists were interviewed. Below, the opinions of ordinary participants will mainly be presented; the opinions of leaders require separate analysis. The aim of the study was to identify the range of ideas that, in the event of radical changes in the existing government, could shape a new agenda.

The study assumed the existence of two ideological axes: the imperial democrats and the socialist liberals. Most of the respondents identified themselves as democrats. The imperial ideological discourse at this stage of the work was not fully presented. For this reason, the results of the study are preliminary and incomplete. The overall political picture cannot be described without an analysis of imperial views.

As for the liberals and socialists, here we must deal with eclectic worldviews (along the line of democrats-imperials, on the contrary, there is a sharp demarcation). Besides, the meaning of the words “liberals” and “socialists” among ordinary participants in movements differs from their meaning in political terminology.

[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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