

Weekly Top 10

WASHINGTON, D.C. September 25, 2020

TO: NCSEJ Leadership and Interested Parties

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

Dear Friend,

This week, Russian opposition figure, Alexander Navalny, was released from a hospital in Berlin a month following his poisoning by the chemical agent novichok. President Putin has denied poisoning Navalny, telling French President Emmanuel Macron [in a phone call this week](#) that Navalny may have poisoned himself. Today, in a further escalation between the Kremlin and Mr. Navalny, [Russian authorities seized his apartment](#).

On Wednesday, Belarussian President, Alexander Lukashenko, held a [secret inauguration for his sixth term in office](#). Following the unannounced ceremony mass protests broke out across the capital. According to videos posted on the popular Belarussian Telegram channel, NEXTA, protesters were confrontational, blocking roads and at times chasing police vehicles. Much of the international community, [including the United States](#), have rejected Lukashenko's claim that he won the election with 80% of the vote.

[In three separate incidents this week](#), swastikas were painted on two monuments for Holocaust victims in Ukraine, and in Russia. At the former concentration camp Bogdanovka, a note with swastikas was addressed to three prominent Jews including Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Eduard Dolinsky, director of the Ukrainian Jewish Committee. The same day, swastikas were spray-painted on a monument commemorating the mass shooting of thousands of Jews in 1942 in Kirovgrad Ukraine. In Russia, a 30-year-old man was arrested for painting a cross and pouring yellow paint on a monument to Holocaust victims in Aksay, a village outside the city of Rostov-on-Don near the Ukrainian border.

Sincerely,



Mark B. Levin
NCSEJ Executive Vice-Chairman & CEO

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Georgia: From the Coronavirus to a Critical Test of Democracy
Kenneth Yalowitz, John Tefft, & William Courtney
The National Interest | September 22, 2020

Georgia has successfully dealt with the coronavirus outbreak but now must meet the task of conducting free, fair, and transparent parliamentary elections on October 31 and dealing with the economic impacts of the pandemic. Each of us has served as U.S. Ambassador to Georgia and can attest that the country has come a long way in democratic and economic reforms since independence in 1991. We were encouraged by the compromise electoral reform law adopted earlier in the year, but the whole election process could be reformed to better reflect the will of the Georgian people.

There is serious concern over Russian interference in the upcoming election. U.S. Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degnan has twice warned that “Georgians should expect that Russia is going to interfere” based on “a long pattern of interference through disinformation campaigns and other efforts.”

[Read the full article here.](#)

Russian opposition leader Navalny leaves Berlin hospital month after poisoning
Loveday Morris and Isabelle Khurshudyan
The Washington Post | September 23, 2020

BERLIN — Poisoned Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny has been discharged from inpatient care, the German hospital that was treating him said Wednesday, adding that doctors think a full recovery is possible.

Berlin’s Charité hospital said Navalny left Tuesday after 32 days of treatment — 24 of which were spent in intensive care. Although a complete recovery is feasible, “it remains too early to gauge the potential long term effects of his severe poisoning,” the hospital said in a statement.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Putin tells Russians to obey rules as COVID-19 cases tick higher
Reuters | September 24, 2020

MOSCOW (Reuters) - President Vladimir Putin urged Russians to stick to social distancing rules and said he wanted to avoid another strict lockdown on Thursday, when the daily tally of new COVID-19 cases was the highest in more than two months.

Russia’s COVID-19 response centre recorded 6,595 new infections on Thursday, the highest daily count since mid-July. Moscow had 1,050 new cases, more than any other city or region in Russia.

Russia exited lockdown in early June, and many shops, businesses and the transport network in Moscow are now operating as usual, though office occupancy rates remain sharply lower.

Guidelines on social distancing remain in place, and people must wear face coverings in shops and on public transport in the Russian capital, though some flout those rules which are not rigorously enforced.

[Read the full article here.](#)

What Is Belarusian Telegram Channel NEXTA?

Alla Hurska

The Jamestown Foundation | September 23, 2020

For years, the issue of freedom of the press and censorship in Belarus has remained an extremely complicated issue. Most domestic newspapers and TV channels are largely controlled and closely supervised by the government. Apart from that, temporary internet shutdowns in Belarus had become regular government practice since September 9, 2001, when the authorities blocked dozens of web outlets covering the presidential elections (Charter 97, September 11, 2008).

The government once again turned to sharp censorship on August 9, 2020, during and immediately following the latest Belarusian presidential elections. From August 9 to 12, online access (including mobile networks) was significantly disrupted (see Commentaries, August 14). According to one journalist investigation of the days-long blackout, technology and equipment bought from a United States company helped the Belarusian authorities block much of the internet and restricted communication on instant messengers and social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp, during the disputed presidential election (Moskovsky Komsomolets, September 13). Telegram, an application that was already popular among Belarusians, proved to be most resistant to these government disruptions. When all of Belarus went nearly completely offline, the messenger still worked, thanks to its built-in blocking-bypass mechanism and additional proxy servers connected specifically for Belarus. According to Pavel Durov, the founder of Telegram, anti-censorship tools were enabled for Belarus so that Telegram would always remain accessible for most users (Twitter.com/durov, August 10). The messenger is among the most popular Android applications downloaded by users from Belarus, along with other services to bypass state censorship. Without exaggeration, during the mid-August internet shutdown, Telegram became the country's sole source of information (Pravda.com.ua, August 19).

[Read the full article here.](#)

What Russia Doesn't Get About Germany

Sabine Fischer

Carnegie Moscow Center | September 23, 2020

Ever since German Chancellor Angela Merkel announced on September 2 that Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny had been poisoned with the nerve agent Novichok, the term "turning point" has been used many times in Russia to describe the implications this will have for Germany's attitude toward Russia. As Carnegie's Dmitri Trenin writes, Germany will cease its efforts to understand Russian motives and to interpret and mediate between Russia and German allies within the EU and NATO. Berlin, he says, is ending "the era launched by Gorbachev of a trusting and, for many years, friendly relationship with Moscow."

But that era ended long ago. Rather than a turning point, Merkel's statement was yet another link in a chain of events that have been undermining German trust and willingness to accommodate Russia's positions and increasingly destructive policies. The astonishment currently being expressed in Russia speaks to a lack of understanding of how Russia is seen in Germany, and how this perception has changed over the years.

Russian misjudgements of German policies date back to the 1990s. In the wake of German unification, Germany took it upon itself to act as an advocate for Russia's closest possible rapprochement with European political and economic structures. But many in Russia overlooked the fact that Germany had also pledged to build strong ties with its Central Eastern European neighbors, and to be their door opener to European integration. From a German perspective, this was imperative after the horrors Nazi Germany had inflicted on those countries during World War II. Russia, absorbed by its own domestic troubles, paid little attention to its former Warsaw Pact allies—but many in Moscow still saw them as Russia's backyard. As NATO enlargement became a reality toward the end of the 1990s, it triggered harsh reactions, and Germany and Russia found themselves on different sides of the fence.

[Read the full article here.](#)

The Kremlin's search for scapegoats in the Belarusian protests **Givi Gigitashvili** **The New Eastern Europe | September 21, 2020**

Amid the ongoing mass protests in Belarus, Russian state-funded and fringe media outlets accused Poland and the three Baltic countries of interfering in Belarusian affairs and instigating the protests.

The Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab) has identified several unsubstantiated claims pushed by Russian state-funded and fringe media. These narratives are in line with statements made by Belarusian and Russian officials. Alyaksandr Lukashenka stated on August 10th that the post-election protests in Belarus were "led by Poland, Great Britain and the Czech Republic". Along similar lines, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson, Maria Zakharova, argued that the protests were provoked by "third forces whose purpose was to fracture Belarusian society". According to the DFRLab's analysis, Russian outlets mainly targeted Poland and the Baltic states.

While some expected that the Kremlin would react promptly to large-scale protests in Belarus, as it did in the case of Ukraine, many experts have argued that the Kremlin is waiting to see how things develop and is not rushing to interfere. The Russian independent media outlet Meduza reported on August 19th that members of Russia's ruling parties, as well as state-funded propaganda media outlets, have not received clear guidelines from Russian authorities on how to cover the protests in Belarus. The author explained the absence of clear instructions from the Kremlin by noting that the Kremlin is not unanimous on how it wants to respond to a political crisis in Belarus or what would constitute a "desirable scenario" for Russia.

[Read the full article here.](#)

3 Holocaust monuments vandalized with swastikas in Ukraine and Russia **The European Jewish Congress | September 21, 2020**

In three separate incidents, swastikas were painted on two monuments for Holocaust victims in Ukraine, and another one in Russia.

At the former concentration camp Bogdanovka, in southern Ukraine, a note with three swastikas was addressed to three prominent Jews: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and former politician Yevhen Chervonenko.

"Come to your senses, please stop, because the sale of Ukrainian land will quickly lead you to the Holocaust," the note said.

Additional swastikas were etched and painted on the marble monument commemorating the murder of 54,000 Jews there during the Holocaust.

The same day, another incident was documented near Kirovgrad, some 100 miles north of Bogdanovka, where swastikas were spray-painted on a slab of marble commemorating the mass shooting of thousands of Jews in 1942. They wrote "Death to the kikes" at the foot of the monument.

Police are looking for the perpetrators of both incidents, the Ukrainian National Police wrote in a statement.

In Russia, police arrested a 30-year-old man for painting a cross and pouring yellow paint on a monument for Holocaust victims in Aksay, a village outside the city of Rostov-on-Don near the border with Ukraine. The man had a dispute with an employer and vented his frustration by destroying the monument.

[Read the full article here.](#)

US Senate Committee supports Dayton's nomination as ambassador to Ukraine **Ukrinform | September 23, 2020**

The US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations supported Keith Dayton's nomination as US ambassador to Ukraine and recommended the upper house of the Congress to approve it.

The Committee hearing was held on Tuesday, an Ukrinform correspondent reports.

"I am glad that the Committee has approved fifteen nominations (for various positions) this morning. I am particularly pleased to send nominations for the

posts of ambassadors to Japan and Ukraine to the Senate for approval," US Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jim Risch said.

He underscored that the positions of ambassadors in the two countries "play a vital role in shaping US foreign policy," expressing confidence that Keith Dayton's nomination "will soon be approved" by the upper house of the US Congress.

As reported, U.S. President Donald Trump nominated Keith Dayton for the post of U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine in early May 2020.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Man who saved thousands during Holocaust designed Buckhead synagogue **Thornton Kennedy** **MDJ Online | September 23, 2020**

In recorded interviews, Andre Steiner appears slight. He wears thick glasses, his white hair combed back and his trim beard well-kept. He is difficult to understand because of a thick Eastern European accent despite having lived in Atlanta for several decades.

The impression belies an extraordinary human being, who was best known as a planner and architect until later in his life. Born in Austria-Hungary (present-day Slovakia), he was a successful architect with a wife and a young child when World War II broke out.

He is known to history as a Jewish Oskar Schindler of "Schindler's List" fame. While the German industrialist saved an estimated 1,200 Jewish lives during World War II, Steiner saved nearly six times that number.

In Atlanta, he was a planner with Robert and Co., the architecture and engineering firm founded by Georgia Tech graduate L.W. Robert. Steiner was also an instructor in urban planning at the predecessor of Georgia State University. He served as vice president of the urban design department of the American Institute of Planners.

Steiner's best-known building in Atlanta is the Ahavath Achim Synagogue on Peachtree Battle Avenue in Buckhead, completed in 1958.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Unpacking the results of the Russian elections of Sept. 13 **Mikhail Turchenko** **Riddle.io | September 23, 2020**

More than nine thousand elections and referendums were held in Russia on the "single voting day on September 13, 2020" (EDG-2020). Among them are by-elections of State Duma deputies in four single-mandate constituencies, gubernatorial elections in 18 constituent entities, elections of 11 regional parliaments and elections of representative bodies of 22 regional capitals. Administrative nominees or candidates aligned with the authorities won almost everywhere. The by-elections to the State Duma passed without sensation. The current heads of the regions, as well as the interim governors, won the gubernatorial elections. United Russia retained a majority in regional parliaments and representative bodies of capitals. Only in the elections to the city councils of Tambov and Tomsk, as well as to the Council of Deputies of Novosibirsk, United Russia got less than 50% of the seats.

Despite the overall results, support for the authorities, namely United Russia, is in decline. In the regions - by as much as 11%. In regional capitals - by 10%. The turnout has also dropped. Moreover, the success of the Kremlin's protégés in the gubernatorial elections, as well as the success of United Russia in the elections to regional parliaments, was most likely due to procedural abuses during early voting.

The candidates supported by Alexei Navalny's Smart Voting project got the best results in the municipal elections. First of all, in Tambov, Tomsk and Novosibirsk. Still, the overall effect of Smart Voting is still unknown.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Lithuania confab marks 80th anniv. of visas saving Jews from Nazis **KYODO News | September 24, 2020**

An international conference in Lithuania was held Thursday to commemorate the 80th anniversary of "Visas for Life," issued by Japanese diplomat Chiune Sugihara to help Jews escape from Nazi persecution during World War II.

The event, which was also held with livestreaming, was attended by diplomats including the Dutch and Lithuanian foreign ministers, who praised the bravery of Sugihara (1900-1986), while Japan's foreign minister was among those who sent video messages.

Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linus Linkevicius praised the actions of Sugihara, saying he is a "model to follow" for diplomats today.

Sugihara -- who is often dubbed as "Japan's Schindler," after Oskar Schindler, the German who provided Jews with a safe haven -- provided transit visas for more than 2,000 Jewish refugees in 1940, while serving as an acting consul in Kaunas despite violating orders from his superiors.

"Sugihara's humanitarian decision reminds us that there are important values shared among us over time and across borders," Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi said in a video message shown at the conference.

[**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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