

## Weekly Top 10

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*Jews in Belarus and around the world celebrated Hanukkah this week.*

**WASHINGTON, D.C. December 18, 2020**

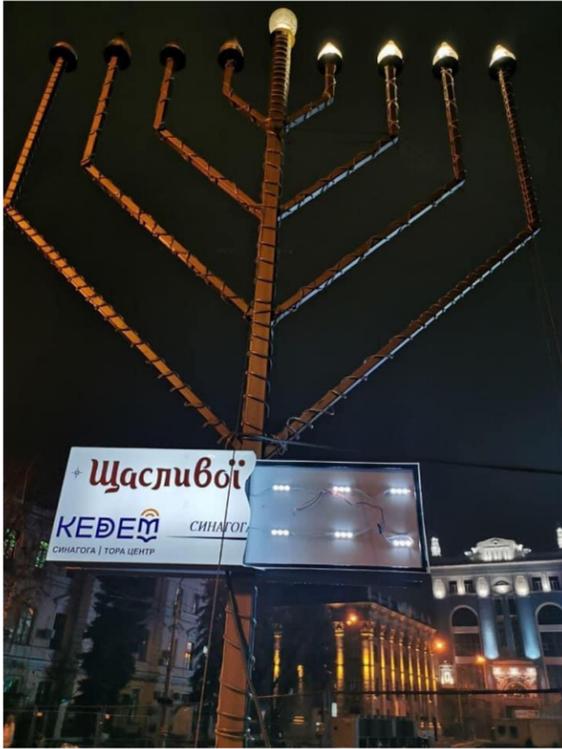
**TO: NCSEJ Leadership and Interested Parties**

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

Dear Friend,

This week the Senate unanimously passed the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism Act of 2019. The legislation elevates the Special Envoy to Monitor & Combat Anti-Semitism to the level of Ambassador-at-Large. Senator Jacky Rosen (D-NV) was the lead in getting the legislation passed. NCSEJ and other Jewish organizations were actively involved in urging its passing.

Senators Rosen and Lankford, co-chairs of the Senate Bipartisan Task Force for Combating Anti-Semitism, also [released a statement](#) applauding the Council of the European Union's declaration prioritizing the fight against anti-Semitism. The Senators called on EU members to implement the policies called for in the declaration, which includes a recommendation for consistent use of the IHRA Working Definition of anti-Semitism.



The Donetsk Jewish community in Kyiv installed a Menorah in the heart of the Podol neighborhood. On Saturday night it was partially vandalized. It is located 100 meters from a Menorah that was damaged last week by Ukrainian extremist Andrei Rachok. Police have opened a criminal investigation in both cases.

[On December 15th, 1970](#), eleven, mostly young Jewish activists were on trial in Leningrad for attempting to

hijack a Soviet airplane to draw attention to the plight of Soviet Jews. A watershed moment in the Soviet Jewry movement, the defendants received harsh sentences, including two death sentences. The Soviet government responded to the international outcry by commuting the death sentences and shortening the prison terms. The final last defendant was released in 1984.

NCSEJ works to promote and protect the well-being of Jewish communities in the second-largest Jewish diaspora. Please remember to support our work as part of our yearly Chanukah Appeal by clicking [HERE](#).

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.](#)**

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**NCSEJ WEEKLY TOP 10  
Washington, D.C. December 18, 2020**

**Russian-speaking Jewish teens pursue academics at high school in Israel**  
**Matt Robinson**  
**The Jerusalem Post | December 16, 2020**

For nearly 50 years, Alexander Muss High School in Israel (High School in Israel)

has been providing thousands of students in grades 10-12 the opportunity to come to Israel to participate in a pluralistic college-prep American high school semester abroad experience that allows them to learn 4,000 years of Jewish history while preparing them for their academic, personal, and spiritual lives. Since 2003, the school has been operated by JNF-USA.

Notable High School in Israel alumni include Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg, former Hillel and former Genesis Prize Foundation President Wayne L. Firestone, singing sensation Matisyahu, and members of the band O.A.R.

“JNF-USA has always been about connecting Jewish people in the United States with the land and people of Israel,” said JNF-USA Chief Executive Officer, Russell F. Robinson. “Our Zionist mission is part of our DNA.”

[Read the full article here.](#)

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**Polish Holocaust survivor’s family wins lawsuit for land illegally sold to church by rescuer’s son**  
**Cnaan Liphshiz**  
**JTA | December 16, 2020**

(JTA) — The Supreme Court of Poland upheld a 6-year-old ruling in favor of the descendants of a Holocaust survivor who had sued to reclaim from a Krakow-area church ownership of land stolen from her.

Monday’s decision by the court’s Chamber of Extraordinary Control and Public Rights ends a protracted legal battle by the family of Blanka Goldman to regain ownership of the land, which was sold illegally to the Our Lady of the Scapular church in the town of Tarnow.

The Poetschke family, who was not Jewish, hid Blanka from the German occupation forces during the Holocaust, the Gazeta Wyborcza paper reported. She was the only member of her family who survived.

She immigrated to Australia after World War II, leaving Hubert Poetschke, her rescuer, power of attorney over land that belonged to her family. Hubert died and his son, Jerzy, sold the land to the church. Church officials instructed him to falsely claim the land had been abandoned, the paper reported.

In 2010, Goldman’s daughter, Ann Drillich, learned the land had been stolen and sued to regain control of it. In fighting the lawsuit, the church claimed in one court submission that the family was “cynically using the Holocaust” to increase its wealth.

The church lost the suit in 2014, but Justice Minister Zbigniew Ziobro’s office appealed to the Supreme Court.

Goldman’s family is seeking about \$700,000 in damages, though the exact amount to be paid has yet to be determined by a court in Krakow.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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**Putin Uses Annual Press Event To Deny Russian Role In Navalny Poisoning, Allege U.S. Conspiracies**  
**Radio Free Europe | December 17, 2020**

Russian President Vladimir Putin has dismissed a fresh investigative report pointing to involvement by Russia’s Federal Security Service (FSB) in the poisoning of Kremlin critic Aleksei Navalny and alleged, without evidence, that the Russian opposition leader was working for U.S. intelligence.

Putin, also without providing evidence, said the joint report led by digital sleuth Bellingcat and issued this week was “not an investigation, it’s laundering of U.S. intelligence material.”

Putin made the remark during his highly choreographed, annual end-of-year news conference on December 17.

The event, which lasted four and a half hours, came with Russia’s economy struggling in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and with fresh suspicions of a Russian role in the poisoning of Navalny and a massive cyberattack on the United States that targeted businesses and government agencies and departments.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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**The Event That Sparked the Movement to Free Soviet Jewry**  
**Lenn Richter and Avi Weiss**  
**Tablet Mag | December 15, 2020**

is a date rarely marked, even as it inspired a movement hardly studied, led by heroes barely known.

Fifty years ago, on Dec. 15, 1970, the first Leningrad Trial opened. In it, a group was charged with attempting to hijack a small Soviet commercial plane. Their aim was to reroute it to Sweden from where they would make their way to Israel.

It was an act of desperation. For decades, the Soviet government had discriminated against its Jewish citizens, promoting blatant anti-Semitism, not allowing them to practice as Jews, even as the Soviets blocked their emigration. News of their intolerable suffering was scarcely reported in the West, and when it trickled out, Jews outside the Soviet Union were, in the words of Elie Wiesel, the actual “Jews of Silence.”

Something drastic had to be done. And so, the group felt impelled to take action to wake up the free world. Their message: Twenty-five years after the murder of 6 million Jews as the world looked on, silence could never be tolerated again. The planned hijacking was not a hijacking in the strict sense of the word. The group had purchased all the seats on the small plane, so that no innocent people would be hurt. Among their group was Mark Dymshits, a former Soviet pilot, who would take the controls and fly the plane out. Indeed, none in the group was armed. It was a bold act of civil disobedience.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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**Russia and the West: mistakes of the 1990s**  
**Sergey Radchenko**  
**Riddle.io | December 16, 2020**

In mid-December 1993, elections to the State Duma were held in Russia, this first since Boris Yeltsin violently dispersed the Supreme Soviet during the “October events.” These elections became perhaps the most “democratic” in the entire history of the new Russia. Their results, however, were stunning: the “democrats” were strongly pushed back by radical parties of the left and right wing.

The US leadership watched with apprehension. Strobe Talbott, the chief Russian hand in the Bill Clinton administration, shared his thoughts with the British Prime Minister John Major’s team during his February 1994 visit to Washington. “He (Talbott) had set in hand an exercise within the State Department – though he was most anxious that it should not leak out that US policy towards Russia was being ‘reviewed’”, – wrote Major’s assistant Roderic Lyne.

Lyne also noted that some in the US administration considered it a mistake to talk about a real partnership with Russia. The first such fatalist was Anthony Lake, Clinton’s national security adviser. According to Lyne, Lake believed that Russia “is already going to the bad, and that we should not encourage the Russians to think that they can interfere in various questions in a negative way because we have given them the status of ‘partner’”.

This debate about the future of Russia was certainly reflected in one of the main foreign policy issues of the Clinton administration: NATO expansion. The gradual opening of archival documents of those years allows us to look at this problem anew. Was the Clinton team acting correctly then? And did the US “lose” Russia in the process of NATO expansion?

The second question can be answered unequivocally: no. Russia never belonged to America, so the United States could not lose it. It is obvious that what happened was primarily caused by internal Russian problems: a great power complex, toxic political narratives, etc. But the United States did also play a role in shaping Russian political narratives.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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**Russian nationalists again rile Kazakhstan by questioning its nationhood**  
**Almaz Kumenov**  
**Eurasia.org | December 15, 2020**

Russian politicians sometimes enjoy, for reasons best known to themselves, riling their loyal neighbor Kazakhstan.

Last week, it was the turn of a pair of lawmakers who questioned Kazakhstan's claims to nationhood by claiming that the country's very existence was merely a result of historical Russian generosity.

Kazakhstan's former president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, fired back in oblique fashion in a speech to mark Independence Day on December 15 by telling his listeners that Kazakhs are "the descendants of brave ancestors who inhabited a vast valley from Altai to Atyrau, and from Alatau to Arka."

"We are full-fledged heirs of the vast steppes, from the shores of Ustyurt and the old Caspian Sea, and in the lands between the Syr Darya and the Irtysh [rivers]," he said.

Although the section of the address in which he made those remarks was in Kazakh, their intended audience was unmistakable.

The fuse was lit by Vyacheslav Nikonov, chairman of the Education and Science Committee in Russia's State Duma, who said during a broadcast on Russian state television on December 10 that much of what is now known as Kazakhstan was formerly uninhabited land.

"Northern Kazakhstan was not inhabited at all. [Kazakhs] existed, but much further to the south. The territory of Kazakhstan is a great gift from Russia and the Soviet Union," Nikonov said, knowingly tweaking at the sensibilities of Kazakhs, many of whom regularly consume Russian TV output.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Managing Adversity: Russia and the Baltics** **Vygaudas Ušackas** **Carnegie Moscow Center | December 17, 2020**

On November 19, 1996, as the deputy foreign minister of Lithuania, I delivered a keynote speech on the Baltics' campaign to join NATO at a conference in Stockholm. It was the first and probably the most comprehensive speech by a senior Lithuanian government official at the time on the subject. Among other arguments, I stressed that Lithuanian membership of NATO should be considered a powerful way of buttressing relations with Russia. I argued that "although memories of recent occupation are still alive, becoming part of the alliance and thus gaining recognition that our nation is an inalienable part of the Western democracies, Lithuania could further pursue an open and mutually beneficial economic partnership with Russia, and such a relationship is equally in the interest of Russia itself."

Sixteen years have now passed since Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania joined NATO and the European Union. The three countries are an integral part of the EU's Nordic economic and financial subregion. We are also direct neighbors of Russia, with all the risks and opportunities that this entails.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Senate passes bill elevating anti-Semitism monitor to ambassador** **Ron Kampeas** **JTA | December 16, 2020**

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The U.S. Senate passed a bill that would elevate the position of the anti-Semitism monitor to ambassador, adding punch to the envoy's mission of pressing other governments to confront anti-Jewish bigotry.

"Anti-Semitism continues to rise at an alarming rate across the globe," Sen. Jacky Rosen, D-Nev., who led sponsorship of the bipartisan bill, said in a statement Wednesday after the vote, which passed unanimously. "To equip the State Department to better address rising anti-Semitism, it is critical that we elevate the role of the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism to Ambassador-at-Large."

The U.S. House of Representatives passed a similar bill last year, meaning it is almost certain to become law before the year ends and the current Congress lapses.

A broad array of Jewish groups backed the measure. With the status of ambassador, the envoy will have easier access to the secretary of state, increased funding and the office's recommendations are likelier to be seen overseas as having the backing of the administration of the day.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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## **Russian trolls stoke online anti-Semitism when tensions peak in US, report find**

**Ben Sales**

**The Times of Israel | December 16, 2020**

Soon after the 2017 far-right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, a Twitter user going by the name “jojoh888” knew who was to blame for the clashes between neo-Nazis and the antifa activists who opposed them: George Soros, the Jewish billionaire and progressive philanthropist.

“George Soros is the puppet master. He’s funding both sides,” the account tweeted, echoing a false claim expressed frequently by far-right activists. “jojoh888” was a Russian troll controlled by Vladimir Putin’s government that was suspended in 2018 in an effort to root out disinformation from Twitter.

To the Network Contagion Research Institute, which studies how hate manifests on social media, the tweet was a perfect encapsulation of how anti-Semitism is now showing up online.

A new report by the institute illustrates how anti-Semitism has been a feature of the widely publicized Russian disinformation campaigns surrounding American elections and other moments of social tension, with an eye toward sowing division in the United States by way of social media. The anti-Jewish slurs from Russian accounts dovetail with increased online anti-Semitism around significant dates like Election Day or Inauguration Day, or during periods of crisis like the Charlottesville rally or the ongoing pandemic.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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## **Public Relations and Realities of the Belarusian Crisis**

**Grigory Ioffe**

**The Jamestown Foundation | December 16, 2020**

Popular narrative tropes are not always accurate predictors of how a story will ultimately develop. Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, the former presidential hopeful and a person believed by many to have won the presidential elections of August 9, is widely seen as a positive character in the unfolding Belarusian drama.

Courageous and likable, she does her best to rally international support for the protest movement in her home country.

Tikhanovskaya has already met personally with six heads of state. And last week (December 10), Israel’s ambassador to Lithuania visited her office in Vilnius to explain that even though his colleague in Minsk had recently presented his credentials to President Alyaksandr Lukashenka (Belta, November 24), this did not reflect Israeli support for Lukashenka’s policies (Nexta, December 10). By all accounts, Western leaders are fond of hobnobbing with Tikhanovskaya, continuously professing her moral stature and ostensibly pending leadership. On December 3, she announced her readiness to lead Belarus “during a transitional period.” She pointed out that “the Lukashenka regime is falling apart, and following [...] pressure and protest, the stage of dialogue will inevitably begin... We all understand,” she stressed, “that people from the system will find that it makes more sense for them to sit down at the negotiating table than to fight their own people” (Gazeta.ru, December 3).

In contrast to Tikhanovskaya, President Lukashenka is broadly castigated as a dictator associated with electoral fraud and abuse of human rights; while his public relations team is deemed a sore loser in the court of public opinion. And yet, despite months of protests against his rule, Lukashenka remains firmly in control and taking steps that look all but certain to retain this status quo, while keeping Tikhanovskaya from achieving her stated goals.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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## **Man shouts ‘Jews to the grave’ as he tips over Kiev chanukiah**

**Alkes Phillips**

**The JC | December 14, 2020**

Video footage has emerged of a man upturning a public chanukiah in Kyiv’s Kontraktova Square, in Ukraine, before shouting an antisemitic slogan. The video, believed to have been shot last Thursday, shows a man stating: “Ukrainians – the power. Jews – to the graves.”

At the start of the video, the perpetrator speaks to camera. According to a report

by the Times of Israel, he said that he wanted to “show everyone how to treat foreigners who are occupying and taking over the country.”

Director general of the Ukrainian Jewish Committee Eduard Dolinsky claimed the man was “Ukrainian nationalist” activist Andriy Rachkov.

According to the Jewish Confederation of Ukraine, police had also identified the perpetrator as Mr Rachkov and were pursuing a charge of hooliganism. The confederation alleged that he returned to repeat the act the following day. They added they were “deeply concerned about the blatant act of vandalism”, and called on the police to investigate Mr Rachkov under Ukrainian equality laws.

[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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