

Weekly Top 10

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*Vandalism at the Jewish cemetery in Chisinau, Moldova on Oct. 31, 2020.
(Courtesy of the Jewish Community of Moldova)*

WASHINGTON, D.C. November 6, 2020

TO: NCSEJ Leadership and Interested Parties

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

Dear Friend,

On Saturday night, a number of headstones were destroyed at the Jewish cemetery in the Moldovan capital of Chisinau. NCSEJ was in contact with the Embassy of Moldova to express our concern and urge the investigation and prosecution of the vandals. [The Moldovan Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) and the [Ministry of Education, Culture, and Research](#) responded quickly with statements condemning the desecration. Also over the weekend, three headstones were desecrated in the town of Kecel in Hungary.

On Saturday and Sunday Moldova and Georgia respectively held elections. Early results in Georgia's parliamentary elections showed the incumbent Georgian Dream party leading with 48% of the vote.

According to the Georgian Institute of Politics, Georgian Dream's economic policy comprises a combination of the pre-existing free-market model, created by their predecessors, with a comprehensive "center-left" safety net. There will be a second round on the 21st of November.

Moldova's presidential election is heading for a runoff between President Igor Dodon and Maia Sandu, with the pro-European challenger pulling ahead of the incumbent after the first round of voting on Sunday. The electoral commission's data showed Dodon's main challenger, former Prime Minister Sandu, securing a narrow lead with 36.1% of the vote. As no candidate received a majority vote, a run-off will be held on the 15th of November.

The situation in Belarus remains tense with over 300 protestors arrested in Minsk on Sunday during protests -- the 13th consecutive week of demonstrations in the capital of Minsk. President Alexander Lukashenko reshuffled his top officials this week, appointing Interior Minister Yuri Karayev and Security Council Secretary Valery Vakulchik as his envoys to the westernmost Grodno and Brest regions bordering Poland and Lithuania. On November 1, Belarus closed its borders to all foreigners.

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.](#)

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NCSEJ WEEKLY TOP 10
Washington, D.C. November 6, 2020

Headstones smashed at Jewish cemeteries in Moldova and Hungary
Cnaan Liphshiz
JTA| November 3, 2020

(JTA) — Headstones were smashed and graves defaced at Jewish cemeteries in Hungary and Moldova.

At least five headstones were destroyed at a cemetery in the Moldovan capital of

Chisinau on Saturday, the Jewish Community of Moldova said in a statement. Swastikas, a pentagram and the number 666 were spray painted on other headstones.

The same cemetery has been targeted for vandalism for three years straight, the statement said.

In a separate incident in Kecel, south of Budapest, three tombstones were smashed and human feces were found on a nearby headstone on Sunday, the Mazsihisz umbrella group of Hungarian Jewish communities reported on its website. Police are investigating the incident, Mazsihisz said.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Romanian PM to 'Post': Romania, Israel share legacies, challenges, hopes

Ludovic Orban

The Jerusalem Post | November 3, 2020

It is not by mere coincidence that I have arrived in Israel at this particular time, under such challenging circumstances that are upon us all. As I have been preparing for my first official visit to Israel as prime minister of Romania, I discovered there is a lot to share between Romania and Israel at all levels.

This common ground stems sometimes from surprising corners. For instance, the national anthem of Israel, "Hatikvah," was adapted in 1888 by the composer Samuel Cohen from a Romanian folk song.

One of the strongest bridges between our countries lies in the legacy of our deeply rooted respective communities that continue to have powerful ties. We are indebted to the community of Israelis of Romanian origin for the widespread appreciation of Romania within Israeli society. Likewise, back home, we are constantly reminded by the small but vibrant Jewish community in Romania of this special link with Israel.

[Read the full article here.](#)

No Night So Dark: The Story of a Czech-Jewish Family Discovered From a Anastasia Linevich

Prague Morning | November 3, 2020

The story of a successful Czech-Jewish family that was hidden in a black box for decades has come to light thanks to the efforts of family members and journalist David Vaughan. It reveals the life story of several generations of the Wels family in pre-war Czechoslovakia, whom the tragedy of the Holocaust nearly eliminated.

The exhibit "No Night So Dark" should still be taking place in the Winternitz Villa in the hills of the Smichov district. Prague offers a great number of villas outside the city centre with family stories behind each of them. The story of Wells' family could have been lost forever.

However, a box called "the Black Elephant" stuffed with hundreds of letters, sketches, photographs, and memoirs was discovered in the wardrobe of the only surviving Wels family member, Tomáš, who had escaped to Britain during WWII. Tomáš never shared the story of his family with his children, until he was admitted to hospital for heart surgery. This is when he invited his son Colin to tell him about the past, but then a sudden stroke left him unable to speak. The only memories that were left of the Wels family were kept in a black box, where Tomáš' mother Ida had put everything that was dear to them before she along with almost the whole family was first sent to Terezín. Then in September 1943, Rudolf, Ida, and Martin Wels were sent to Auschwitz, never to return.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Russian police raid Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation in Moscow

Reuters | November 5, 2020

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russian police raided the Moscow offices of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation on Thursday and state bailiffs said a criminal investigation had been opened against the group's director.

Navalny, who is convalescing in Germany after his alleged poisoning with a novichok nerve agent in Russia, posted images on social media of law

enforcement officers at his group's offices in a business centre in Moscow.

The RIA news agency cited bailiffs as saying the raid was linked to a criminal case against Ivan Zhdanov, director of Navalny's group, for failing to implement a court order, an apparent reference to a lawsuit payout.

A court in Moscow ordered Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation and Navalny supporter Lyubov Sobol last month each to pay 29 million roubles (\$374,483) for libelling the Moscow Schoolchild catering company.

The Kremlin's critics have cast those lawsuits, as well as a series of mass police raids, as part of a coordinated campaign aimed at crippling their activities. Russian authorities deny that.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Georgian civil society organisations express negative assessment of 31 October elections **CommonSpace.eu | November 5, 2020**

Georgian civil society organisations have given a negative assessment of the 31 October parliamentary elections. They say "the Georgian government has failed to ensure the elections adhere to democratic standards".

On October 31, 2020, the parliamentary elections were held in Georgia in accordance with the updated electoral system. The citizens of Georgia had the opportunity to elect a legislative body based on a model that is close to the proportional system, and this should be considered as an important step forward. Despite this change, we believe that the Georgian government has failed to ensure the elections adhere to democratic standards. Moreover, in our assessment, the 2020 parliamentary elections were the least democratic and free among the elections held under the Georgian Dream government.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Kyrgyzstan: Protests flourish as crises mount on all sides **Eurasia.net | November 2, 2020**

Sadyr Japarov came to power in Kyrgyzstan by exploiting and directing street anger.

But the prime minister-cum-acting president may learn before too long that testy crowds are a sword that cuts both ways.

There was some evidence of that on Bishkek's streets on November 2 as a bewildering number of simultaneous low-level demonstrations unfolded over a matter of hours.

Seemingly the most consequential one involved traders from Bishkek's colossal Dordoi bazaar, who assembled in front of the Government House to complain that they have for weeks been unable to take receipt of goods arriving from China. They blame Kyrgyz customs and border personnel for the holdup.

"We are making phone calls to China. There they tell us that the borders are open, but Kyrgyzstan isn't letting things through," one trader was quoted as saying by Kaktus news website.

Kaktus has reported previously, on the basis of reports from freight companies, that some trucks are being held at the Torugart crossing for periods of up to three weeks. The cause has been attributed variously to last month's political unrest, and the confusion provoked by the subsequent behind-the-scenes scramble for government posts, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

[Read the full article here.](#)

The Belarusian Crisis and the Unenviable Fate of the Mediators **Grigory Ioffe** **The Jamestown Foundation | November 3, 2020**

The political crisis in Belarus has reached either a stalemate or a crossroads that evades easy predictions as to where, when and how it will be resolved or alleviated. On the government side, the stalemate reveals itself in unusual nervousness. The country's law enforcement chiefs have been reshuffled—itsself not that unusual, but the recent tempo has been remarkable. Only in September, Valery Vakulchik was transferred to be secretary of the national Security Council

after having chaired the Belarusian KGB for the last eight years. Now, Vakulchik was suddenly shifted again, to the position of presidential assistant responsible for Brest Oblast. Likewise, Yury Karayev, the minister of internal affairs (in charge of police) since merely June 2019, has now been named assistant to the president as well, responsible for Grodno (Belta, October 30). The heads of three Belarusian universities have also been replaced (Tut.by, October 20). Additionally, the borders with Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Ukraine were closed for motorized entrance without prior announcement—though the border crossings remain open for those wishing to exit (Tut.by, October 29). President Alyaksandr Lukashenka declared that the state is beginning to encounter threats of “terrorism” and referred specifically to wire circuit closures at multiple railway segments that could lead to catastrophes (Sputnik.by, October 30). He pledged no “further retreat” by the authorities. Moreover, the head of state insisted that any students who join protest rallies should be expelled and promised to officially stop recognizing foreign college diplomas (Tut.by, October 29). The latter pledge was a response to offers issued by academic institutions in Lithuania and Poland to accept the expelled Belarusian students. Nonetheless, it marks a notable departure by what was heretofore a relatively open country despite widespread clichéd perceptions to the contrary (see EDM, June 20, 2012, November 10, 2014, August 2, 2018).

[Read the full article here.](#)

Ukraine caught between constitutional crisis and counter-revolution

Mattia Nelles

The Atlantic Council | November 5, 2020

A controversial October 27 ruling by the Ukrainian Constitutional Court has canceled the requirement for government officials to file e-declarations of their assets, sparking a political crisis in Kyiv. Critics say the court decision strikes at the heart of anti-corruption reforms adopted since Ukraine’s 2014 Revolution of Dignity and poses a direct threat to the country’s Euro-Atlantic integration.

President Zelenskyy has slammed the move. The Ukrainian leader branded it an attempted “counter-revolution” staged by “a coalition of Russian proxies and some prominent Ukrainian oligarchs who feel threatened by the activities of our anti-corruption institutions.” He has responded in dramatic fashion by calling for a complete overhaul of the Constitutional Court.

With Zelenskyy and the Constitutional Court now engaged in an increasingly open confrontation, Ukraine faces the prospect of a serious constitutional crisis without any obvious legislative or political solutions.

This is creating considerable challenges for Ukraine’s Western partners, who have a clear interest in safeguarding the country’s post-2014 reform progress but also remain committed to the principles of constitutional government.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Hungary Is Sliding Toward Authoritarianism. Can the Mayor of Budapest Save It?

Vivienne Walt

Time | November 5, 2020

On a recent autumnal night in Budapest, about 1,000 people jammed the narrow street outside the city’s prestigious University of Theatre and Film Arts, as speakers on a makeshift podium railed against Hungary’s far-right Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. “We have had enough of this civil war!” bellowed the filmmaker Szabolcs Hajdu, just hours after the government effectively removed the school’s longtime leaders and replaced them with Orbán’s political loyalists. “This is not just about the university,” Hajdu shouted. “It is about the whole country.”

The crowd needed little persuasion that their country was inching toward authoritarianism. Orbán and his Fidesz party won overwhelming control of Hungary’s parliament in early 2010 and set about building what the Prime Minister himself calls an “illiberal democracy.” In the decade since, Hungarians have seen judges and bureaucrats appointed for their political fealty, the media transformed into pro-government propaganda and civil-society groups starved of resources.

Then came the pandemic. With the world in crisis and Hungary under lockdown, Orbán declared emergency measures in March, granting himself the power to bypass parliament and rule by decree. COVID-19 data was to be strictly controlled, with doctors telling inquiring politicians and journalists that they were forbidden to talk publicly about the crisis. Those who criticized the government

online faced arrest. On paper, the emergency measures expired in June, but the government's grip on power has not loosened. What few remaining independent news sites remain are being silenced, and public universities like the University of Theatre and Film Arts are being privatized, with control handed to Orban's allies. In May, the Washington-based rights group Freedom House said Hungary no longer qualifies as a full democracy.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Moldova heads to an electoral run-off as “apocalyptic” discourse gains ground

Denis Cenusă

The New Eastern Europe | November 4, 2020

The first round of Moldova's presidential elections is over. More than 1.3 million people have voted for their chosen candidates. Ex-Prime Minister Maia Sandu, as well as the incumbent President Igor Dodon, will now compete in a run-off vote on November 15th. A second-round vote involving these two candidates was forecasted months and even years before the current elections. Both have been political adversaries since 2016 and even during last year's coalition, which was formed after the fall of the oligarchic regime. This relationship soon changed after Dodon's Socialists Party toppled Sandu's government one year ago.

In the beginning of this month Sandu won with 36 per cent, which is about 4 per cent more than her main challenger. For Sandu, this may seem like revenge for her defeat in 2016. However, the second round will be tougher and Dodon has already presented the arsenal of topics and tools that he hopes to use against Sandu. This includes fighting against the defamation and disinformation campaign, which in many ways resembles the themes of the 2016 elections. Some new topics are also present, such as COVID-19 and potential destabilisation surrounding the Transnistrian conflict.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Neither U.S. Candidate Bodes Well for Russia's Energy Market

Tatiana Mitrova

Carnegie Moscow Center | November 2, 2020

The energy sector was an early hostage of geopolitical friction between the United States and Russia, and the situation has only gotten worse in recent years. The two countries may be the biggest traders on the global energy market, but bilateral trade in resources between them is practically non-existent. Joint energy projects are few and far between, not only on their own territory, but that of third parties too. Neither Russia nor the United States has run up against any serious threat to their national energy security: both countries are self-sufficient. Yet energy remains a constant source of divisions in bilateral relations.

For decades, the two countries have been immersed in both overt and covert conflicts over access to energy technology (sanctions relating to this have been a regular feature for half a century), over the European gas market (most recently over Nord Stream 2), over competition between Russian gas and U.S. liquified natural gas (LNG), in the Caspian region (over the development of pipelines bypassing Russia), and in the Arctic (over control of Arctic resources). There have been periods of relative thaw, when the two sides have tried to find shared interests, and even undertaken joint projects, but most of them ended in disappointment.

Before 2014, conflict in the energy sector was limited to symbolic gestures, rhetoric, and attempts to use diplomacy to gain influence in third-party countries. That changed when Russia was slapped with sanctions affecting its oil and gas industry over its role in the Ukraine crisis, just as there was a boom in shale gas and oil in the United States. That boom drastically reduced U.S. dependence on hydrocarbon imports, and even turned the United States into a net exporter in some areas, such as LNG, which instantly threw it into a battle with Russia for the biggest markets: Europe and Asia.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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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