

## Weekly Top 10

**WASHINGTON, D.C. March 6, 2020**

**TO: NCSEJ Leadership and Interested Parties**

**FROM: Daniel Rubin, Chairman;  
Aleksander Smukler, President;  
Mark B. Levin, Executive Vice-Chairman & CEO**

Dear Friend,

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky made another major change in his government when he forced out Prime Minister Oleksiy Honcharuk earlier this week. Honcharuk was replaced by Rada member Deputy Prime Minister Denys Shmygal.

The Ukrainian parliament overwhelmingly approved Shmygal nomination. Before entering electoral politics, he worked for DTEK, an energy company owned by Ukrainian oligarch Rinat Akhmetov. The new prime minister has promised quick action on President Zelensky's core agenda of economic reform.

On Sunday, Azerbaijan became the first country with a Shi'ite majority to have a cabinet-level minister give a speech at the annual AIPAC Policy Conference in Washington. Samir Sharifov, Azerbaijan's finance minister, told the crowd: "Cooperation with Israel is not limited to oil supply; we are interested in widening cooperation in defense and the transfer of technology." Jews have lived in Azerbaijan for 2,600 years, with an estimated 30,000 currently residing in the country of 10 million.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin announced a military ceasefire in Idlib to begin at midnight on Thursday. Idlib, the last rebel stronghold in Syria, has experienced increased violence and bloodshed since last December, the start of the Russia-backed Syrian offensive to regain control over the region.

This week, NCSEJ met with the new Ukrainian ambassador to the United States, Volodymyr Yelchenko and the Charge d'Affaires of Belarus to the United States, Dmitry Basik. NCSEJ also had the opportunity to meet with Andras Heisler, President of the Jewish Communities in Hungary and Andras Buchler, President of the Sopron Jewish Community, who were in Washington for meetings with Congress, the Executive branch, and the American-Jewish community.

Sincerely,



Mark B. Levin  
NCSEJ Executive Vice-Chairman & CEO

**NCSEJ WEEKLY TOP 10**  
**Washington, D.C. March 6, 2020**

**Ukraine's President Zelensky replaces his Prime Minister**  
**Ivana Kottasová and Mary Ilyushin**  
**CNN | March 4, 2020**

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky has replaced the country's Prime Minister on Wednesday, saying he hoped the new PM would "do the impossible."

Ukraine's Parliament approved Denis Shmygal as the new PM Wednesday, after accepting the resignation of Oleksiy Honcharuk at an extraordinary session of the Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine's parliament.

Zelensky rejects Trump's claim that Ukraine is corrupt in interview with CNN's Christiane Amanpour Zelensky rejects Trump's claim that Ukraine is corrupt in interview with CNN's Christiane Amanpour "The previous government did everything possible but today Ukrainians need a government that will do the impossible. I hope that the next Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine will be able to do that," Zelensky said, according to a statement on his website.

Shmygal is Ukraine's third Prime Minister in just over six months, and is a national politics newcomer. He served as the governor of Ivano-Frankovsk region and before that was the head of DTEK Burshtynskaya TPP, a coal power plant in the region.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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#### **Israel Praises Serbian Pledge to Open 'State Office' in Jerusalem**

**Milica Stojanovic**

**Balkan Insight | March 2, 2020**

The Israeli embassy in Belgrade said it was "happy" to hear that Serbia plans to open a diplomatic representative office in Jerusalem, which Israel claims as its capital.

"We are happy to hear [President Aleksandar] Vucic announcing a plan for the opening of the official Serbian state office in our capital Jerusalem. We encourage others to follow the same direction and join more countries," the embassy's Twitter account said.

Vucic announced the news while addressing the annual conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee on Sunday evening during his US trip.

"We are going to open very soon not only an office of our Chamber of Commerce. But, together with our Chamber of Commerce, an official state office in Jerusalem with the Serbian official flag alongside our embassy in Tel Aviv. That's our way of showing respect to the Jewish people," Vucic said.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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#### **Serbia's president calls general election for April 26**

**Reuters | March 4, 2020**

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic on Wednesday called a general election for April 26, a vote seen as important for his Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) to cement its hold on power.

"I wish a lot of success to all participants and a democratic atmosphere on election day," Vucic said after signing the decree in his office in Belgrade.

Most opposition parties have decided to boycott the vote, accusing Vucic and his coalition of autocracy, stifling media freedom, attacks on opposition activists, corruption and ties to organized crime. Vucic and his backers, who had an overwhelming majority in the outgoing 250-seat parliament, have vehemently denied the accusations.

Some of the opposition parties promote a nationalistic and pro-Russian agenda, The SNS sees Serbia as a future European Union member, but it also calls for close economic and military ties with Russia and China.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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#### **Acquainting Belarusian Jews with their Yiddish heritage**

**Arturo Kerbel Shein**

**Forward | March 3, 2020**

In discussions of economics, tourism, industry, politics and even contemporary Jewish culture, the Baltic lands and recent changes in the Balkans are mentioned often, as is the profound influence of the countries in central Europe on issues affecting the European Union.

Almost no one mentions Belarus, though.

True, in the Yiddish world, researchers travel to Belarus to find material on historical figures and events that took place there. But apart from the academic world, White Russia remains largely unknown to Jews, even though many of the cities and towns that once had flourishing Jewish communities can still be found there. Even Jews who know that their family comes from this area often say that they come from Poland, Lithuania, or Ukraine because they're better acquainted with the Jewish and general history of those lands.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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**Bulgaria agrees deal to cut price of Russian gas imports by 40%**  
**Reuters | March 3, 2020**

SOFIA, March 3 (Reuters) - Bulgaria has agreed a 40% cut in the price of gas it imports under its long-term contract with Russia, its dominant gas supplier, Prime Minister Boyko Borissov said on Tuesday.

Bulgaria, which relies on Russian imports for more than 80% of its gas needs, is the last of eight east European countries to agree a price cut after Brussels reached an anti-trust agreement with gas giant Gazprom in 2018.

Borissov told reporters it had been the biggest and will help the Balkan country's small and open economy. Market analysts said it was good news but long overdue as Bulgaria has been paying almost 50% more for Russian gas compared to its European peers for the past several years.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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**The Marvelous Misadventures of the U.S.-Ukraine Relationship**  
**Mark Episkopos**  
**National Interest | March 2, 2020**

The impeachment hearings in the House of Representatives have demonstrated a near-unanimous consensus among Washington experts and politicians regarding Ukraine policy, best expressed in the closing remarks of Rep. Adam Schiff's (D-Calif.): "We should care about Ukraine. We should care about a country struggling to be free and a Democracy . . . but of course, it's about more than Ukraine. It's about us. It's about our national security. Their fight is our fight. Their defense is our defense. When Russia remakes the map of Europe for the first time since World War II by dint of military force and Ukraine fights back, it is our fight too."

[Read the full article here.](#)

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**Slovakia's populist opposition wins parliamentary election**  
**The Times of Israel | March 1, 2020**

BRATISLAVA, Slovakia — The center-right populist opposition claimed victory in the parliamentary election in Slovakia, ending the reign of the country's long dominant but scandal-tainted leftist party that governed on an anti-immigration platform.

According to nearly complete results released by the Statistics Office early Sunday, the Ordinary People group captured 25% of the vote and 53 seats in the 150-seat parliament in a move that steered the country to the right and could make a local ally of France's far-right National Rally party led by Marine Le Pen a part of the governing coalition.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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**How Jews fleeing anti-Semitism in France are influencing Israeli politics**  
**Don Murray**  
**CBS | March 1, 2020**

It's a small country, but it is watched by the world.

Israel goes to the polls on March 2, the third time in a year. Many countries have tracked Israel's lengthy political crisis, but it has particular resonance in France.

It has the largest Jewish community in Europe and, in recent years, has been the largest European source of immigration to Israel. Immigration driven in part by fear.

The last decade has burdened France with a number of shocking and bloody memories, but one aggression, one victim, remains locked in the public's mind.

She was Sarah Halimi, a 65-year-old Jewish retired kindergarten teacher living in a high-rise in Paris. Among her neighbours was Kobili Troaré, a 27-year-old man she knew and chatted with from time to time.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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**Azerbaijan Minister Makes History by Attending AIPAC, Praises Ties With Israel**  
**Algemeiner | March 2, 2020**

Azerbaijan made history on Sunday by becoming the first country with a Shi'ite majority to have a cabinet-level minister give a speech at the annual AIPAC Policy Conference in Washington, D.C.

Samir Sharifov, Azerbaijan's finance minister, told the crowd: "Cooperation with Israel is not limited to oil supply; we are interested in widening cooperation in defense and the transfer of technology." He added that Israel is one of the few "states that supported in Azerbaijan in need with armaments."

[Read the full article here.](#)

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**Erdogan, Putin announce Idlib ceasefire after Moscow meeting**  
**Al Jazeera | March 5, 2020**

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin have announced a military ceasefire in Idlib, after a meeting in Moscow that lasted six hours.

Idlib, the last rebel stronghold in Syria, has witnessed increased violence and bloodshed since last December, the start of a Russia-backed Syrian offensive to regain control over the region.

[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.

