

## Weekly Top 10

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**WASHINGTON, D.C. October 2, 2020**

**TO: NCSEJ Leadership and Interested Parties**

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

Dear Friend,

[On September 27, 2020, fighting broke out between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the region of Nagorno-Karabakh](#), the worst fighting since a five-day war in 2016. Both sides have mobilized their troops and blame the other for provoking the violence and death of civilians. We have been in contact with the Jewish communities in both countries and while there is no specific community problem, citizens in both countries are under martial law.

Russian opposition figure, Alexander Navalny, [was accused on Thursday of working with the CIA](#), after Navalny said he believed President Vladimir Putin was behind the suspected poisoning that put him in a coma in Germany. [According to Le Monde](#), Mr. Putin suggested last week to French president Emmanuelle Macron that his nemesis had poisoned himself.

On Monday, the human rights community lost one of its titans when Yuri Orlov passed away. at age 96. A physicist by trade, he designed particle accelerators and studied the foundations of quantum mechanics. He made his mark in history when he created the Moscow Helsinki Group to expose human rights violations in the Soviet Union and was exiled and sentenced to a labor camp in Siberia. He endured illness and isolation before being freed as part of a prisoner swap orchestrated by President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1986. He became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1993. [Please read more about Yuir Orlov in a moving op-ed by Natan Sharansky.](#)

Yesterday, I was fortunate to participate in a [virtual global celebration of the 80th birthday of well known Jewish activist Mika Chlenov](#). NCSEJ joined International leaders from around the world to

pay tribute to his activism during the Soviet Jewry movement in Russia and his role as one of the leading figures in the development of independent Russian Jewish life after the fall of the Soviet Union. In the middle of the 1970's, Chlenov became one of the founders of the "culturnik direction" of the independent Jewish movement. In the final decade of Soviet power, he was an active member of the Jewish movement and one of its leaders, and was persecuted by the authorities and the KGB. He has worked tirelessly for decades on behalf of Jewish life in Russia. in many leadership positions including the President of the Va'ad of Russia, and the Secretary-General of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress.

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. October 2, 2020**

**With Yuri Orlov's bold vision, we lit a fire under the Soviet regime  
Natan Sharansky  
The Times of Israel | September 29, 2020**

"Please come," said Luda Alexeyeva, my partner-in-crime as a dissident in the USSR.

It was an early morning in February 1977. Two weeks earlier, a contact in the KGB had warned us that his superiors were about to arrest Yuri Orlov, the founder of the Moscow Helsinki Watch Group. Orlov sneaked out of his own window that day, and had been missing since. The KGB arrested Alex Ginzburg, another member of our group, instead.

"Please."

I didn't want to come. Luda's place was far, and I had much to take care of that morning. I suggested coming in the afternoon instead. But Luda insisted, saying she didn't feel well, and sounding tense. I realized that something must be going on — something she didn't want to say on the KGB-bugged phone line.

"I'm coming."

Less than two years before that morning, the USSR had signed the Helsinki Accords. In this agreement it committed itself to respecting its own citizens' human rights in exchange for political and economic benefits in the international sphere. As dissidents in the USSR, we read the news with deep mistrust. We had no doubt that the Soviet Union would ignore this commitment and enjoy the benefits of the agreement while shrouding its crimes in lies. We tried to find ways to keep the USSR accountable for its crimes in the eyes of the West. Some

suggested writing yet more letters to our western contacts, some suggested making statements to the foreign press. But Uri Orlov put his foot down.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Turkey and Russia preside over a new age of mercenary wars** **Ishaan Tharoor** **The Washington Post | September 30, 2020**

A long-“frozen” conflict flared back to life this week. Dozens have been reportedly killed amid ongoing clashes between Azerbaijani and Armenian forces in Nagorno-Karabakh, a mountainous enclave of ethnic Armenians encircled by Azerbaijani territory. The new round of fighting that began over the weekend marks the bloodiest moment since the 1990s, when the two fledgling former Soviet states warred over disputed regions until a Russian-brokered cease-fire in 1994.

Both countries have mobilized their armed forces and blame the other for provoking the violence and killing civilians. The situation has been made more complex by the intervention of Turkey, which, unlike previous flare-ups when it urged a cessation of hostilities, has staunchly backed Azerbaijan and is allegedly even engaging in the clashes. Armenian officials said a Turkish F-16 shot down an Armenian fighter jet, a charge Azerbaijani and Turkish officials rejected.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Kremlin says Navalny works with CIA, after he accuses Putin of poisoning** **Reuters | October 1, 2020**

BERLIN/MOSCOW (Reuters) - The Kremlin accused opposition politician Alexei Navalny on Thursday of working with the CIA, after Navalny said he believed President Vladimir Putin was behind the suspected poisoning that put him in a coma in Germany.

The accusation from Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov appears to be the first time the Russian authorities have directly accused Putin’s highest-profile critic of working with a foreign intelligence agency.

It raises the stakes should Navalny fulfil a pledge to return to Russia, and may add to pressure on Western leaders, especially German Chancellor Angela Merkel, to take action over his case.

Navalny responded by saying he would sue Peskov over the accusation, challenging him to present evidence to back it up.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Belarus a Blip, Russia Looms Large on Macron’s Baltic Visit (Part One)** **Vladimir Socor** **The Jamestown Foundation | September 30, 2020**

French President Emmanuel Macron’s meeting with Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouska in Lithuania turned out to be even less than a side-show: a half-hour private meeting, without a joint public appearance (BNS, Agence France Presse, September 28, 29). Instead, Russia loomed large on Macron’s agenda for his two-day visit to Lithuania.

For all his ambitions to lead Europe into a rapprochement with Russia, Macron might have reflected that Lithuania had witnessed the rise and fall of such French ambitions two hundred years earlier. A stone’s throw from Vilnius, on the Nemunas River, Emperor Napoleon met with Russian Tsar Alexander I in 1807 to divide Central-Eastern Europe into spheres of influence. The partition lines largely resembled those drawn in 1939 by France’s nemesis with the same eastern power (Grégoire Gafenco, *Préliminaires de la Guerre à l’Est*, Egloff Fribourg and L.U.F. Paris, 1944, 1946). And five years after the meeting on the Nemunas River, it was Vilnius again that became the terminus of the Grande Armée’s bare remnants escaping from Russia.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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### **Reformed or Just Retouched? Uzbekistan’s New Regime** **Yuriy Sarukhanyan** **Carnegie Moscow Center | October 1, 2020**

In four years, Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has managed to establish a reputation both at home and abroad as a reformer. Upon coming to power in September 2016, he announced sweeping changes and did everything he could to distance himself from the harsh regime of his late predecessor, Islam Karimov. His first steps met with almost universal support, but over time, enthusiasm has waned as some of the reforms turned out to be superficial. Next year, Mirziyoyev must run for reelection and make an important choice: whether to continue with his half-hearted liberalization without touching the foundations of the regime, or to embark on the more vigorous reforms that Uzbek society expects from him. When Mirziyoyev took charge of Uzbekistan following the death of Karimov, the public was skeptical of his promises of reform. Having served as Karimov's prime minister for thirteen years, he didn't look much like a fearless reformer. Yet the new president immediately embarked on a raft of changes.

Mirziyoyev began by tackling the issues for which Karimov had come under the strongest criticism: the economy, public policy, and international relations. Most political prisoners from the Karimov era were released from Uzbekistan's prisons, and the authorities closed the Jaslyk prison, which was notorious for the use of torture. These steps were welcomed by the West.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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## **Fighting Flares Between Azerbaijan and Armenia**

**Andrew E. Kramer**

**The New York Times | September 27, 2020**

MOSCOW — Fighting that was reported to be fierce broke out on Sunday between Azerbaijan and Armenia and quickly escalated, with the two sides claiming action with artillery, helicopter and tanks along a disputed border.

The military action centered on the breakaway province of Nagorno-Karabakh, an Armenian separatist enclave in Azerbaijan. Ethnic tensions and historical grievances in the mountainous area north of Turkey and Iran have made kindling for conflict for decades.

The fighting on Sunday, however, was reportedly more severe than the typical periodic border skirmishes, and both governments used military language describing the events as war. Before Sunday, the last major escalation was in 2016.

This year, a small flare-up in July went almost ignored. The mediators of a diplomatic settlement process, France, the United States and Russia, are distracted and increasingly at odds over other issues, analysts say. The conflict simmered, all but forgotten, until Sunday.

"Horrible news" from the Caucasus, Thomas de Waal, a senior fellow with Carnegie Europe, wrote on Twitter. The fighting was "already a small war." Both sides reported civilian dead and wounded.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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## **FM Szijjártó Meets Mazsihisz Leader: Constructive Dialogue with Jewish Organisations Important**

**Hungary Today | September 29, 2020**

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó visited the Rumbach Sebestyén Street synagogue in Budapest on Tuesday for talks with Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities (Mazsihisz) President András Heisler, the organisation said. Heisler expressed thanks for the exemplary development of Hungary-Israel relations and briefed Szijjártó about the situation of the Hungarian Jewish community and plans for the near future, it said in a statement.

"The Mazsihisz president highlighted areas where relations between the Hungarian government and Mazsihisz have room for development with a view to making joint achievements," it added.

Maintaining constructive dialogue with international Jewish organisations was also discussed, Mazsihisz said. The importance of these relations was demonstrated by the presence of European Affairs Manager at the World Jewish Congress András Ligeti and Mazsihisz presidential advisor for international relations András Bűchler, the statement added.

It also said that a comprehensive revamp of the Rumbach Sebestyén Street synagogue financed from 3.2 billion forints (EUR 8.9m) granted by the Prime Minister's Office and the Human Resources Ministry is expected to be completed this year.



[Read the full article here.](#)

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## **Beba's Story Tells of Jewish Life Before the Nazis**

**Joseph Berger**

**The New York Times | September 30, 2020**

Three years ago, a large cache of artifacts, including poems, letters and notebooks by some of the greatest Yiddish writers of the first half of the 20th century, was discovered in the basement of a church in Vilnius, Lithuania. In scouring through them and other artifacts that had been rescued from Nazi efforts to destroy all traces of Jewish culture, researchers discovered a more humble document: the writing of a fifth-grade girl telling of her daily life in Vilnius in the 1930s.

Now that girl, whose name was Americanized to Beba Epstein, is the central character of a YIVO Institute for Jewish Research exhibition that went up online recently. The exhibition aims to explore Jewish life in Eastern Europe before World War II. By scrolling through Beba's story, a visitor will learn that the first movie she saw was "Uncle Tom's Cabin," and that her grandfather tried to squelch her mischievous side.

"My grandfather used to tell me that I had to behave like a good religious girl," wrote Beba, who was born in 1922, in what she called her autobiography. "If not, God would spank me with iron rods — so I hid from God."

There are photographs of Beba and her sister Esye among their schoolmates, and stories of swimming and running in summer.

But at many points visitors can, with the click of a mouse, learn about Vilnius itself; its schools; and the summertime places Jews preferred, like Otwock and Zakpopona in Poland whose crisp air was believed to aid in curing tuberculosis and other diseases. Over 200 artifacts — photographs, film clips, maps, school notebooks — are featured in the exhibition.

"Beba Epstein: The Extraordinary Life of an Ordinary Girl" is the first installment in what YIVO officials said would be a series of such portraits that are used to illuminate European Jewish life before the Nazis killed six million Jews.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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## **Opponents of Moldovan President Warn of Fraud Risk in November Vote**

**Madalin Necsutu**

**Balkan Insight | September 30, 2020**

Voting has yet to start in Moldova's presidential election, but five challengers to pro-Russian incumbent Igor Dodon have already cried foul.

Barely a month before the November 1 vote, Dodon's closest challenger, pro-European Maia Sandu, and four other contenders signed a joint letter to European officials, including EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, calling for intervention in what they said was unfolding fraud.

Dodon told them to stop complaining, but a higher number of polling stations being opened in Russia and apparent irregularities in voting lists are fuelling concern.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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## **European Georgia presents party list for 2020 parliamentary elections**

**Agenda.ge | September 29, 2020**

Opposition party European Georgia has presented its party list for the 2020 parliamentary elections.

Leader of the party Davit Bakradze said their representatives in the list are not distributed consecutively, which means that voters themselves decide who enters the parliament.

We are not a party where lists are written in cabinets, we are not a party where one, two, or five people decide who should be in parliament. We are not a party where people divide positions so that people do not ask for their opinion. We are a party where everything is decided by the opinion of the voters and the people. Therefore, the basic principle of staffing our party is party competition", said

Bakradze.

[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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