

Weekly Top 10

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Michał Laszczkowski, right, with members of the Wagabunda Scouts troop

WASHINGTON, D.C. November 20, 2020

TO: NCSEJ Leadership and Interested Parties

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

Dear Friend,

The Moldovan presidential election, seen as a contest between the west and Russia resulted in victory, after a run-off vote, for the pro-west candidate, former prime minister Maia Sandu. Sandu won praise from both Russian President Putin and the EU. A former World Bank economist, she emphasized she would make fighting corruption a priority. She faces major challenges in dealing with the economy and the coronavirus pandemic. She also will have to face these challenges without a parliamentary majority. Final results are expected to be announced within the next few days. The U.S. Ambassador to the O.S.C.E congratulated President Sandu on her victory.

Ukrainian Chief Rabbis Yaakov Bleich and Moshe Asman are both

supporting the building of a synagogue on the grounds of Babyn Yar. The synagogue is scheduled to open in September 2021 in time for the 80th anniversary of the massacre of more than 30,000 Jews in 1941.

Lastly, please save the date for our 2020 Winter Board of Governors Meeting on **Tuesday, December 8th at 12:00 p.m. EST.** [Please register here.](#)

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 20, 2020

This non-Jewish leader is working to clean up Poland's Jewish cemeteries

Cnaan Liphshiz

The Jerusalem Post | November 18, 2020

National Independence Day in Poland has served in recent years as a backdrop for antisemitic, xenophobic and violent incidents at nationalist rallies. Last week, thousands in Warsaw flouted the coronavirus ban on public gatherings and clashed with police who tried to disperse them. The illegal procession on Independence Day, Nov. 11, included a banner that read “no to Jewish demands” — a reference to the efforts pushing Poland to pass legislation offering restitution for property that once belonged to Jews, mostly Holocaust victims.

Compared to previous years, that was relatively tame. In 2017, marchers shouted “White Europe, Europe must be white,” “Sieg Heil” and “Remove Jewry from power.”

But this year in Nowe Miasto, a village situated 35 miles northwest of Warsaw, about a dozen non-Jewish teenage members of the local branch of the International Scouts movement spent their Independence Day quite differently. They were cleaning up the local Jewish cemetery, beating back the overgrown vegetation from around the graveyard's 10 surviving headstones.

At noon, the members of the Wagabunda 426th Scout team put down their shears and, outside the cemetery, they joined in the customary singing of the Polish anthem, “Poland Is Not Yet Lost,” or “Mazurek Dąbrowskiego.”

The symbolism of that moment was not lost on Michał Laszczkowski, president of the Cultural Heritage Foundation, a nonprofit that organized the Wagabunda cleanup and dozens of others like it in recent years.

“Maybe it was symbolic, but that wasn’t the intention,” Laszczkowski, 38, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. “The fact that the cleanup fell on Independence Day was for practical reasons, not to make a statement.”

Lockdowns and school shutdowns in Poland forced the scouts to postpone plans to clean up the cemetery last month, said Laszczkowski, who contacted the Nowe Miasto Scouts at the suggestion of the Mayor’s Office.

“We needed to do it on a school holiday, so we chose Independence Day because most other events were canceled this year anyway,” he said.

The end result is nonetheless appropriate, Laszczkowski said.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky tests positive for COVID-19 **Cnaan Liphshiz** **JTA | November 19, 2020**

(JTA) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said he has tested positive for COVID-19.

Zelensky, who is Jewish, made the announcement Monday on Twitter, adding that he is feeling well and continuing to work in confinement.

“There are no lucky people for whom #COVID19 does not pose a threat,” Zelensky wrote. “Despite all the quarantine measures, I received a positive test. I feel good & take a lot of vitamins. Promise to isolate myself, but keep working. I will overcome COVID19 as most people do. It’s gonna be fine!”

Zelensky, 42, is among a number of world leaders who have contracted the virus, including President Donald Trump, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Why the exhibit on the Warsaw Jewish quarter, Muranow, is so good **Benny Mer** **Forward | November 16, 2020**

When I first heard that Warsaw’s Polin Museum had an exhibit about Muranow, the former Jewish quarter of the Polish capital, my first instinct was to buy a ticket to Warsaw - until I remembered that we’re in the midst of an epidemic.

Although I live in Israel, Muranow has become very familiar to me in recent years, during my ongoing research of daily Jewish life in Warsaw before the Holocaust. But my interest also extends to life in Muranow today. 70 years have passed since the Holocaust, so when I visit the area, I’m just as eager to learn about the Poles living there now as I am about its former Jewish residents.

Since I couldn’t tour the exhibit in person, I checked out the online exhibit and ordered the accompanying catalog, “Muranow Is Here.” The exhibit is full of creative touches. By pressing an old doorbell, for example, you can listen to an English translation of a short story by the late Yiddish writer Zusman Segalovitsh about Krasinski Park, the so-called Jewish garden in Muranow. A pair of “binoculars” allows the viewer to examine old photos in detail. And there are also more curious displays like a container of the German-produced skin cream “Nivea” which was apparently popular in Warsaw in the 1930s. As a result, the exhibit truly gives the viewer a sense of what Muranow was like.

[Read the full article here.](#)

New synagogue will open on Nazi killing grounds of Babyn Yar in Ukraine **Cnaan Liphshiz** **Forward | November 17, 2020**

(JTA) — A new synagogue is planned to open in Babyn Yar, the park in the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv commemorating a ravine where the Nazis and their collaborators murdered more than 30,000 Jews.

The new synagogue will open in 2021, the state news agency Ukrinform reported

last week, ahead of the 80th anniversary of the killings in September.

It is “our duty to care for people who visit Babyn Yar and need to honor their memory and pray for the death of their loved ones and all those who died in the terrible tragedy of the Holocaust,” Moshe Reuven Azman, a chief rabbi of Ukraine, said in a statement.

According to the report, Ukraine’s other Orthodox chief rabbi, Yaakov Dov Bleich, is on board as well with the synagogue plan. The Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center, an organization established in 2016 to build a Holocaust museum in Kyiv, is leading and fundraising for a project expected to cost millions of dollars. Babyn Yar has seen multiple failed projects to build a Holocaust museum and monuments.

Three cornerstones have been placed on the grounds with great pomp over the past 20 years for Jewish commemorative projects that never materialized. The plan to erect a museum there will not materialize before 2024.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Israel in talks with Russia over Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine, PM says **Ari Rabinovitch** **Reuters | November 16, 2020**

JERUSALEM - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday about buying Russia’s Sputnik V vaccine for COVID-19.

“An hour ago I spoke with Russian President Vladimir Putin regarding the possibility of purchasing an option on the vaccine Sputnik-V,” Netanyahu told reporters. “We will discuss this in the coming days.”

[Read the full article here.](#)

Nagorno-Karabakh becomes Russia's latest protectorate in the South Caucasus **CommonSpace.eu | November 19, 2020**

The second Karabakh war ended with catastrophic results for Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. The trilateral statement signed by Russian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani leaders on November 10 was a clear capitulation of the Armenian sides. During the 26 long years of negotiations under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group, several settlement plans have been elaborated and offered to the conflict sides – the phased deal in December 1997, the union state in 1998, the Key West deal in April 2001, the Kazan document in June 2011 and the Lavrov plan since 2014. However, none of them were as disastrous for Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic as the trilateral statement of November 10, 2020.

Previous deals envisaged the return of territories considered by Armenians as a “security zone” to Azerbaijan, but not all territories immediately, and with clear linkage with the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh. This status to be decided either through future negotiations (December 1997 deal and Lavrov plan) or through a legally binding referendum (Kazan document), or – as in the Key West model – for Karabakh of the 1988 borders to be declared as part of Armenia but Yerevan obliged to provide a corridor from Azerbaijan proper to Nakhchivan. Instead, the 10 November 2020 deal not only envisages the immediate return to Azerbaijan of all seven regions (four have been under Azerbaijani control as a result of hostilities, and three should be returned by December 1, 2020), but also accepts Azerbaijani control over 2000 square km of Nagorno-Karabakh proper. Thus, from 11450 square km of territory, only up to 2500 square km are left outside of Azerbaijani control. Furthermore, there is not a single word about Karabakh's status, and Armenia agreed to provide a land corridor from Azerbaijan proper to Nakhchivan, which will be under the control of Russian border troops.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Pompeo discusses free elections in Georgia **Giorgi Lomsadze** **Eurasia.org | November 18, 2020**

Few countries will offer Mike Pompeo as warm a welcome on his valedictory world tour as Georgia. American flags flew in the capital during the U.S. secretary of state’s overnight visit amid hopes that Pompeo could help solve Georgia’s domestic political gridlock and provide some counterbalance to Russia’s growing

clout in the region.

But the irony was not lost on observers. America's top diplomat has refused to recognize the results of the recent presidential election in his own country. Yet he was in Tbilisi to congratulate the ruling Georgian Dream party on its controversial recent win and to tell the opposition, whom he declined to meet, to recognize the results.

Only Georgian Dream has accepted the October 31 parliamentary election, in which it won a slight majority – enough to form a government and pass most laws. While international observers initially called the election broadly competitive, local watchdogs found flaws in the vote-counting process, including mathematical errors favoring Georgian Dream and problematic hand-written corrections in tabulation records.

The local office of the International Republican Institute, a Washington-sponsored group promoting democratic processes around the world, observed “misuse of state administrative resources, vote buying, intimidation of voters and observer groups, manipulation of precinct-level summary protocols.”

Pompeo did not meet with opposition leaders, so they tried to catch the secretary's attention by lining their supporters on Tbilisi's central Rustaveli Avenue. “We stand here today to send a message, to make a promise and take responsibility for Georgia's tomorrow, and this is the message we want Mr. Pompeo to take back home to the U.S.,” said Davit Usupashvili, a member of political party Lelo.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Pro-Western Candidate Wins Moldovan Presidential Election **Corneliu Rusnac** **US News via AP | November 16, 2020**

CHISINAU, Moldova (AP) — Maia Sandu, a former World Bank economist who favors closer ties with the European Union, has won Moldova's presidential runoff vote, decisively defeating the staunchly pro-Russian incumbent, according to preliminary results released Monday.

Sandu captured over 57% of the vote, leaving the incumbent, Igor Dodon, behind by over 15 points, according to preliminary data from the Central Election Commission, CEC, that said nearly 100% of the vote has been counted. Sunday's election was seen as a referendum on two divergent visions for the future of the small Eastern European nation sandwiched between Ukraine and Romania. Sandu and Dodon, who Russian President Vladimir Putin identified as his preferred candidate, have been rivals since he narrowly defeated her in the 2016 presidential race.

“People voted in very large numbers ... they voted because they care, because they want their voices to be heard,” Sandu, who promised during the campaign to secure more financial support from the EU, said late Sunday after it became apparent she was leading. “People want the ones in power to offer solutions to their problems.”

On Monday, Dodon conceded after the results were published and congratulated Sandu.

“I call for calm and peace, absolutely no disturbances or protests, we must not allow any destabilization of the country,” he said.

The current pro-Russian government controls only 51 of 101 seats in the parliament. The new president can dissolve parliament if the prime minister resigns and there are two failed attempts to find a successor.

Putin on Monday congratulated Sandu and expressed hope that her work as the head of state “contributes to the constructive development of relations” between Russia and Moldova.

Earlier in the day, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Moscow respects “the choice of the Moldovan people” and hopes to establish “a working relationship” with the new president.

“We know that Maia Sandu said she would work in the interests of the Moldovan people, and we're convinced that building good and close relations, cooperation in all areas with our country, Russia, is in the interest of the Moldovan people,” Peskov told reporters.

Ever since gaining independence a year after the Soviet collapse in 1991,

Moldova has been divided between those favoring closer relations with Europe and those who prefer stronger links with Moscow.

[Read the full article here.](#)

New Ukrainian ambassador presents copies of credentials at Israeli Foreign Ministry

Matthew Bryza

Ukrinform | November 11, 2020

On November 16, 2020, the Ambassador of Ukraine to the State of Israel Yevhen Korniychuk presented copies of his credentials to Chief of the State Protocol of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel Gil Haskel.

This was reported by the press service of the Ukrainian Embassy in Israel. On the same day, Ambassador Korniychuk met with Deputy Director-General of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, Director of the Eurasian Department Gary Koren, who congratulated the Ukrainian ambassador on the beginning of his mission in the State of Israel, wishing him fruitful work and success in promoting bilateral cooperation.

"The parties exchanged views on topical issues and prospects for the further development of Ukrainian-Israeli relations," the report reads.

As Ukrinform reported, President Volodymyr Zelensky, by a decree of September 10, appointed Yevhen Korniychuk as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine to the State of Israel.

[Read the full article here.](#)

'Ethnicity, not religion, focus of post-Soviet Jewish identity' - study

Jeremy Sharon

The Jerusalem Post | November 18, 2020

A new study conducted for the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress on Jewish identity among Jews from the former Soviet Union has found that despite a lack of religious emphasis in Jewish identity, connection to Jewish ethnicity among this population remains strong.

The study conducted in cooperation with Tel Aviv University and authored by Prof. Vladimir "Ze'ev" Khanin, interviewed 2,362 representatives of the "extended Jewish population" of the former Soviet Union to examine the cultural and communal identities of Jews in these countries in order to give a clearer understanding to Jewish organizations as to how to engage with them.

"The study clearly shows that ethnic, rather than religious or simply cultural understanding of Jewishness remains the ultimate element of post-Soviet Jews, including persons of mixed origin and non-Jewish members of their families," said Khanin.

Additionally, Khanin said that the study demonstrated the "formation of a new sub-ethnic group of the Jewish people - the Russian-speaking Jews," including those who remained in the former USSR and those who resettled in Israel, the US and other countries.

"The role of religion in the post-Soviet Jewish identity remains insignificant, and religious criteria for determining Jewishness, irrelevant in the Soviet times, are still on the periphery of the local Jewish national collective consciousness," the study found.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Young Russians play out their 'Birth Right' in Israeli short film

Jessica Steinberg

The Times of Israel | November 16, 2020

In the 24 minutes of "Birth Right," Inbar Horesh's new short film, she delves into Russian immigration to Israel and the intricacies of who is a Jew, and takes a critical look at Taglit-Birthright Israel, an organization that sponsors free 10-day trips to Israel for young adults.

Inspired by the true story of the lead actress, Natasha Olshanskaya, the film takes place during a Russian Birthright trip, as young Russians on a tour bus stop for the night in the Israeli desert, where they meet two IDF soldiers, also of Russian heritage.

The girls preen and flirt, but one, Natasha, quietly grappling with an undisclosed argument with her mother back home, connects with the shy of the two soldiers. Their connection helps unfold the story of how Russians, many without strong Jewish or Israeli backgrounds, end up living in Israel and serving in the army.

[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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