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American Citizen Services Newsletter ***January 2005***

Dear American Citizens:

Welcome to our inaugural issue of Embassy Skopje's American Citizen Services Newsletter. The primary goal of this e-Newsletter will be to inform you of important issues that may concern you while residing abroad. You will be receiving it on a quarterly basis, because you have registered with our office and are part of our Warden Registration System. If you have any suggestions or ideas for certain issues to be included in our newsletter, feel free to send them to us at consularskopje@state.gov.

This and all future newsletters will also be available on the ACS page of our Internet site at <http://skopje.usembassy.gov>.

In this issue:

- **Welcome Message from the Ambassador**
- **Safety and Security Situation**
- **Upcoming Holidays**
- **Opening of the new "American Corner" in Skopje**
- **Helpful Hints for Voters**
- **Taxpayer Information**
- **2005 Foreign Service Written Examination**

WELCOME MESSAGE FROM THE AMBASSADOR

Welcome to the Quarterly Newsletter for American Citizens in Macedonia! I hope this new publication will be helpful to you. Our goal is to provide the kind of information that will help make you an informed overseas American. Whether it be security issues, Embassy holidays, or passport information, we will use the Newsletter to stay in touch with you on issues that affect your lives. Take advantage of the links in the Newsletter to obtain information in greater detail as needed. And please pass the word to any Americans in Macedonia who have not yet registered with the Embassy to do so and to provide us with their email address so we can add them to the Newsletter mailing list. Finally, please accept my best wishes for a Happy and Successful 2005!

Lawrence E. Butler
Ambassador

SAFETY AND SECURITY SITUATION

While the security situation in Macedonia has stabilized, occasional inter-ethnic and criminal violence remains a concern. The overall number of security incidents has diminished significantly since 2001. Travelers should be alert for unusual behavior and other possible indicators that something out of the ordinary is in progress. Acts of intimidation and violence against American citizens have not occurred recently but remain possible.

Americans should avoid demonstrations and other sites, such as roadblocks, where large crowds are gathered, particularly those involving political causes or striking workers.

While overall levels of crime remain low, there have been several recent incidents of home and vehicle break-ins. We remind all American citizens to lock their windows and doors at all times and not leave any valuables in plain sight in their car.

For the latest security information, Americans traveling abroad should regularly monitor the Department's Internet web site at <http://travel.state.gov> where current [Worldwide Caution Public Announcements](#), [Travel Warnings and Public Announcements](#) can be found.

UPCOMING HOLIDAYS

The Embassy will be closed for the following holidays in the next six months:

- Presidents' Day – Monday, February 21
- May Day – Monday, May 2
- Memorial Day – Monday, May 30
- Independence Day – Monday, July 4

A full list of all of our holiday closings for 2005 is available online at <http://skopje.usembassy.gov/holidays/non-working%20days.html>

OPENING OF THE NEW "AMERICAN CORNER" IN SKOPJE

On January 25, 2005, U.S. Ambassador Lawrence E. Butler and Minister of Culture of the Republic of Macedonia Blagoja Stefanovski opened the new "American Corner" at the City Library "Braka Miladinovci" in Skopje.

This is the second American Corner to be opened in Macedonia. The American Corner in Bitola opened in October 2003 and has proved to be a great success to date, with nearly 700 registered members.

American Corners provide, free of charge, information to the general public about the United States through books, magazines, special publications, CD-ROMs, and the Internet. It will also host a wide variety of events, such as cultural programs and guest lectures. Membership is free and open to the general public. The American Corner in Skopje, located on the main floor of the library at #22 Blvd. Partizanski, is open Monday-Friday from 10:00 to 20:00 and Saturday from 11:00 to 16:00. Further information will be available on the Embassy Internet website at <http://skopje.usembassy.gov>.

HELPFUL HINTS FOR VOTERS

Eligible voters interested in voting in any elections that may come up during 2005 should submit a new Registration and Absentee Ballot Request Form (FPCA). The online version of the FPCA can also be found at <http://www.fvap.gov/pubs/onlinefpc.html>

Detailed information about special elections or referendums is always available at www.fvap.gov. It is the citizens' responsibility to notify their local election official of changes in their mailing address (where the citizen needs their ballot mailed). Many local election officials report that absentee voting materials mailed to citizens are returned to them marked "Address Unknown." This problem may be caused by changes in duty stations or overseas residence addresses.

Use a Federal Post Card Application (FPCA), SF 76. FVAP highly recommends that the FPCA be completed in its entirety and submitted every year. In addition to informing the local election official of the citizen's current mailing address, submitting the FPCA will register or confirm the citizen's registration, and acts as a request for absentee ballots for any elections to be held that year.

When completing the FPCA enter the following additional information to notify the local election official of your address change. In Item 4 (Mail Absentee Ballot To) enter "NEW ADDRESS" in the top of this box. In Item 7 (Remarks) write your previous address and enter "OLD ADDRESS". As a result, the FPCA will serve as a simultaneous absentee ballot request and a change of address form for voting purposes.

Remember, the FPCA must be properly completed and legible in order for it to be processed by the local election official. Completion instructions for each state can be found in Chapter 3 of the 2004-05 Voting Assistance Guide (also on the FVAP website at www.fvap.gov or <http://www.fvap.gov>.)

Note: The FPCA does not require postage if mailed within the U.S. mails. Completed FPCAs can be submitted to the American Citizen Services unit in the Consular Section for mailing to the U.S. via diplomatic pouch. When completing the FPCA, it is important to include a voter registration number or Social Security Number and any further information that can help the local election official properly identify you.

We strongly encourage all eligible voters to submit an FPCA early enough so that you have enough time to receive, vote your ballot, and return it to the local election official to meet state deadlines. Addresses for local election officials can also be found in Chapter 3 of the Guide (at www.fvap.gov <<http://www.fvap.gov>>) at the end of the instruction section for each state.

Voting Residence Guidelines: Overseas Citizens - The following general guidelines are for citizens residing outside the United States not affiliated with the Federal government to determine their state of legal residence for voting purposes.

* "Legal state of residence" for voting purposes is the state where you last resided immediately prior to your departure from the United States. This right extends to overseas citizens even though they may no longer own property or have other ties to their last state of residence and their intent to return to that state may be uncertain.

* Eligibility to vote and residency requirement is determined by the state. Your right to vote in your state and determination of voting precinct depend on your physical residence while you were in the state.

* Only 12 states, to date, provide exemption to the physical presence law for UOCAVA citizens overseas. These states allow eligible U.S. citizens who have never resided in the U.S. to register and vote where a parent would be eligible to vote. See the 2004-2005 Voting Assistance Guide (www.fvap.gov <<http://www.fvap.gov>>) for specific information.

* The Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) of 1986 provides that exercising the right to vote in elections for Federal offices under the Act should not affect for purposes of any Federal, state or local tax, the residence or domicile of a person exercising such right.

* Voting in Federal offices only may not be used as the sole basis to determine residency for the purposes of imposing state and local taxes.

If you claim a particular state as your residence and have other ties with that state in addition to voting, then you may be liable for state and local taxation, depending upon that particular state law. Appendix E of the Guide contains information on potential tax obligations. Consult your legal counsel or tax adviser with specific questions.

TAXPAYER INFORMATION

Can a consular officer assist me in filling out and filing my taxes?

No, consular officers are not permitted to assist with either filling out or filing taxes. You should contact an accountant, a tax attorney or the IRS for assistance with your taxes. Tax forms and booklets are available at the American Citizen Services section of the U.S. Embassy during the annual tax season, from about mid-January through the end of April.

Is there an IRS office or representative at the U.S. Embassy in Skopje?

No, there is no IRS office or representative at the Embassy. We do however stock a limited number of the most wanted federal tax forms and booklets in the ACS Unit. You can also download all IRS forms and instructions at www.irs.gov

May I file my federal or state taxes through the U.S. Embassy in Skopje?

No, you must file your tax returns directly with the [Internal Revenue Service](http://www.irs.gov) or your state's revenue service. Please see the list of state revenue service web sites below for more information about filing your state taxes.

Does my state's revenue service have a web site?

The following states have web sites containing information and tax forms. Please note that Alaska, Florida, New Hampshire*, Nevada, South Dakota, Texas, Washington, and Wyoming do NOT currently have state income taxes. Click on the state name below to go to its revenue site.

Alabama	Arizona	Arkansas	California	Colorado
Connecticut	Delaware	District of Columbia (Washington, D.C.)	Georgia	Hawaii
Idaho	Illinois	Indiana	Iowa	Kansas
Kentucky	Louisiana	Maine	Maryland	Massachusetts

Michigan	Minnesota	Mississippi	Missouri	Montana
Nebraska	New Hampshire	New Jersey	New Mexico	New York
North Carolina	North Dakota	Ohio	Oklahoma	Oregon
Pennsylvania	Rhode Island	South Carolina	Tennessee	Utah
Vermont	Virginia	West Virginia	Wisconsin	

*New Hampshire residents should contact state authorities as certain financial transactions may be subject to that state's income tax.

2005 FOREIGN SERVICE WRITTEN EXAMINATION

Are you interested in joining the U.S. State Department as a Foreign Service Officer? The U.S. Department of State will administer the 2005 Foreign Service Written Exam on April 23, 2005. The exam will be offered in Skopje thru the Embassy. The application deadline for overseas test centers is March 16, 2005. Register online in the Employment/Officers section of the Department's website at <http://www.careers.state.gov/officer/register.html>. Study guides are available online.

Eligibility Requirements:

To take the examination and to enter the Foreign Service you must:

- be a US citizen,
- be 20 years of age and no older than 59 on the date of the exam and 21 to be appointed and must be appointed to the Foreign Service prior to the month in which a candidate reaches age 60.
- be available for worldwide assignment,
- not have been previously separated from the Foreign Service for retirement, expiration of time in class, retirement based on relative performance or separation for cause.