



Embassy of the United States

Bul. Ilinden bb.
1000 Skopje
(+389 2) 3116 180
consularskopje@state.gov
<http://skopje.usembassy.gov>

American Citizen Services Newsletter September 2006

Issuance of New Electronic Passports Begins	1
New Passport Requirements for Travelers	2
Safety and Security Situation	2
Register Your Stay in Macedonia	2
Upcoming Embassy Holidays	3
Updated Information about Avian Influenza	3
Social Security Questionnaires	4
Elections Update 2006	4

ISSUANCE OF NEW ELECTRONIC PASSPORTS BEGINS

On August 14, the Department of State began issuing electronic passports (“e-passports”) to the public to enhance border security and to facilitate travel. Production has started at the Colorado Passport Agency and will be expanded to other production facilities over the next few months.

The new e-passport includes state-of-the-art biometric technology consistent with specifications adopted by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). An integrated circuit or chip in the rear cover of the passport will contain the same biographical information as the passport’s data page, and also will include a digital copy of the bearer’s photograph. The State Department has incorporated numerous security features into the passport to protect the chip against unauthorized attempts to read or alter the data inside.

For more information about the electronic passport, please visit the Bureau of Consular Affairs’ website at <http://travel.state.gov>.

NEW PASSPORT REQUIREMENTS FOR TRAVELERS

Congress has required that by January 1, 2008, most travelers to and from the Caribbean, Bermuda, Panama, Mexico and Canada have a passport to enter or re-enter the United States. Currently, other documents establishing proof of citizenship and identity are accepted for travel to and from parts of the Western Hemisphere.

To implement this new requirement, the Administration has proposed to complete it in phases, providing as much advance notice as possible to the affected public to enable them to meet the terms of the new guidelines. By January 8, 2007, a passport will be required for all air and sea travel to or from Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Bermuda. On January 1, 2008, the requirement will be extended to all land border crossings as well as air and sea travel.

This change will affect all United States citizens entering the United States from countries within the Western Hemisphere who currently do not possess valid passports. It also will affect certain foreign nationals who currently are not required to present a passport to travel to the United States.

SAFETY AND SECURITY SITUATION

While the security situation in Macedonia today is stable, travelers always should be alert for unusual behavior and other possible indicators that something out of the ordinary might be happening. Americans should avoid demonstrations and other sites, such as roadblocks, where large crowds are gathered, particularly those involving political causes or striking workers. Acts of intimidation and violence against American citizens have not occurred recently but remain possible. While overall levels of crime throughout Macedonia remain low, there have been occasional incidents of home and vehicle break-ins. We remind all American citizens to lock their windows and doors at all times and not to leave any valuables in plain sight in their vehicle.

The Worldwide Caution issued for American citizens abroad by the U.S. Department of State regarding the threat of terrorist acts on June 19, 2006 remains in effect. For the latest security information, Americans traveling abroad should regularly monitor the Department's website at <http://travel.state.gov> where up-to-date [Worldwide Caution Public Announcements](#), [Travel Warnings and Public Announcements](#) can be found.

REGISTER YOUR STAY IN MACEDONIA

We encourage all U.S. citizens resident in Macedonia to register with the Embassy in Skopje. Registration can help with renewing a lost or stolen passport, assist with notification in the event of an emergency, and provide a record of residency. The data

you provide is electronically secured and accessed only by cleared U.S. government personnel and releasable only under the provisions of the Privacy Act.

We invite you to register yourself and your family by visiting the State Department's registration website. U.S. citizens around the world who travel or reside abroad can access this site either through a link on <http://travel.state.gov> or directly at <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs>.

If you are unable to utilize the online registration process, you can register with the Embassy by downloading the [Registration form for Americans in Macedonia](#) and sending it to us by mail, fax or email along with a copy of your U.S. passport. U.S. citizens who wish to register with the Embassy can also apply in person and bring their U.S. passport. Registration is free.

UPCOMING HOLIDAYS

The Embassy will be closed for the following holidays:

- Columbus Day – Monday, October 9
- People's Uprising Against Fascism – Wednesday, October 11
- Veterans Day – Friday, November 10
- Thanksgiving Day – Thursday, November 23

A full list of all of our holiday closings for 2006 is available online at <http://skopje.usembassy.gov/holidays.html>

UPDATED INFORMATION ABOUT AVIAN INFLUENZA

Countries continue to report cases of avian influenza A (H5N1), commonly referred to as "bird flu", in their domestic and wild bird populations. In addition, some countries are reporting H5N1 in other wild and domestic animal populations. A small number of confirmed cases of H5N1 among humans have been reported, some of which have resulted in death. More information is available on the World Health Organization website at http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/country/en/.

The Department of State has released a new fact sheet, available at http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health_1181.html, alerting Americans to the U.S. government's preparations for a possible influenza pandemic. The Department of State emphasizes that, in the event of a pandemic, its ability to assist Americans traveling and residing abroad may be severely limited by restrictions on local and international movement imposed for public health reasons, either by foreign governments and/or the United States. Furthermore, American citizens should take note that the Department of

State cannot provide Americans traveling or living abroad with medications or supplies, even in the event of a pandemic.

ELECTIONS UPDATE 2006

November 7, 2006 is general Election Day in the United States. If you are not registered to vote or have not requested your absentee ballot, please do so as soon as possible, as state deadlines may be fast approaching.

The official U.S. government website for overseas absentee voting assistance is the Federal Voting Assistance Program website at www.fvap.gov. The site includes a downloadable absentee ballot application, state-specific instructions for completing the form and registering to vote, links to or contact numbers for state and local officials, and a downloadable emergency ballot.

There are several new online resources to provide nonpartisan information and aid your voting efforts while abroad. The New Millennium Young Voters Project website at <http://www.stateofthevote.org/>, hosted by the National Association of Secretaries of State, is one source for information on candidates.

SOCIAL SECURITY QUESTIONNAIRES

On June 8, the Social Security Administration sent out more than a quarter of a million Foreign Enforcement Questionnaires to beneficiaries living overseas. These questionnaires are sent to beneficiaries every two years.

It is extremely important that the questionnaires be completed and mailed back to Social Security. The purpose of the questionnaire is to detect unreported changes that may affect one's ongoing eligibility for benefits (e.g., marriage, divorce, death, etc). Failure to mail back the form will result in suspension of benefits.

Quite often, those with direct deposit fail to report changes of addresses to Social Security. Their questionnaires are then mailed to the wrong address and eventually benefits are suspended. Therefore, it is important that beneficiaries with direct deposit keep Social Security informed of their new address when they move. The reports should be mailed to the Social Security Administration in the United States.

