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### **SAFETY AND SECURITY SITUATION**

We reiterate the State Department's Country Specific Information on Macedonia: The security situation in Macedonia is stable, although occasional criminal violence does occur. Americans should avoid areas with demonstrations, strikes, or roadblocks where large crowds are gathered, particularly those involving political causes or striking workers. Crime in Macedonia is low by U.S. standards, and violent crime against Americans is rare. Pick-pocketing, theft, and other petty street crimes do occur, however, particularly in areas where tourists and foreigners congregate. American travelers are advised to take the same precautions against becoming crime victims as they would in any U.S. city. Valuables, including cell phones and electronic items, should not be left in plain view in unattended vehicles. Windows and doors should be securely locked when residences are not occupied. Organized crime is present in Macedonia; organized criminal activity occasionally results in violent confrontations between members of rival organizations. ATM use is generally safe; however, travelers should take standard safety precautions.

The loss or theft abroad of a U.S. passport should be reported immediately to the local police and the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. If you are a victim of a crime while overseas, in addition to reporting to the local police, please contact the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate for assistance. The Embassy/Consulate staff can, for example, assist you to find appropriate medical care, to contact family members or friends, and explain how funds could be transferred. Although the investigation and prosecution of the crime is solely the responsibility of local authorities, consular officers can help you to understand the local criminal justice process and find an attorney if needed.

The Worldwide Caution issued for American citizens abroad by the U.S. Department of State regarding the threat of terrorist acts has been updated as of February 2, 2009. 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.

## **UPCOMING HOLIDAYS**

The Embassy will be closed for the following holidays:

- Orthodox Easter – Sunday, observed on Monday, April 20
- Labor Day – Friday, May 1
- Saint Cyril and Methodius Day – Sunday, observed on Monday, May 25
- Memorial Day – Monday, May 25

## **ONLINE INFORMATION ABOUT DEMONSTRATION ACTIVITIES IN THE COUNTRY**

Embassy Skopje will soon begin posting information regarding routine demonstrations in Macedonia on the U.S. Embassy Skopje's website at <http://macedonia.usembassy.gov>. We will send out a message to inform you once this new process has been put into place. Once you receive the notice, please monitor our website regularly for current, routine demonstration activities in the country.

## **EMBASSY SMS BLAST MESSAGE SYSTEM**

The U.S. Embassy in Skopje, in collaboration with its wireless provider T-Mobile, will launch an SMS blast system to better advise and inform the resident American citizen community in the event of an emergency. The embassy plans to roll out this system over the next two months and will use it in an emergency situation to quickly disseminate warden messages or travel alerts. This system will complement the existing warden message system which will continue to operate. SMS alert systems are already in use at other embassies around the world with great success.

All American citizens are encouraged to participate by submitting a valid cellular phone number to the consular section. You may email the telephone number, along with your

name and address to [SkopjeACSMailbox@state.gov](mailto:SkopjeACSMailbox@state.gov) and the American Citizen Services (ACS) unit will enter your information.

If you have already registered with the embassy, and provided a cellular phone number, you will automatically be included in the rollout. The ACS unit encourages you to update your information with the embassy by re-registering or by sending an email to [SkopjeACSMailbox@state.gov](mailto:SkopjeACSMailbox@state.gov). Your information will be kept confidential per U.S. privacy laws; T-Mobile and other agencies will not have access to it. Please forward this message to any American citizens you know who are not currently registered with the embassy and who may want to participate. If you do not wish to participate, please send an email to the address above with your name and state that you wish to opt out of the system.

American citizens who participate in the SMS blast system will not incur any costs. The embassy will only use the system in the case of an emergency and has established an agreement with T-Mobile which covers all the costs incurred.

## **U.S. TAX INFORMATION RESOURCES**

Income tax season is upon us. Although you may not presently be earning any income in the U.S., U.S. law requires American citizens to file a tax return annually. The filing of a tax return does not automatically mean that you must pay taxes; however, it does notify the IRS whether you do or do not owe taxes in the U.S. for that tax year.

We recommend that you obtain your tax forms online at <http://www.irs.gov/formspubs/index.html>.

Please note that the IRS no longer compiles the "1040 Overseas Filers Package," so there will be no packages available at the U.S. Embassy for the 2008 tax year. All forms from the package are available for download from the IRS website.

For more information on U.S. taxes, please consult the list of websites and telephone numbers below to help find the forms and answers you need.

Main IRS website: <http://www.irs.gov>

Tax guidance for U.S. citizens abroad:  
<http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/international/article/0,,id=97324,00.html>

Tax guidance for persons in the military:  
<http://www.irs.gov/individuals/military/index.html>

Electronic payment website: <http://www.eftps.gov/>

Refund information: <http://www.irs.gov/individuals/article/0,,id=96596,00.html?portlet=4>

STATE TAX RETURNS: For individual state income tax information, visit <http://www.taxadmin.org/>. The Embassy does not have state tax forms or state tax information.

## **NEW IRS REGULATION: DISCLOSURE OF TAX INFORMATION BY PREPARERS**

The IRS asks Americans to take note of new regulations giving taxpayers greater control over their personal tax return information. New regulations under Internal Revenue Code Section 7216, Disclosure or Use of Tax Information by Preparers of Returns, became effective January 1, 2009. These regulations limit tax return preparers' use and disclosure of information obtained during the return preparation process to activities directly related to the preparation of the return.

The regulations, along with supplemental Revenue Procedure 2008-35 [http://www.irs.gov/irb/2008-29\\_IRB/ar13.html](http://www.irs.gov/irb/2008-29_IRB/ar13.html), contain the updated rules and requirements relating to disclosure and use of tax return information. These regulations apply to paid and volunteer preparers and the administrative staff that supports them. Failure to comply may result in criminal or civil penalties. See the IRC 7216 <http://www.irs.gov/efile/article/0,,id=188390,00.html> information page on IRS.gov for more details. Frequently Asked Questions are available at <http://www.irs.gov/efile/article/0,,id=188398,00.html> on irs.gov.

## **NEW IRS BROCHURE FOR OVERSEAS TAXPAYERS**

The Internal Revenue Service has published a new brochure to assist taxpayers: Publication 4732, Federal Tax Information for U.S. Taxpayers. Copies are now available at the U.S. Embassy or for download at <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p4732.pdf>. The IRS developed the brochure as a resource to help locate tax information in order to prepare tax returns and/or resolve tax account problems.

## **WHAT MAKES YOU WANT TO VOTE?**

Voting is your constitutional right! What inspires you to vote? What calls you to take action and vote? Now is your chance to express your thoughts on the importance of voting by entering the 2009 Voting Slogan Contest.

The winning slogan will inspire U.S. citizens around the world to exercise one of the fundamental rights of a democracy! The April 9, 2009 deadline for submissions is fast approaching.

The Voting Slogan Contest is a biennial contest sponsored by the Federal Voting Assistance Program in its efforts to promote interest in the democratic process among military members, their families and U.S. citizens worldwide. It is easy to participate. Just create a simple slogan (or slogans) that express the importance of voting and will inspire others to vote and submit it to the FVAP.

The contest winner and runners-up will not only feel the satisfaction of knowing that their slogan is helping improve voter awareness, but they will also be given a certificate of recognition from the Department of Defense for their contribution to this important endeavor.

There is no limit to the number of entries you may submit, but we request that all slogans be submitted separately. All submissions must be received by **April 9, 2009**.

All submissions must include your full name, branch of service (if military), mailing address, daytime telephone number, fax number (phone and fax numbers should include all necessary country/city codes or DSN prefixes) and e-mail address (if applicable).

**To submit your entry:**

**E-mail:** [slogan@fvap.ncr.gov](mailto:slogan@fvap.ncr.gov). Text only (e-mail messages with attachments are deleted for information security purposes). One slogan per e-mail including contact information.

**Fax:** (703) 696-1352 or DSN 426-1352. Visit the FVAP website at [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov) for international toll-free fax numbers. Submit one slogan per fax including contact information. No cover sheet is necessary.

**Mail:** Federal Voting Assistance Program  
Attn: Voting Slogan Contest  
1155 Defense Pentagon  
Washington DC 20301-1155

If submitting by mail, please type or print on regular letter size paper one slogan per page with contact information on each page.

**“Be Smart, Do Your Part, Vote!”** was the winning slogan for the 2007 Voting Slogan Contest. It was submitted by YNC Karen Bassingthwaite, U.S. Navy, Tampa, Florida.

Please join the FVAP in helping to inspire others to vote by submitting your entry today and you could be one of this year’s winners!

## **RENEWING U.S. PASSPORTS AHEAD OF SUMMER TRAVEL**

U.S. citizens who will be traveling this summer are strongly encouraged to check their passports (and those of their family members) now to confirm that they have not expired or will not expire soon. Don't let a long-awaited vacation or a move to another country become a nightmare because of an expired passport. Note that some countries require foreigners to have a passport with a validity of at least six months in order to be granted entry to their country; you should check with the Embassy of the country you are traveling to. If your passport has expired or is nearing its expiration date, you should begin the process of applying for a new one immediately in order to beat the summer rush. Check the expiration date of your child’s passport-remember that passports for children under 16 years of age are valid for 5 years only. It typically takes 1 to 2 weeks from the time you apply to receive a full-validity passport. For information on renewal procedures, application forms, fees, etc., please see <http://travel.state.gov>

## NEWS FROM SOCIAL SECURITY: HOW DO I CHANGE MY NAME

If you change your name, be sure to tell both Social Security and your employer. Otherwise, you risk a delay in your tax refunds and your wages being posted incorrectly to your Social Security record which may affect your future Social Security benefits. To change your name on your Social Security card, you must present proof of your U.S. citizenship or immigration status, legal name change document (such as a marriage certificate, divorce decree, or court order), identity and a completed Application for a Social Security Card (Form SS-5). All documents must be either originals or copies certified by the issuing agency.

In addition to presenting a legal document with your new name, you must provide us with two identity documents, including one document in your old name (document can be expired) and one identity document in your new name (unexpired). For further information, please visit the Social Security website <http://socialsecurity.gov>



This newsletter is an unofficial and informal source of practical information for American citizens residing in Macedonia. If you have comments, questions, or suggestions, please contact the Consular Section at (02) 311-6180, or at [consularskopje@state.gov](mailto:consularskopje@state.gov). This newsletter is also available on the American Citizens Services page of our website at <http://macedonia.usembassy.gov>