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PRESS RELEASE

U.S. helps Macedonia improve IT privacy

March 21, 2006: Privacy is a widely recognized human right. Individuals are entitled to fair treatment in the way that personal information is collected and used. This includes personal identification (ID) information in the hands of public institutions as well as private businesses. A representative from the Washington DC based Center for Democracy and Technology is in Skopje this week to conduct workshops on practical ways for further improving IT (information technology) privacy in Macedonia. The workshops are funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), part of the U.S. Mission in Macedonia.

“In the Information Age, personal information has become a highly valued commodity that is collected, aggregated, shared and sometimes sold in ways never before imagined,” according to James X. Dempsey, Center for Democracy and Technology. “As public institutions move services online, there is growing risk of compromise and abuse. However, at the same time, greater use of information technology does not necessarily mean less privacy. Technologies can be designed and implemented in ways that enhance privacy.”

Macedonian public institutions have started using the Internet to deliver services and information. Citizens are already benefiting from the Apply on Line system developed by the Civil Servant Agency with assistance from the USAID funded e-Gov Project. The Project has also supported the development of an e-Procurement system and an e-Tax system and is currently designing an e-Health system (that will monitor the quantity and costs of prescription drugs).

While IT privacy issues are addressed in the various laws regulating personal data and information policy, the practical application of the principles of “fair information practices” is new in Macedonia. The institutions that enforce the laws and the institutions that collect personal information from citizens need to adopt and maintain adequate democratic IT privacy practices.

“Trust is a crucial ingredient of any successful online program, whether in the field of e-government or e-commerce. Privacy and security are key elements of online trust,” states Jerker Torngren, the USAID e-Gov Project Chief of Party. “We want the e-government applications developed by our Project to be successful and to respect privacy issues in all our systems. This is important because citizens will not use services that do not handle personal data responsibly.”

NOTES TO EDITORS:

The American people, through USAID, have invested more than \$450 million in Macedonia since 1993. More than 20 projects worth \$30 million a year are currently being implemented. These projects are designed to support Macedonia's transition to a free market-based, multi-ethnic democracy. They include initiatives to accelerate economic growth, develop democratic institutions, and educate citizens for a modern economy. USAID provides economic and humanitarian assistance in more than 100 countries. For more information, please visit <http://macedonia.usaid.gov>.

The workshops entitled "Privacy in the Macedonian and International ICT Environments" are organized by the USAID e-Gov Project www.e-Gov.org.mk in cooperation with the Macedonian Directorate for Security of Classified Information and the Directorate for Personal Data Protection. The two workshops, for the public sector and private sectors (IT companies and financial institutions), are designed to provide helpful examples of IT Privacy practices, for participants to implement immediately after returning to their agencies, ministries, organizations and companies. The topics to be covered include the EU legal framework for data protection, privacy in the context of e-Government and e-Commerce, Macedonian laws in the context of IT privacy and cyber security.