



2

UNITED STATES COMMISSION
FOR THE PRESERVATION OF AMERICA'S HERITAGE ABROAD

NEWS RELEASE

DECEMBER 10, 2002

EMBARGOED UNTIL: 11:30 a.m.

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U.S. and Macedonia Agree to Preserve Cultural Property

The United States and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia today entered into an agreement regarding the preservation of cultural properties -- places of worship, historic sites, monuments, cemeteries, and cultural archives.

The agreement was signed by Secretary of State Colin L. Powell and Macedonian Foreign Minister Ilinka Mitreva in Washington, D.C. Also present were the negotiators of the agreement, U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad Chairman Warren L. Miller and Macedonian Ambassador Nikola Dimitrov.

The agreement pledges the countries to --

- take steps to help protect and preserve properties that are important to the cultural heritage of citizens of the two nations;
- cooperate in identifying and preserving such properties; and
- ensure equal treatment of all cultural groups in property preservation and access policies.

It also establishes a Joint Cultural Heritage Commission for bilateral efforts on the issues.

The Joint Commission is expected to focus on the cultural property of cultural groups in Macedonia that the Nazis tried to exterminate, such as Jews, and groups that suffered under the Communist regime.

Cultural Property Agreement Add One

Miller explained the focus on cultural properties of groups victimized by Nazi genocide, saying "Many properties that are an essential part of their heritages are endangered because the members of those groups who would have otherwise taken care of the properties were killed or forced to flee from their communities."

Of 7,800 Jews in Macedonia before the Holocaust, only 200 survived. The Macedonian government recently agreed to return some communal property to the country's Jewish community and to compensate it for other property. It also agreed to help the community restore a major cemetery.

The U.S. Commission plans to conduct a survey of Jewish cultural properties in Macedonia.

Today's agreement is the eleventh such agreement to be entered into between the U.S. and countries in eastern and central Europe. The U.S. is seeking agreements with 22 countries in the region.

The U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad is charged by law with identifying sites in the region that are associated with the heritage of U.S. citizens and obtaining assurances from the region's governments that the properties will be preserved. It also assists privately-funded site restoration. Its agreements are negotiated in cooperation with the U.S. Department of State.

NOTE TO EDITORS: Photographs of the signing are available from the Commission office upon request.