

The International Program – Macedonia



A briefing with a representative of Judicial Watch’s legal team was requested on behalf of participants in the Macedonian Study Tour, which was supported by “the Judicial Strengthening Project (JSP) of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).”

Members of the 2015 study tour were selected from prominent legal and civil society organizations across Macedonia, with the expectation that they would “take active participation in justice sector reforms and rule of law enforcement upon return to their country.”

As outlined in the meeting request, the study tour was designed to better equip its participants in areas of effective advocacy, to include:

awareness-raising campaigns; advocating for legislative changes; monitoring and reporting to (the) public about the performance of justice/judicial sector institutions; working jointly with media to improve the media’s understanding of court operations, rule of law and human rights protection; and demanding transparency, independence, accountability and effectiveness of justice/judicial sector institutions.

The U.S. Department of State’s [country profile](#) reports that “relations between Macedonia and the United States are “cooperative” and include “a broad range of political, economic, cultural, military, and social issues.” Macedonia gained its independence from Yugoslavia in 1991 and established full diplomatic relations with the United States in 1995.

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According to the State Department, the U.S. is committed to helping Macedonia “strengthen rule of law; improve education; promote media freedom; and build greater democratic foundations in a full, inclusive multi-ethnic society.”

State Department sponsored Leadership Visitor Programs (LVP) and study tours help fulfill these goals by introducing legal and civil society professionals from newly emerging democracies to civil society groups in the United States that utilize a variety of methods and tools available in a free society that serve to keep government open and accountable to the people. Judicial Watch is one of America’s most successful non-governmental organizations in bringing accountability and transparency to government through open records laws, and it has met frequently with international groups since its founding in 1994.

The Macedonia delegation was fortunate to meet with Judicial Watch’s director of litigation, Paul Orfanedes. The meeting took place on July 6, 2015, at JW’s headquarters in Washington, DC. Joining Mr. Orfanedes at the roundtable was the executive director of the [Council for Court Excellence](#), Ms. June Kress.

Mr. Orfanedes provided the Macedonians with an overview of Judicial Watch’s mission and current activities. In summary, he told the delegates that JW does three things:

- First, JW promotes transparency and accountability through open records laws. He told the delegates that JW has forty to fifty lawsuits pending at any one time. Although open records litigation is primary, he told the visitors about a pending [civil rights lawsuit](#) filed on behalf of eight Maryland citizens against Maryland public officials for illegal gerrymandering of voting districts in violation of the Constitution. This case also served to highlight JW’s [Election Integrity Project](#).
- Second, he said that Judicial Watch educates the public about government misconduct. He told the delegates that this is accomplished in a variety of ways: through monthly newsletters, its Internet site and document postings, books and documentaries, investigative journalism, educational panels, TV and radio interviews, and its *Corruption Chronicles* [blog](#).

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- And third, Judicial Watch provides *pro bono* representation to its clients. As a non-profit organization, it is funded primarily through the donations of its hundreds of thousands of supporters across the nation.

Most notably, Judicial Watch is not beholden to the government.

As set forth in its Mission Statement, “through its educational endeavors, Judicial Watch advocates high standards of ethics and morality in the nation’s public life and seeks to ensure that political and judicial officials do not abuse the powers entrusted to them by the American people. Judicial Watch fulfills its educational mission through litigation, investigations, and public outreach.” [The International Program](#) is an integral part of its educational program.