

Honorary Consuls: Wealth Can Beget Wealth

Written by OCCRP

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Consulate in Bitola --Courtesy of Nova Makedonija

Wealth and connections are the building blocks to a rarified form of freedom from travel restrictions, the title of honorary consul.

The honorary consul status is outlined in the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations of 1963 and describes a welter of privileges and opportunities, as well as the responsibilities of an honorary consul. Those duties, for a post that carries no stated salary, include enhancing economic, scientific and cultural development of the country a person represents.

This status and title can be impressive, as are the stated responsibilities, but just like virtually every other means of unrestricted travel and particular business opportunities, it is on sale, often goes to those with connections, has considerable business and personal advantages, and does not come cheap. What the position also allows is that the person may stay in his home country and represent the interests of a foreign country and deal in its exports.

In Russia, www.honoraryconsul.ru offers a description of the honorary consul that includes elements that would pique anyone's interest: "diplomatic passport and visa-free travel all over the world...right to bring three cars to the country without import duty and to register the cars as the consul...the right to have a red diplomatic vehicle registration plate....."

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It continues. The status opens “vast opportunities...access to the export resources of the country you are representing and its export quotas...allows transfer of unlimited sums of money in cash across a border...luggage is not checked at customs... get many useful acquaintances in business circles and top...institutions...”

A Moscow jurist, who says he can assist in obtaining this status and says those privileges are real, says the price begins at \$90,000, but he did not want his name used because the “topic is not too open.” He did not want to divulge any details, saying only that the process is very complicated and clients might be sensitive to his revealing it.

As with many things offered on the internet, not all sites are reliable. One that gives its addresses in the Netherlands and Spain (www.right-way.net) had a phone number that did not work and the Netherlands address was that of a hotel, and the one in Spain could not be traced to a legitimate business.

Some Problems Arise

Because of various problems, though, some countries are re-examining the role of honorary consuls to their countries. Liberia, in October, voided the practice of giving such representatives diplomatic passports, saying that in doing so, it was falling into step with practices of other countries. Without offering details, it stated that anyone who purported to be an honorary consul from any of a half-dozen countries that it named, was “doing so fraudulently.”

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~~Alvaro Uribe, Governor of Antioquia, is a member of the United Fruit Company, the largest banana exporter in the world. He is also a member of the United Fruit Company, the largest banana exporter in the world.~~

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