

Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

ENGLISH only

**Permanent Council No. 600  
23 March 2006****EU statement on the end of the presence of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Uzbekistan**

1. The European Union is concerned by the decision taken by the Government of Uzbekistan on 17 March to end the presence of the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Uzbekistan within 30 days. Since the establishment of the UNHCR office in Tashkent in 1993, the office and the Uzbek authorities have cooperated closely in support of UNHCR operations during the civil war in Tajikistan and in providing protection and assistance to a large number of refugees and asylum seekers from Afghanistan. This task is not yet fully accomplished. The cases of some 2000 refugees from Afghanistan, to whom Uzbekistan has offered refuge on its territory, remain unresolved. Furthermore, asylum seekers from Afghanistan and some other countries continue to approach the UNHCR office in Tashkent where UNHCR conducts refugee status determination.
2. We take note of the good co-operation the Uzbek Government has built with the UNHCR office in Tashkent over the past thirteen years. The UNHCR presence has been a tremendous asset for refugees from the Central Asian region. The EU would deeply regret to see this local cooperation severed in a unilateral move, thus confirming what some perceive as a worrying trend toward self-isolation by the Uzbek government. Therefore, we call on Uzbekistan to reconsider its recent decision and continue undiminished its co-operation with UNHCR and other international organisations in which Uzbekistan participates.
3. The EU is convinced of the importance of dialogue as the appropriate means for exchanging views between equal partners, and therefore reaffirms its

readiness and willingness to work and engage in constructive co-operation with Uzbek authorities in all areas of OSCE activities.

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia\* and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia\*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, EFTA country Norway, a member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this declaration.

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\*Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process