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**Permanent Mission of Ireland
to the OSCE**

Rotenturmstrasse 16-18,
A-1010 Vienna
Tel: +43 1 71576 9826
Fax: +43 1 715 5755

ireland-osce@chello.at

Irish Presidency of the European Union

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EU Statement under current issues on Uzbekistan

The European Union takes note of the announcement by the Uzbek Minister of Defence on 11 June that the Uzbek Government is ready to consider the issue of demining of its State borders and to look into alternative concepts of border security. This is an issue which we have spoken of on many occasions at the Permanent Council. Moreover, the European Union stresses the importance of Uzbekistan's participation in the EU BOMCA Programme, in order to strengthen regional cooperation and to improve its relations with neighbouring countries. The OSCE is, of course, already involved in this programme.

The joint PC/FSC workshop on anti-personnel mines and explosive remnants of war highlighted the human impact of mines. Figures were given that minefields along the Uzbek/Kyrgyz border alone have since 2000 caused 32 fatalities and 12 non-fatal injuries, as well as a high number of domestic farm animals killed. Minefields along the Uzbek/Tajik border represent another source of serious concern. The conclusion of the workshop was that a political solution has to be reached to address the issue of landmines in Central Asia.

The European Union therefore welcomes the announcement by the Uzbek Minister of Defence and encourages the OSCE Centre in Tashkent, in coordination with the Border Issues Co-ordination Unit in Vienna as well as the OSCE Centres in Dushanbe and Bishkek, and the other principal international donors and institutions active in the region, to explore ways to assist the Uzbek authorities in following up on this announcement. As mine action is a high political priority for the European Union, we stand ready to assist and support these efforts.

The Candidate Countries Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey align themselves with this statement.