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**Permanent Council No. 586
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**EU Statement on Return of Uzbek Refugees and Asylum Seekers
from Kazakhstan**

The EU is concerned about allegations that a number of Uzbek refugees and asylum seekers have been forcibly returned by the Kazakh authorities to Uzbekistan. We recall the obligations under international refugee law as well as the international obligations pertaining to the principle of non-refoulement and would ask the authorities of Kazakhstan to provide clarification of this issue.

Considering the longstanding tradition of cooperation between the government of Kazakhstan and UNHCR, which has been in many respects a model for the region, the EU would like to support the appeal from the UNHCR to the Kazakh authorities to undertake further actions to augment the protection of all asylum seekers in Kazakhstan.

Mr. Chairman, on a different subject, we would like to thank the Kazakh delegation for the information provided to last week's Permanent Council meeting on the decision taken to release Mr. Zhakiyanov from custody. We consider this a positive decision and hope that Mr. Zhakiyanov will be released very soon.

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia ¹ 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 countries Iceland and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this declaration.

¹ Croatia continues to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process