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**EU STATEMENT ON THE REGIONAL MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON REFUGEE
RETURNS HELD IN SARAJEVO ON 31 JANUARY 2005**

**RESPONSE TO THE STATEMENT DELIVERED BY
AMBASSADOR VLADIMIR MATEK ON BEHALF OF THE DELEGATIONS OF BOSNIA AND
HERZEGOVINA, CROATIA AND SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO**

The EU welcomes the Regional Ministerial Conference on Refugee Returns and its Declaration adopted in Sarajevo on 31st January this year. On this occasion the EU would like to thank Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro and Croatia for informing the participating States on this very important development given the high priority the OSCE attaches to the issue of refugee return in the region. The EU highly values the political commitments adopted jointly in Sarajevo by the three countries aiming at finalizing the process of return of refugees in the region by the end of 2006 and looks forward to their swift and determined implementation. The EU considers these commitments to be an important contribution towards helping all persons affected by the war and to be a very encouraging step towards further normalisation and good cooperation between the countries of the region. With the UNHCR and the OSCE, the EU will continue to assist this important process.

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