At a meeting in mid-June of military officials from several European and Shanghai Cooperation Organization member countries, it was announced that Uzbekistan was committed to demining its borders with Kirgizstan and Tajikistan.

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The decision was confirmed at an OSCE permanent committee meeting on June 23 in Vienna, where Uzbekistan called for assistance in demining its borders. There have been close to 100 deaths from mines in the past 3-4 years - Uzbek, Kirgiz and Tajik, according to Tajik authorities (no official figures are tallied), not including the deaths of sheep and cows, in areas that have only been legal borders in recent times and were traditionally grazing areas. The Uzbek government has never actually acknowledged that it planted mines on its borders approximately 4-6 years ago when the threat of Islamic insurgents was more urgent, so the decision to DEmine is also an acknowledge that mines were used in the past. As Uzbekistan was the only country laying the mines on its borders, it created ill will and negative publicity for Uzbekistan. Thus, the announcement will be a positive boost to Uzbekistan's image, which is now the subject of considerable controversy arising from human rights concerns. Both Tajik and Kirgiz governments welcomed the Uzbek decision in public statements. In Central Asia, only Tajikistan and Turkmenistan have joined the 152 nations that have signed the Ottawa convention (Estonia was the most recent, signing in May 2004), and so far Uzbekistan has not indicated that it is ready to sign. Still, this move is an important step in a region characterized more by political tensions and environmental and security worries than moves towards peace.

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