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PRESS RELEASE

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CCBE updates its guidelines on Corporate Social Responsibility

The Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE), which represents more than 700,000 European lawyers through its member bars, has published updated guidelines on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

The CCBE first published CSR guidelines in September 2003 when the CCBE highlighted the reasons why lawyers should be involved in advising companies in this field.

Since September 2003, CSR has achieved greater prominence at international, European and national levels. In line with these developments, more and more companies are taking an active interest in CSR, and companies today have a greater understanding of the need to incorporate CSR practices into their day to day decisions.

The updated guide, in addition to explaining recent developments, also highlights to a greater degree the reasons why lawyers should be involved in CSR. The guide discusses the lawyer's position with regard to access to company boardrooms and the question of legal professional privilege.

The task of explaining why more companies should be interested in CSR is also addressed. The guide discusses the extent to which a company or its directors may assume liability for own acts or for complicity in government or third person activities. These questions are considered under the terms 'sphere of influence' and 'complicity' respectively.

The new CCBE guide notes that one aspect of the changing environment is the challenge faced in the courts in regard to the liability of parent companies for the acts and omissions of their subsidiaries. Recently, there have been a number of legal actions in Britain, the United States, Canada and Australia against parent companies for actions by subsidiary companies operating in economically developing countries. The CCBE advises that a company should be aware that violations of laws and regulations can lead to directors being held personally liable for wrongful acts on the part of their company and employees. Such liability can be in the form of civil or criminal liability. Although there are different rules in different jurisdictions, the notion is emerging that neglect of CSR obligations may lead to directors' liability.

Bernard Vatier, CCBE President, said today: "The role of lawyers in the implementation of principles of corporate social responsibility is ever increasing. These updated guidelines on CSR will help lawyers to assist companies and directors in understanding the importance of CSR in an economy based on sustainable development".

[A copy of the updated guidelines is attached.](#)

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