

November 2016

Statement for Ambassador Murat Adali

on the occasion of the

Fifth annual Forum on business and Human Rights, 14-16 November 2016

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Council of Europe, as an intergovernmental organisation which seeks to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law in our 47 member states across Europe, takes a great interest in the topic of business and human rights. This Forum comes at a timely juncture, when renewed interest in the need for corporate social responsibility has arisen following negotiations of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA). I am thus delighted to be making a few brief remarks today about the work of the Council of Europe in this field.

The important work of the United Nations in this area, the adoption of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights in 2011, has been closely followed and much welcomed by the Council of Europe. Our Committee of Ministers has adopted a declaration in 2014, endorsing the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights as the current globally agreed baseline in this area, and has expressed its strong support for their implementation by all member States of the Council of Europe. In 2015, the Committee of Ministers' annual thematic debate on common human rights questions with the UN focused on business and human rights. Members of the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights as well as many experts from capitals participated in this very fruitful debate.

Moreover, a drafting group of the Steering Committee for Human Rights, composed of national experts from our member states, together with observers from both the private sector and civil society, finalised a "Recommendation to member states on business and human rights" after 2 years of intense work, which was subsequently adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 2 March 2016.

I will leave it to Professor René Lefeber, former Chairman of the Steering Committee Drafting Group, to discuss the particular features of the Recommendation in the Panel on human rights due diligence in policy and regulation in the afternoon of the 16th of November. Suffice it simply to say here that the CoE instrument is intended to facilitate the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles within our 47 member states, close existing gaps (in particular with regard to the issue of access to remedy) and bring the Principles in line with Council of Europe standards, in particular the European Convention on Human Rights, as applied and interpreted by the European Court of Human Rights. The Recommendation also intends to raise awareness about the topic and to mark a further step in

the recognition that transnational enterprises and other business have a responsibility to respect human rights.

We therefore consider that this ongoing work within the Council of Europe can stimulate the discussion and raise some interesting aspects for the debate within this Forum. It is hoped that the renewed momentum in this area – not least spurred by the recent negotiations surrounding the CETA (and strong reactions including by civil society) — can be seized to make concrete steps towards achieving stronger corporate social responsibility and finding effective ways of preventing and remedying the related human rights abuses.

To promote this new regional instrument, the CoE is organising a high level Seminar on the protection and promotion of human rights in business in Strasbourg on 13 June 2017. Persons interested in participating should contact the Secretariat of the Steering Committee for Human Rights of the Council of Europe.

Thank you very much.