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Transparency International EU welcomes EU Directive to protect journalists, civil society and whistleblowers from vexatious lawsuits

Lucinda Pearson · Wednesday, April 27th, 2022

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Transparency International EU welcomes the European Commission proposal that will end cross-border vexatious lawsuits used to silence individuals and organisations that hold those in positions of power to account.

These lawsuits, also known as Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) are lawsuits brought forward by powerful to harass and silence those speaking out in the public interest. Typical victims are those with a watchdog role, for instance: journalists, activists, informal associations, academics, trade unions, media organisations, whistleblowers and civil society organisations.

“SLAPPs are a threat to democracy and fundamental rights” said Vitor Teixeira, Senior Policy Officer and Transparency International EU “they are used by the wealthy and powerful to silence those who speak out against corruption and wrongdoing. Money and influence should not be able to hide the truth, so we welcome this initiative from the Commission.”

The proposed Directive has a wide scope, and includes remedies, penalties and an early dismissal mechanism. It also includes a recommendation which will include provisions on training, awareness raising, data collection. It however only covers cross-border cases and not domestic lawsuits.

“We will now be working to ensure that the European Parliament and Council guarantee this Directive remains ambitious and offers real protection to those speaking out. We also will be encouraging national governments to bring rules on domestic SLAPP cases in-line with this cross-border initiative” added Teixeira.

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