

European Commission seeking (private international law) experts for its European Democracy Action Plan

The European Commission on 3 December presented the European Democracy Action Plan. The Press Release explains that: *“Standing up to challenges to our democratic systems from rising extremism and perceived distance between people and politicians, the Action Plan sets out measures to promote free and fair elections, **strengthen media freedom** and counter disinformation.”*

With regard to the aim of strengthening media freedom, the Commission *“will propose in 2021 a **recommendation on the safety of journalists**, drawing particular attention to threats against women journalists, and an **initiative to curb the abusive use of lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs)**.”*

The Commission is seeking to establish an **Expert Group against Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP)**. The Call defines SLAPP as *“groundless or exaggerated lawsuits, initiated by state organs, business corporations or powerful individuals against weaker parties who express, on a matter of public interest, criticism or communicate messages which are uncomfortable to the litigants.”*

The Call further explains: *“Whilst most SLAPP appear to be national lawsuits, they can be made more complex, thus more costly to defend, when they are deliberately brought in another jurisdiction and enforced across borders, or when they exploit other aspects of national procedural and **private international law**. Most SLAPP suits are based on defamation claims, but there are cases based on other grounds, including data protection, blasphemy, tax laws, copyright, trade secret breaches, and similar concepts.”*

Interested persons can find the call in the Register of Commission Expert Groups.