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Blueprint Greece's Parent Aussie NGO Wins Financial Times Award

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Blueprint for Free Speech Executive Director Suelette Dreyfus lobbied EU lawmakers to strengthen whistleblower protection laws

Fifteen months after the noted Australian NGO Blueprint for Free Speech set up Blueprint Greece to fight corruption, money laundering and fraud, the Melbourne-based group helped pass wider protection for whistleblowers in the European Union and was jointly awarded a prestigious Financial Times award.

Blueprint for Free Speech partnered with India's Nishith Desai Associates law firm to develop the Perugia Principles, 12 Ways Journalists Should Protect Their Sources, which won the Financial Times' Asia PacificLawyers Awards 2019 in the category of Innovation in the Rule of Law and Access to Justice.

Blueprint Greece last year, with its parent organization, organized appearances in Athens of CIA whistleblower John Kiriakou and another in Thessaloniki, co-sponsored by Transparency International and the American College of Thessaloniki and has built a worldwide following on Twitter, reporting as well on wrongdoing, hacking, cryptocurrency and the massive \$230 billion Danske Bank money laundering scandal.

In Greece, it has followed the alleged scandal around the Swiss pharmaceutical company Novartis and reported on issues as well on Cyprus, including EU worries about the Golden Visa scheme giving wealthy foreigners residency permits and passports for the bloc.

"Blueprint for Free Speech was set up to defend and expand protections for freedom of expression. Protecting whistleblowers is one part of this. The NGO also does other work to defend free speech," said Executive Director Suelette Dreyfus.

She has built an international reputation in the field and her specialities of technology research, journalism, writing, information systems, digital security and privacy and the impact of technology on whistleblowing, featured in international media, including being interviewed on Deutsche Welle.

Often in Europe, she delivered testimony in favor of whistleblower protections that were recently adopted by the European Parliament where she has worked with lawmakers there including former Greek journalist Stelios Kouloglou.

She noted that whistleblowing has emerged as a counter to corruption that has become even more prevalent with the emergence of cryptocurrency as a way to launder dirty money and criminals becoming more tech-savvy and sophisticated.

"Whistleblowing is an emerging form of free speech – it is the right to dissent from wrongdoing. We now know much more about secret deals and bad behavior done for decades behind the scenes; the public's appetite for better ethical behavior is strong." A recent survey showed Americans believe corruption is the top problem for them.

"People also realize that means defending the truth-tellers. That's why there is a mood for change in Europe – and why whistleblower protection laws have been being passed around the globe, from Australia to Lithuania to the EU Parliament itself," she said.

Blueprint, extending to Blueprint Greece's role, is to insure that truth reaches from whistleblowers to the public, including through journalists who are turning to more elaborate methods of obtaining information online.

"It's no good having a great law on the books protecting the media's freedom to publish if journalists are cowering in the corner, fearing for their lives, in the real world," she said.

With frequent reprisals against whistleblowers, and journalists coming under target as well from governments, she said Blueprint's mission is more critical in a digital world where surreptitious methods can be used to uncover people who report wrongdoing and journalists working with their confidential sources.

"Free speech isn't just a human right – it's a corrective mechanism in our society when things start to go rotten. That's why it's worth defending with all the fierceness of a lioness protecting her treasured cub," she said.

She said she was especially pleased with the award for the Perugia Principles that were presented at the International Journalism Festival in Italy, showing how journalists can interact with whistleblowers and tying together law, technology and ethics.

Laws that protect journalists have not kept pace with advances in technology. Proper encryption of digital communication is a concern for anonymous sources and whistleblowers in particular, with the risk of being uncovered by a digital footprint of the slightest kind, the paper said of the Perugia Principles, with the world now different than the Watergate days of journalists meeting sources in parking garages and dark places.

The new EU directive was a hard battle, she said, with some lawmakers wanting to keep whistleblowers from being able to report wrongdoing to external sources such as journalists. "There is now third-tier whistleblowing protection under that directive and that's a super big win for journalism," she said at the Perugia event.