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# Spaniard who took on Google says content with privacy steps

MADRID | BY ROBERT HETZ

May 30 Mario Costeja, the 58-year-old lawyer and calligrapher from northwestern Spain who fought Google in court to have obsolete personal information removed from Internet searches, said on Friday he was content with the company's new steps to protect privacy.

Internet giant Google, which processes more than 90 percent of all Web searches in Europe, said on Thursday that people can use a new webform to submit requests to have information they find objectionable removed from Web search results.

"I want to congratulate Google because they have taken a decision that humanises a tool that can now be considered perfect," said Costeja, who comes from Galicia.

Six years ago he launched what became a landmark legal action against Google after someone told him that was information on the Internet saying that his home was repossessed due to a tax debt.

Costeja asked Google to remove the information because the house had been sold years earlier and he had paid the tax.

"Google in Spain asked me to address myself to its headquarters in the U.S., but I found it too far and difficult to launch a complaint in the U.S., so I went to the Agency for Data Protection in Spain to ask for their assistance. They said I was right, and the case went to court," Costeja told Reuters in a telephone interview.

Spain's courts requested an opinion on the case from the European Union's top court in Luxembourg. This month the EU court upheld citizens' "right to be forgotten".

Costeja, born in the 1950s under the Francisco Franco dictatorship, said he had been a fighter for freedom of expression and against totalitarian regimes his whole life.

"I support freedom of expression and I do not defend censorship. What I did was to fight for the right to request the deletion of data that violates the honour, dignity and reputation of individuals," he said.

The data he asked to be removed is still visible on the Web, he said, as Google awaits final instructions from Spain's High Court, which will act on the recommendation from the Court of Justice of the European Union (ECJ).

Costeja said he disagreed with critics who say the ruling could lead to censorship and the hiding of negative information.

His case and others have led to a heated debate in Europe about the balance between privacy and the freedom of information in Europe, where citizens enjoy some of the world's strictest data protection laws. (Editing by Fiona Ortiz and Will Waterman)

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