

CitizenCentral CHAPTER 5 transcript

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Speaker 2 [00:00:12] Ask the EU to stop caging animals.

Speaker 3 [00:00:15] To reconcile the economy with our planet.

Speaker 1 [00:00:18] Set a timeline for fossil fuel phase-out.

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Speaker 2 [00:00:24] None of the European nations will be part of the G8.

Speaker 1 [00:00:28] It is about where we want to go and who we want to be.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:00:39] Hello, there, welcome to CitizenCentral, a podcast series all about the first transnational democracy instrument in the world, the European Citizens' Initiative. Brought about back in the Lisbon Treaty, the ECI gives people the chance to pitch their own EU policies to the European Commission by gathering one million signatures from seven EU states. My name is Méabh Mc Mahon. I'm an Irish reporter in Brussels, and on CitizenCentral I'll be finding out what exactly the ECI is, how you can launch or support one, and what drives people to give up their time and energy for a cause they care deeply about. Welcome to CitizenCentral. Fossil fuels are one of our main energy sources. Their presence in our society and economy is huge. And that's exactly what our first ECI wants to tackle. Silvia, thank you so much for being with us. Please tell us a bit more about yourself.

Silvia Pastorelli [00:02:08] My name is Silvia Pastorelli. I'm a climate energy campaigner with Greenpeace, working a lot on fossil fuels at the moment, and specifically gas.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:02:16] First, can you tell us about your ECI?

Silvia Pastorelli [00:02:20] So, we've seen that the fossil fuel industry has been using the same tactics as the tobacco industry, from outright denying that climate change is a problem to presenting skewed information and different data sets that will lead you to believe that we don't need the measures that we actually need to keep the temperature increase to only 1.5 °C, and in the end basically just delaying climate action. But we do have a ban on tobacco in place. And so the parallel here is very clear. I don't think we have ever had as much awareness about the state of health of our planet. So, the ban that we're proposing at the European level would cover advertisement and sponsorship by fossil fuel companies. If we know what is causing our planet's poor state of health, why would we want to keep promoting the products causing the problem?

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:03:11] Do you think that these bans will also ignite a change in lifestyle patterns, like they did with tobacco?

Silvia Pastorelli [00:03:15] I think that they have the potential to do that. One of the things that we really hope to be able to do with this initiative is to create a conversation, in particular around the place advertising has in our lives, in our public spaces. Advertising is

everywhere; something that is so present will, in the end, create a conversation around our choices.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:03:34] Have you found that working on this ECI you've already started a conversation with people who perhaps wouldn't have engaged in this conversation before?

Silvia Pastorelli [00:03:42] For some people this may appear very new, maybe even somewhat extreme, but it's a very concrete ask. People can picture it; they can understand very clearly what their signature would mean and what the impact of that signature would be. The conversation is not yet a mainstream one. We see that these conversations are starting to happen on a national level in different places. One of the benefits of having this Europe-wide initiative is to move the conversation from the fringes to the centre of the environmental movement. And potentially this could become a catalysing moment for the movement. An initiative with this particular demand has the potential to create change that is really systemic in every country at the same time. I think this is one of the benefits of ECIs in general. You have the potential to make this change happen from the ground up. I think a lot of people understand how necessary this is, and also how proportionate it is to the urgency of the climate crisis.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:04:50] But sponsorship is such a big deal. It's in sport, culture, media, education; it's everywhere.

Silvia Pastorelli [00:04:56] We know that many fossil fuel companies are also sponsoring scientific educational institutions, cultural institutions, cultural events. We know why they're doing this, of course. Two main things happen: they perpetuate the idea that they are part of the solution, that they hold the key to the solution as an industry, but they also legitimise their presence by continuing to be seen as part of the debate and as part of our lives, and this is all about increasing the social licence.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:05:25] Who do you think should or could fill in this economic gap if your ECI is successful?

Silvia Pastorelli [00:05:31] People were probably asking the same question when the tobacco ban entered into force, and they were wondering what was going to happen. Is there going to be a big gap that is never going to be filled again? Turns out, I don't see this big gap; other things have filled it. An ECI with this demand is also an opportunity for people in general to maybe rethink the role of advertising, and also what we want to prioritise in our lives.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:05:56] Greenwashing is the big word of our time.

Silvia Pastorelli [00:05:59] One of the most striking things about advertisements from fossil fuel companies nowadays is that they basically do not seem to be advertising any fossil fuel at all. Sun shining, people cycling, kids running... these are the kinds of images they're proposing. But at the end of the day, the core of their business – where the bulk of their investments lies – is still the extraction and production of fossil fuels. They show you one picture; that picture maybe represents renewable energies, a tiny fraction of what they're actually doing. So, it's a very misleading picture.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:06:33] And, Silvia, if you hit the one million signatures, and this does become law, how do you think the conversation with industry will go?

Silvia Pastorelli [00:06:40] I'm not expecting this to be easy, obviously. I think it's going to be a very interesting conversation. I can already picture certain countries being more opposed than others, especially in the case of companies that are partly state-owned; they have an additional level of interest in sponsors and advertisements because they're linked to the state itself. These conversations at EU level can also really be an exciting moment for activists and campaign organisations across Europe. People can get behind such a demand and really put a lot of pressure on these countries.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:07:19] I can imagine some of our listeners might be getting scared they're going to have to give up their car or their heating system.

Silvia Pastorelli [00:07:25] This is not a ban on the products themselves. This is a ban on their advertisement; the core of their advertisement does not match the core of their business. It is the same as with tobacco for most people: now smoking inside a restaurant or smoking on an aeroplane is unthinkable to us. I cannot imagine people thinking, 'Oh, I would like to have that back.' Petrol stations are already a thing of the past.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:07:54] Silvia, thank you so much. Best of luck. It's a really interesting ECI.

Silvia Pastorelli [00:07:58] Thank you so much for having me.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:08:05] As Silvia mentioned, this is not a ban on the fuel; it's a ban on its advertising. So, that's why we're now off to Copenhagen to meet Thomas Kolster, a marketing creative who wrote the book 'Goodvertising' and now advises brands on how to communicate and advertise. Thomas, thank you so much for joining us on CitizenCentral. First, tell us how you became a 'goodvertiser.'

Thomas Kolster [00:08:29] I was working in the creative industry, and since we were actually in Copenhagen hosting the COP 15, the climate summit, I had very high expectations of our politicians coming together. We had Tony Blair, we had Barak in town, and I thought, 'Wait a moment, our politicians are going to be doing something about it.' And obviously we all know they didn't. They failed us yet again. That prompted me to ask the question, 'What can I do in my capacity?' So, I wrote a book and quickly connected with a lot of people inside the advertising industry who just felt the same way I did when I was younger.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:09:07] What exactly does it mean to be a 'goodvertiser'?

Thomas Kolster [00:09:10] The premise is really basic. What I'm passionate about is basically just being a catalyst for other people's positive change. So, that's sort of my own personal mission.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:09:18] That's really interesting, Thomas. And do you see a big change taking place?

Thomas Kolster [00:09:24] Not from the side of the politicians. I do see a shift happening, especially from corporates. More and more corporates are standing up to these challenges, some of them more wholeheartedly and genuinely than others. But there is a real fundamental shift that is happening. Change is just difficult, whether you are an individual, a politician, an institution or a big brand. What I've always been passionate

about is figuring out what triggers change and how we can enable change in the best possible way.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:09:52] But, Thomas, what we don't see that much in fossil fuel advertising is actual fuel.

Thomas Kolster [00:09:56] Yes, it's sort of like an illusionist trick; it's a puppet show.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:10:07] Do you think that the European advertising landscape would look different if fossil fuels were phased out?

Thomas Kolster [00:10:13] It's not like we're certainly going to lack billions and billions of dollars. Maybe the system will just find a healthier way of operating, to be honest. And I don't think it's been operating in a very healthy way anyway. Maybe it's actually good.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:10:28] Had you ever heard of the ECI before we called you?

Thomas Kolster [00:10:31] No.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:10:32] And now that you know it, what do you think of it?

Thomas Kolster [00:10:35] I'm a globalist by heart. I'm a European before I'm a Dane so I'm obviously pro whatever way you can make people understand that just because there's a Danish flag and a piece of land, you shouldn't fundamentally forget the history that brings all of us together. And I think the capacity to empathise with others is incredibly important.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:11:01] So, will you be signing up?

Thomas Kolster [00:11:03] Sure! Let's go with it. If you cut off a source, it might spur more innovation. So, maybe it's good. Maybe it's good to be a little bit more dramatic in these events and in this day and age. So, yes, I definitely would sign up.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:11:20] OK, Thomas, great to speak to you.

Thomas Kolster [00:11:24] Thanks so much.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:11:29] Fossil fuel has so many extensions into our society, and fine arts and museums are no exception. So, we're now off to Liverpool to meet Clara Paillard, a French woman who's an advisor to 'Culture Unstained,' a research and campaigning organisation that wants to end fossil fuel sponsorship of culture.

Clara Paillard [00:11:47] I'm a French citizen. I moved to the United Kingdom when I was 21, and I worked in museums and galleries. I became involved in trade unions because very quickly I realised that the museum and cultural sector is quite a precarious place to be for artists and workers. I also linked up with museum workers across the EU. People were interested to campaign for better conditions of work or around the issue of climate change and the arts and culture. In the last 10 years, it's come to my attention that many polluting industries were sponsoring exhibitions, museums, cultural festivals. What they got in return was reputation. Their new image was very beneficial to them, clearing the bad reputation they had developed in the last decades because of their impact on climate change. Nowadays, a tobacco company would be persona non grata in a museum because the

visitors would be completely shocked that a tobacco company could sponsor arts and culture. It's not yet the case for all sponsorships. But what is really worrying in terms of an education and citizenship point of view is whether these old companies are trying to influence the content of some of those exhibitions. It may not be that important if they're sponsoring, for example, the display of an ancient master painting, but when they are sponsoring an exhibition about climate change, you start to wonder what the real impact is. Oil companies are using sponsorship to also influence public discourse at our museums and galleries. I am putting this information out there for the education of the public. This is a battle about the truth and the narrative around climate emergency. We know that for the last 40 years those oil companies have been perfectly aware of the impact they've been having on our planet, and it took years to reveal that dimension to the wider public. So, as citizens and artists, we have a historical duty to research, speak out, expose those truths and rectify this narrative. Therefore, we have an approach that is led by science, but also by citizens.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:14:19] Now, as you can see on the climate front, science-based clarity is crucial for the public's understanding of how to take on the challenges of our time. And that, in a totally different way, is exactly what our next guest is campaigning for. Antoine, thank you so much for being with us here on CitizenCentral. First, tell us all about yourself and your ECI, 'The European EcoScore.'

Antoine Thill [00:14:42] I am Antoine Thill, I'm 22 years old, and I am studying law and political science in Brussels. I'm really concerned about environmental issues. Having taken part in the climate strikes, I definitely wanted to take meaningful action and to engage myself a bit more on this level. And so, after a course on European politics, I discovered the European Citizens' Initiatives. With a couple of friends, we had the idea to launch an initiative centering on finding solutions to climate change. And we thought, how could we have a big impact on everyday life? Consumption has one of the highest impacts on the environment so we thought that if we could find an initiative that concerns everyone, it should be on the topic of consumption. That's why we came up with the idea of 'The European EcoScore.' We all wanted to take concrete action, and we wanted maybe to also feel part of something bigger. That's why the European level is so interesting. You feel directly part of a continent, of something that embraces you, and that's something unbelievable.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:16:20] How has your campaign kicked off, and what is the plan?

Antoine Thill [00:16:24] We are really aware that it's very difficult to reach one million signatures. We encounter a lot of different experts, and a lot of them told us, 'Well, you are young. You don't have any financial means, you don't have extra ties. It will surely be very difficult to reach this million.' But we believe we will reach one million. This also needs a very big campaign. And in the end, it's the different initiatives that succeed. As we have seen, there are big NGOs or big networks with a lot of means, human resources. At the moment, we do not have all those means, but one thing we have is motivation. We want to create this kind of movement. A lot of people react very positively towards initiative. So, we definitely think that with this kind of motivation we will at least prompt a public debate on that issue.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:17:30] Through the EU's 'Farm to Fork' and the 'Fit for 55' package, there are already several labelling projects. What would make yours different?

Antoine Thill [00:17:37] Well, I've read all the documents from the Commission. They say that the Commission will try to create a kind of uniform label on the environmental impact of products that is not compulsory. There is a willingness to act, and that's very positive. But on the other hand, if a label is not compulsory, a lot of enterprises and a lot of people won't put negative information on their products. That's a problem. We would like a compulsory label on all products, to empower consumers to know exactly what the environmental impact is of all the products they buy all across the continent.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:18:32] And do you think that this label would really trigger a change in consumer behaviour?

Antoine Thill [00:18:36] I definitely think consumers want more and more transparency on what they buy. If we give the information, we can then raise awareness. And, actually, it's one of our rights as consumers to know what we are buying.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:18:53] How would this be able to be calculated?

Antoine Thill [00:18:55] Of course, it's very complex. At first, we started trying to create a calculation process, but after a while we met a lot of experts from different countries. Very interesting meetings. A lot of them told us, 'Well, guys, what you are doing is very positive, but it's very difficult to calculate. You should maybe let the experts do this kind of difficult job.' In the Commission they have so many human resources to also calculate all those eco-scores. And so we proposed two kinds of approaches: first, there is the approach developed by the European Commission more than 10 years ago called the 'Product Environmental Footprint,' which is based on life cycle assessments, the production of the product and then the consumption, the recycling and so on. And on the other hand, you have the methods already used by private eco-scores, which may be more pragmatic and easier to implement but a bit less scientific. So, it's possible to have an eco-score. But of course, it's complex. We believe that maybe it isn't our job to propose a very specific calculation method; it's the job of the Commission.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:20:22] Well, Antoine, it seems like a massive challenge you've got in front of you there, but thank you so much for being with us here on CitizenCentral and best of luck getting those one million signatures.

Antoine Thill [00:20:33] Thank you.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:20:34] Well, as Antoine told us, both companies and other movements have already taken on this sustainability impact labelling challenge. For more on that, we can head over to Santander in Spain to meet one of the people pioneering this challenge, Cliona Howie from 'Foundation Earth.' Thanks for joining us on CitizenCentral.

Cliona Howie [00:20:52] Very happy to be here. Thank you for inviting me and thank you for reaching out.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:20:55] First, tell us about yourself.

Cliona Howie [00:20:57] My name is Cliona Howie. I'm the current CEO of 'Foundation Earth.' I come from the environmental sector; I've had a long career in the sector working with governments, working with local authorities, but also working with industry to drive new business models and to shift policy, the way we finance and the way we build

incentives for innovation. All of this brought me to 'Foundation Earth' to transform the value chain of the agri-food sector and bring a more sustainable food industry to consumers.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:21:31] I know you've been working on a sustainability and impact labelling scheme. Can you tell us more about it?

Cliona Howie [00:21:38] Looking into what food labelling exists, consumers are totally confused. They see labels all over the place. There's no credibility. So, the concept of 'Foundation Earth' was created saying, 'What if a new agent came to town?' It's not government-led, it's not industry-led, and it's an independent NGO. Companies are aware that to be resilient, to be alive in three years and to still be producing good quality products that consumers want to buy, they have to rethink their game because sustainability also means good business.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:22:10] There are several labelling projects. What would make yours different?

Cliona Howie [00:22:14] Obviously, putting a food label on says, 'OK, consumers now have access to knowledge on the environmental impact of what they're buying.' That's a huge change, but there's a lot more that needs to be done. So, our scores are front of pack labels. There's digital access to more information if the consumer wishes to dig in and find out about a specific score: they can go into a QR code and find out. But that is very passive aggressive; you don't know if people are going to do that or even consider it. So, the whole science around consumer behaviour and reading labels and understanding labels isn't a big part of what we do. What's behind that label is equally important to the consumer reaction. Labelling stuff, generating the science-based data and the knowledge is equally important. This means that companies then have very specific, precise, accurate data and intelligence on where the impacts are in their supply chain, and they can do something about it. You can now model that and say, 'OK, we've got a significant production impact or transport impact or packaging impact; if we do this differently, what will happen?' So, now people are coming and saying, 'I want to do this; how do I do it?'

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:23:29] And how did you come up with the methodology?

Cliona Howie [00:23:30] One of the things we at 'Foundation Earth' are very committed to is using life cycle assessment-based methodologies, digging as far as we can into the supply chain to use primary data. We want to drive systems change. We want the consumer to say, 'I have absolute confidence and trust that the environmental impact of this tomato is a B compared to that one that's a C.' Now they're making a choice, right? You also want to incentivise companies to say, 'You want to make your tomato a B instead of a C; this is where you can do it. This is where you can change something and do things differently.' That's what needs to happen if you truly want to decarbonise the supply chain. It's also what really needs to happen if you want to give a credible score to consumers. And it's certainly what needs to happen if we want to really drive impact. That's the mission of 'Foundation Earth.'

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:24:19] Thank you so much for being with us here on CitizenCentral.

Cliona Howie [00:24:22] Take care, have a good day.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:24:24] I don't know about you, but I find it fascinating when an ECI proposes a specific topic, and then when you think about this topic, you actually realise

that society's already taking on that very challenge. So, to finish off this chapter, we'll head now to Sweden to meet Adam Webb, the founder of 'Lifelong Cosmetics,' a company that by making very little changes to products we consume every day, is making consuming these products way more ecological.

Adam Webb [00:24:50] My name is Adam; I am the founder of a company called 'Lifelong Cosmetics' based in Stockholm, Sweden. We offer plastic-free personal care products, and they come in this innovative liquid powder formulation. So, you just mix with water at home. Our products lower transport emissions by 94 %, and they come in compostable pouches, which completely takes away the need for plastic packaging. When I created 'Lifelong Cosmetics,' the main idea was to avoid plastic. I was using a deodorant, and I thought, 'How many of these deodorants do I have to use for the rest of my life?' I decided to create a refillable roll-on deodorant designed to last a lifetime. I've always had an entrepreneurial spirit. I promised myself that the next company I would work on had to be purpose-driven. A lot of it came down to the fact that I have two kids. It's about making the future generations safer, basically. We can ship this hand soap through your letterbox, and 40 grams make 500 grams of a liquid product. The idea has been around, and there have been similar products in the past. But my kids love to mix the products. The mums and dads get their kids involved and get them mixing it. Our products are made of 99.6 % natural ingredients. They're good for the family, they're good for kids, and they're good for the planet as well. This eco-score would be fantastic if we could get it implemented throughout Europe and force companies to show exactly how they produce their products and where they produce them. I think this is a huge task.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:26:54] That brings this edition of CitizenCentral to an end. Thank you so much to all our guests and of course to you for listening. And if you fancy finding out a little bit more about any of these ECIs, check out our show notes. You can also take a look at the ECI website or follow the ECIs' individual social media channels. And of course, if you want to propose your very own ECI, you can head over to the ECI forum to learn more about how to get started. I'm Méabh Mc Mahon, and you've been listening to CitizenCentral.