

CitizenCentral 10th Anniversary transcript

Greta Thunberg [00:00:06] We have been sacrificing our education to protest against your inaction.

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.

Speaker 3 [00:00:21]. To master the challenges of the digital age.

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. Now, in today's 10th anniversary chapter of the ECI, first we'll be meeting Dr Julia Baines from PETA. She'll introduce us to the ECI 'Save Cruelty-Free Cosmetics.' Then we'll look back into the history of the ECI. We'll first go to Italy and bring in Virginia Fiume, one of the very last ECIs to end their collection with their ECI 'Stop Global Warming'. Then we'll be off to meet the leader of the very first ECI, Simona Pronckuté, whose life in the last 10 years has changed considerably, as you'll see. Cosmetics is a big business in the EU, but though an animal testing ban is in place, European cosmetics in some cases are still tested on animals, and that's exactly what our next guest is trying to end. Dr Julia Baines from PETA, thank you so much for being with us here on CitizenCentral.

Dr Julia Baines [00:02:11] So, I'm Dr Julia Baines and I'm the site's policy manager for PETA UK, and a lot of my work involves basically trying to save cruelty-free cosmetics. So, I do a lot of work around the cosmetics regulation, how it interacts with chemicals regulations and how those two often contradict each other in terms of animal tests. So, I do lobbying within the parliament, working with industry and also in fronting campaigns.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:02:42] Tell us more about your ECI 'Save Cruelty-Free Cosmetics.'

Dr Julia Baines [00:02:46] Well, with the EU ban on cosmetics tests on animals came the promise that animals would no longer suffer and die for the sake of cosmetics tests. And quite simply, that promise has been broken. Animals are still dying in animal tests for cosmetics ingredients, including ingredients that are used exclusively in cosmetics products – they are not used for any other purpose – and ingredients that have been on the market for decades, and that simply must stop because this breaks the wishes of the public and also the intention of the legislators that brought forward the EU cosmetics testing ban. We need to see progress not just for the animals but actually for improving human health, to have better medicines, better product safety and better protection of the

environment. So what we are aiming to achieve is a humane, human, relevant science that is animal-free, and we need better funding and for this to be fully utilised. And so, really, the objective of our European Citizens' Initiative 'Save Cruelty-Free Cosmetics' is to protect and strengthen the cosmetics animal testing ban, but also to transform the EU chemicals regulation and to really modernise animal-free science.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:04:09] And how has the process been so far?

Dr Julia Baines [00:04:11] It's been brilliant because we have brought together a number of animal protection organisations, so PETA has joined forces with Cruelty-Free Europe, with the European Coalition to End Animal Experiments, with Eurogroup for Animals and also the Humane Society International Europe. And together, these animal protection organisations actually represent over 100 organisations individually across all EU Member States. And so, this collaboration has meant that we can bring together the expertise of our scientists, our policy advisers, our legal analysts. And by getting together and having the ECI, we can really show the Commission what the public wants. And that is to save, cruelty-free cosmetics, because we've seen in recent polls, for example, that nearly three quarters of European citizens want to see animal tests for cosmetics in particular stopped, and the vast majority from the same poll also want to see the EU set binding targets to phase out animal testing entirely.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:05:23] How should they be tested then? What's the conscious alternative to animal testing?

Dr Julia Baines [00:05:27] Well, some of the alternatives that we have in place are advanced computer models that can be far more accurate at predicting what happens to the human body when we're exposed to various chemicals. We have fantastic 3D human skin cell culture methods where you can actually use human skin cells, again to predict what might happen on the human skin surface. We have brilliant tests now to predict what might happen if you were to get a chemical in your eye; what kind of irritation it might cause, what kind of allergies on your skin might happen. And again, all of these different types of methods, when they're put together, can combine into what we call a weight of evidence approach to really build up what can potentially happen to humans. And of course, there does still need to be more investment, there does still need to be further development. And that's why we really need to make sure that not only the methods we have are fully utilised, but that there's proper funding in place for where we still need to see further development.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:06:28] And has it been challenging trying to get those one million signatures?

Dr Julia Baines [00:06:31] We've had brilliant support, fortunately. We have been incredibly lucky to have our campaign launch by Dove and the Body Shop, two global powerhouses within the cosmetics industry, and they have really galvanised support across all consumers to try and reach that target of one million signatures, and we are aiming to be the fastest ever ECI to actually reach that target.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:06:58] And have you learned a lot along the way during the process of being involved in this ECI?

Dr Julia Baines [00:07:02] Yes, we're definitely learning that collaboration is key. Collaboration and organisation because it's so important to make sure that you not only

have the help that you need to get your message out there and to get it across, of course, 26 Member States, but also it's key to be organised in terms of the messaging that we're putting out across our social media channels that we are aligned in our approach.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:07:28] Many cosmetics brands argue that they are against animal testing. Is that really true? Do you know what percentage of cosmetics continue testing on animals?

Dr Julia Baines [00:07:36] Across the world it's estimated that around 100 million animals could still be used in various different locations. In areas such as China, for example, tests are still mandated on animals for certain types of products, and we still seek testing in other jurisdictions as well. But the movement is there.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:07:55] Ok, Dr Julia Baines there from the 'Save Cruelty-Free Cosmetics' ECI. Thank you so much for sharing your story and all about the process of being involved in this ECI with us, and for joining us on CitizenCentral.

Dr Julia Baines [00:08:06] Brilliant, thanks very much.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:08:11] Now, it's probably one of the ECIs that causes the most emotional reactions. So, to get an expert insight into this, let's head to Brussels to meet John Chave, Director General of Cosmetics Europe. John, thanks for joining us. Tell us first more about yourself.

John Chave [00:08:25] So, my name is John Chave. I'm Director General of Cosmetics Europe. Cosmetics Europe is the association which represents the cosmetics and personal care industry at European level. Cosmetics and personal care is regulated at European level and has been since 1976. That means that wherever you are in the European Union, you're subject to the European Cosmetics Regulation. And that means that policy initiatives and regulatory changes at European level affect all the cosmetics and personal care industry in Europe. Cosmetics sure act as an interface with the European institutions to make sure that the regulation is properly understood and that the needs and interests and views of the cosmetics and personal care industry are taken into account in the legislation and policy process.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:09:13] Now, we all use cosmetics every day. But do you think people get how big the cosmetics sector really is?

John Chave [00:09:19] People don't actually understand what is meant by cosmetics because often when people say cosmetics, they think of makeup and maybe skin care as cosmetics. In fact, cosmetics is a huge range of products. That's why we say cosmetics and personal care because under the European regulation, products ranging from fine fragrances at one end to toothpaste at the other end, with all sorts of products in between, like hair dyes and skin care, et cetera, are covered by the same cosmetics regulation.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:09:49] Now, can you clarify to us if cosmetics in the European Union are tested on animals or not? And if they are, why can't we end this?

John Chave [00:09:57] There are no cases in Europe where products are tested on animals. It's also the case that some concerns have been raised by the requirements of the European Chemicals Agency to do animal testing on some chemicals, and some chemicals which could in principle be used in cosmetics. And that has caused some

concern, and again, the cosmetics industry in Europe really wants to move towards a post animal-testing era, and that means encouraging European agencies like the European Chemical Agency to recognise the reality and the potential of alternatives to animal testing. There is an issue with China, and China often crops up in this context, where samples of some cosmetics products have to be submitted to the Chinese authorities for animal testing. And this is something, of course, that the industry, which strongly supports the European animal-testing ban, would like to change. But here there are some positive developments. China has gradually moved away from requiring all cosmetics to be tested.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:10:56] And had you ever heard of the ECI before we reached out to you?

John Chave [00:10:59] I certainly have heard about the European Citizens' Initiative, and I think it's a good way to bring attention to some of the challenges which have arisen in connection with how our ban in cosmetics interacts with the broader chemicals legislation. And I think the time is ripe for a debate about that and a conversation, again coming back to the point that a solution to these problems is really to embrace the potential of alternatives. I think the ECI has quite successfully drawn attention to these challenges, and we welcome the debate, and we would like also to be part of conversations with the authorities and with our partners in the animal welfare organisations to make sure that we move forward into the new era.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:11:40] Do you think the sector really wants to stop testing on animals?

John Chave [00:11:43] Sometimes there is a misperception that in some way the cosmetics industry is defensive about animal testing. This is absolutely wrong. We 100 % support the European ban, there's no question about that. We 100 % support the need to move towards alternatives, and this we share with the animal welfare organisations. We 100 % support the need to engage with European and international authorities about alternatives to animal testing, and this we share with animal welfare organisations. So we have an awful lot in common, and I very much hope that we can work in partnership in the future to realise our common goals. And I would add that we need animal welfare NGOs on board on this.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:12:23] Ok, John, I'll be letting Dr Baines know that you'll be signing up.

John Chave [00:12:27] Well, John as a citizen might consider signing up.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:12:30] Ok, thank you so much for your time, your knowledge and your support.

John Chave [00:12:33] It's been an absolute pleasure. Thank you.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:12:46] Well, now we can dash over to Italy and bring in Virginia Fiume, coordinator of EUMANS and also the leader of 'Stop Global Warming,' one of the very last ECIs that closed its campaign just before we launched CitizenCentral. So, Virginia, it's great to talk to you.

Virginia Fiume [00:13:03] Hi to all the listeners.

Commented [A1]: This piece is not in the recording.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:13:05] So, how did you find out about the ECI?

Virginia Fiume [00:13:07] Back in 2012, I used to work for our Cultural Association in Italy that had the focus on European cultural policies, and there was another organisation which at that time launched the European Citizens' Initiative on 'Media Pluralism.' In Italy, that was very popular because, of course, at the time there was Berlusconi in power. He was the owner of a lot of media. And so the issue was very important for the Italian citizens. That was the first time in my life that I heard about a European Citizens' Initiative. So, I knew the instrument, and then I saw it as an instrument available for me in 2019, when with Marco Cappato, who is the founder of EUMANS, we decided to try to launch this idea of a pan-European movement that fights for sustainability, civilised democracy through participatory democracy instruments.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:14:01] And what was your experience with 'Stop Global Warming' like?

Virginia Fiume [00:14:05] So, it was quite a journey. I called it a marathon because it really is a marathon. We didn't have a network before, so we started with an idea. We collected a group of citizens, individual citizens who agreed on the idea, and then we started to run the campaign. So, at the beginning what was more difficult was the bureaucratic and technological element. And then there was the problem of the time, getting ourselves known. Then I think the pandemic had quite the change. We also onboarded a communication team to work on the campaign and an approach that was based on involving influencers. And this was quite a game changer for the campaign. The whole group of activists felt that something was possible. So, the combination of a communication consultancy, the involvement of these influencers and this boost, and the pandemic – so people had more time to look at things online – was quite helpful. And the next steps, the daily life, was identifying this methodology and trying to replicate it. So, what we did was work on the supporters of the initiative, famous people, testimonial celebrities, but also political supporters. I have to say that we knew we wouldn't have collected one million signatures, but we knew that the carbon-pricing topic was relevant in the debate and would have been more and more relevant. We decided to have a more political approach, so what we did was to focus on mayors; mayors as representatives of local-level communities, but also as the bridge between the local and the European level. I think, if I have to summarise it, it was an effort of being creative in finding on-going new stakeholders, new political partners, a new organisation that could walk a little mile of this milestone with us.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:16:09] Any advice for someone who's thinking of proposing an initiative or someone that's midway in their signature collection?

Virginia Fiume [00:16:15] So, first of all, I would say, put your topic in a way that it's clear and shows why it matters to one million people, at least. Don't put too much focus on the theory, but on the practice of how you can touch the hearts of a lot of people. That's the first thing. The second thing is to find at least that the seven people that constitute your committee are really committed and feel the same urgency; so you need the commitment in at least seven countries because you need to penetrate into the political debate, into the pop debate, into whatever. One thing that I learned running a European Citizens' Initiative is that we shouldn't be colonialist when we think about the European Union. Every single country has its own identity, its own level of debate, its own national debate. So, you really

need to have at least seven people in at least seven places that know what's going on there and that are highly, highly, highly engaged.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:17:19] And, Virginia, what's the morning like after your initiative ends?

Virginia Fiume [00:17:23] Ha! So the good thing, or bad, I don't know, is that I already had other initiatives happening so I was a bit like, ok. Now, there was a sense of emptiness because it's something that you put a lot of effort in. So, there is a moment of like, oh no, what do I do tomorrow? On the other side? We never looked at the ECI as something that would have finished on the 22nd of July. Our goal is carbon pricing, and the ECI was an instrument.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:17:52] So, would you go for a second round?

Virginia Fiume [00:17:54] I would do it again, with a bit more effort into having that team of full time people on board. And stay tuned because EUMANS might be back soon with some other thing.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:18:05] Ok, Virginia, thank you so much for joining us here on CitizenCentral.

Virginia Fiume [00:18:09] Thank you very much.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:18:12] In today's 10th anniversary chapter of the ECIs, it's time to head over to NATO to bring in Simona Pronckuté, the leader of the very first ECI, 'Fraternité2020.' Simona, tell us more about yourself.

Simona Pronckuté [00:18:25] Originally, I come from Lithuania, but I have been living abroad since 2009. I participated in different programmes, exchange programmes, and finally, I ended up in Brazil. So, I joined 'Fraternité2020' 10 years ago. Back then I was 25. I have been living in Brussels for nine years, but in the past couple of years I have been working for an international organisation. So, yeah, I'm very happy that the European Union offered me this amazing opportunity.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:19:01] And what exactly was 'Fraternité2020' asking for?

Simona Pronckuté [00:19:05] To promote programmes for young people, not only Erasmus. Our idea was that young people should have this opportunity, that it shouldn't be a competitive programme. And when I was a student, participating in an Erasmus exchange programme was still very competitive. I also noticed that the Erasmus programme back then was considered as a step for a new life. So you can imagine that this is very challenging if you have never worked abroad, if you don't speak very well foreign languages to write your CV in, I don't know, German, French or English, and companies who would be willing to sign an agreement with the university. The staff was really very difficult. So having had this experience, 'Fraternité2020' was really close to my heart: programmes and opportunities that are easier to access for young people, especially for young people with underprivileged backgrounds.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:20:04] Looking back on 'Fraternité2020,' how does one feel the day after the ECI campaign ends?

Simona Pronckuté [00:20:11] I remember when the campaign finished, that night I wrote my first article for EurActiv about my experience with 'Fraternité2020,' and the next day it was published. I was a little bit upset that it was over, but also happy because I did give it so much time and I worked almost full time on a voluntary basis. It was a bit of a lose-lose, because we had not succeeded in collecting one million signatures. However, it was a big deal, I think, for pressing governors for opportunities for young people, for inclusive youth exchange programmes. I learned public skills; before, I didn't have any experience at all. I also learned how to run social media campaigns; campaigning in general. I also learned a little bit about digital marketing and met incredible people. So, that was the big event at the personal level. It was really one of the best professional experiences for me.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:21:23] Did this ECI change your life?

Simona Pronckuté [00:21:25] Absolutely. I think it helped me to get opportunities. After the European Citizens' Initiative, I joined one of the European associations. I got a scholarship to study at one of the best universities in Europe, and I was also an intern with the European Commission. I was invited as a guest speaker, as a moderator at conferences organised by the European Parliament. So, it gave me so many incredible opportunities, and to focus on research topics related to citizens' participation was very rewarding.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:22:02] Ok, thank you so much, Simona. Thank you so much for joining us on CitizenCentral, and the very best of luck to you.

Simona Pronckuté [00:22:09] A great pleasure to share my experience with other citizens and also this variant of former organisers of the European Citizens' Initiatives.

Méabh Mc Mahon [00:22:30] And this brings the special anniversary chapter of CitizenCentral to an end. A big thank you to all our guests and of course to you for listening. If you fancy finding out more about any of our ECIs or our guests, please check out our show notes. You can also check out the ECI website and the ECI social media channels. I'm Méabh Mc Mahon, and you've been listening to CitizenCentral.