

## CitizenCentral S3 CH2 final transcripts

**Intro** [00:00:03] That Europe finds itself at the front of the storm is not something new. The world of tomorrow will be a different place. It's good that Europe is ambitious in climate policy. We should be ambitious, but also realistic. Our task is to learn to live within the boundaries Mother Earth has given us. Only united, we can defend our values; we can protect the interests of our citizens.

**Manex** [00:00:41] Hello there and welcome to CitizenCentral, the podcast series about the first transnational democracy instrument in the world, the European Citizens' Initiative. In today's chapter, we will look back on some of the successful ECI's – those that gathered over a million signatures and received an official response by the European Commission – to analyse the changes they managed to achieve in EU policy making. We will take a look at the three initiatives known as, 'Ban glyphosate', 'End the Cage Age', and 'Right2Water' [*Water and sanitation are a human right! Water is a public good, not a commodity!*]. To start, we will reach out to Helmut Burtschner-Schaden, one of the leaders of a recent ECI, 'Save the Bees and Farmers! Towards a bee friendly agriculture for a healthy environment'. This successful initiative received the Commission's response on April 5th of this year. Helmut is somewhat of an ECI hero, as several years ago, he also led another successful ECI, 'Ban glyphosate and protect people and the environment from toxic pesticides', which is what we'll talk about today. Some of you may remember, we interviewed him in the very first chapter of CitizenCentral, but for those who do not, here is what he told us back in the day about the 'Ban Glyphosate' initiative.

**Helmut** [00:02:05] The first ECI that I was involved in was really very interesting and also very successful because we got the million signatures within less than five months. And we also got a real good response from the European Commission, because they responded to our second demand, which is to reform the authorisation procedure for pesticides in Europe by a legislative proposal, which made it necessary for chemical industry due to open their studies at the beginning of an authorisation procedure in Europe.

**Manex** [00:02:39] Three very clear demands: the ban on glyphosate; the transparency of chemical company procedures; and to set EU-wide mandatory reduction targets for pesticide use. To look into the demands of this ECI, we now greet two guests joining us: from Belgium, Klaus Berend, and from Ireland, Andrew Owen-Griffiths. Thanks to you both, and please tell our listeners a bit more about yourself and your work.

**Klaus** [00:03:09] Yes, hello. I am the head of the unit dealing with pesticides and biocides in DG Health and Food Safety of the European Commission, which is based in Brussels. But originally, I'm from Germany and more precisely, the border region, Germany, France, Luxembourg, and I think everybody knows Schengen, which is a little town about 15 kilometres away from my home place.

**Andrew** [00:03:33] Hi. Yeah. And thanks for that introduction. I'm Andrew Owen-Griffiths. I currently live in Ireland and that's where I am at the moment. I work for the European Commission in the team that's responsible for the sustainable use of plant protection regulation, so the sustainable use of pesticides.

**Manex** [00:03:49] Klaus, first of all, I want to ask you about the Transparency Regulation. This is a big win for this ECI.

**Klaus** [00:03:57] Well, the Transparency Regulation introduced a number of important changes in the procedure for the authorisation of pesticides to address the concerns that lay behind the second objective of the ECI. And these were namely that companies applying for the approval of active substances or for the authorisation of products do not include all available technical scientific information in their dossiers, and they omit in particular studies that have unfavourable results. Or the concern was that laboratories conducting studies for applicants try to present the results more positively than they should be in order to ensure that they get new contracts in the future.

So, to address these concerns, the Transparency Regulation requires that prospective applicants, or those who intend to submit an application – and this is not only for pesticides but also for other food-related substances such as food additives, enzymes, flavourings or novel foods – they have to notify all of the studies that they have started themselves in-house, or that they contract to an outside test facility or a laboratory. They have to notify this to a register maintained by the European Food Safety Authority, EFSA. And they also have to indicate the start date of the study and the planned completion date.

**Manex** [00:05:19] What change or impact did this bring?

**Klaus** [00:05:22] This new practice established in the Transparency Regulation therefore makes it possible for all citizens, or for any interested academic, for example, or any scientist, or any NGO to verify that all the raw data generated in the study are correctly interpreted and correctly summarised in the study reports. And anybody who wishes so can also submit comments on what has been done to EFSA so that this can be taken into account in the risk assessment process afterwards. And that's very different from the past, because in the past only the summary of studies and tests conducted were made publicly available, but not the raw data. So, it was not possible to verify that what has been reported in the study has actually a basis and is fully backed up by the data that were generated.

As a last element, where in a dossier you have studies that come to different results for the same substance – so a test is done several times and the results are not always the same, which can happen – Commission has the possibility to ask EFSA to conduct further verification, so to decide which of the results reported are indeed the right ones. The overall objective of these changes are to strengthen transparency and engagement of all interested parties in the risk assessment process, so that we get, in the end, the best possible and trusted scientific advice from EFSA that underpins the decisions that the Commission then takes on whether to allow or not to allow a substance in, in food or in the processes leading to the production of foods.

**Manex** [00:07:00] It seems very well thought out Klaus, but listeners may be asking themselves about the initiative's objective number one.

**Klaus** [00:07:09] Well, objective number one was to ban glyphosate and that the Commission did not do in 2017, when the Citizens' Initiative was submitted because there were no technical or scientific reasons to do so. All active substances such as glyphosate are examined periodically to check that they do not cause harm to human or animal health, or unacceptable effects in the environment when properly used. And the outcome of that assessment for glyphosate was that 'yes, that is possible', and therefore, there was no reason for the Commission – or no basis – to ban glyphosate. That said, we renewed the approval for a period of five years, which is rather short, and the new procedure to verify again that all the safety criteria are met is ongoing and EFSA is right now preparing its conclusions on this renewed evaluation, which we expect to receive in the Commission in

July. And then, we will have to decide again, together with the Member States, whether the approval can be renewed or not. But that will depend, obviously, on the outcome of that scientific assessment that is currently being conducted.

**Manex** [00:08:21] And how about the initiative's third objective? Has general pesticide use decreased in the EU?

**Andrew** [00:08:28] Okay, so the farm to fork and biodiversity strategies set this target for 50% reduction in the use and risk of pesticides and in particular to reduce the more hazardous pesticides, so the ones that are more likely to cause harm. This is currently what we believe to be an ambitious and achievable but aspirational target, so it's not legally binding on us or on the Member States. The Farm to Fork Strategy also announced that the Commission would review the current Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive, and this has led to the Commission bringing forward a proposal for a sustainable use regulation, and this is currently being discussed with Council and Parliament. And as part of that, the Commission proposes to make exactly what is being proposed in objective three of the European Citizens Initiative, to make these targets mandatory at both EU and the Member State level.

**Manex** [00:09:18] So, we have the new Green Deal and the Farm to Fork strategy. But do you think the pesticide targets are being achieved and are the farmers being supported?

**Andrew** [00:09:28] I mean, what I would say is that progress is already being made towards these targets. Since the baseline of 2017, we've seen a 14% decrease in this Farm to Fork one target. So, we can measure progress that's already being made. But of course, a target is not about what's happened. It's about setting something, looking forward, and to give an incentive and a driver for change. And there's lots of other actions that need to be taken. And a lot of these are announced in the Farm to Fork strategy to try and support this transition, to provide alternatives, to bring new alternatives to the market, so that when you're removing a chemical pesticide, you've got something else to use and also making information available to the farmer to help them to make decisions. So about getting the information to the farmer and giving them a support system to enable them to make the right decisions.

**Manex** [00:10:19] Progress in the case of this ECI must be very, very complex, but are the citizens opinions being taken into account here?

**Andrew** [00:10:28] Well, if you mean progress in the negotiations, then it's quite clear that pesticides are a rather divisive issue. They polarise opinions, and we are currently going through discussions with both Parliament and Council. So, progress is being made. I think it's important that the commission hears diverse opinions and views, and clearly the European Citizens' Initiative and the views held by those who signed that initiative are important and, to that extent, the ECI is referenced in the impact assessments and in the recitals of the regulation to represent the societal views and the call for change that's being put forward.

**Manex** [00:11:06] How are these targets being set and are new options offered?

**Andrew** [00:11:11] The targets are based on sales of pesticides. So, basically, we're aiming to reduce the sales of pesticides and in particular the more hazardous pesticides. So, each pesticide's in a group and it's given a weighting. So, the idea is that you can move from more hazardous pesticides to lower risk pesticides. So, we're not saying, 'no

pesticides, ban everything', we're saying we need to progress and move from more hazardous substances to less hazardous substances and where possible, to biocontrol agents which are not included in the target figure. So, it's important then that the message is clear that we're not saying we're banning all pesticides or we're cutting 50% of pesticides by now. What the target does is set a forward looking target for a progression to moving to lower risk and pesticide alternatives.

**Manex** [00:12:00] Thanks to both of you. We will keep an eye open to see how everything you're telling us advances.

**Klaus** [00:12:06] So, thank you.

**Andrew** [00:12:07] Great. Hope we did a good job.

**Manex** [00:12:13] Time to speak about another successful ECI, 'End the Cage Age', an ECI that hit 1.4 million signatures in 2020. So, we now head over to Greece to meet Olga Kikou. Hello, Olga. Please tell us who you are and what you do.

**Olga** [00:12:31] Thank you for inviting me. I'm Olga Kikou. I am the head of the EU Office of Compassion in World Farming. I come from Greece, and I've been very involved in the 'End the Cage Age' ECI.

**Manex** [00:12:45] Olga, what was your aim with this initiative?

**Olga** [00:12:49] Our aim was, and still is, to improve the lives of hundreds of millions of animals who are kept in cages across the EU. And here we are talking about laying hens, sows, rabbits, ducks and geese, quail, and calves. All of these animals are kept in cages. Cages severely restrict the movement of these animals. And of course, they bring down the quality of their lives, and they reduce them to mere production units. For this reason, we launched the European Citizens' Initiative 'End the Cage Age', asking the Commission to propose a complete ban on the use of cages in the EU. And this would see actually farms moving to alternative systems, alternative farming systems, without the use of cages.

**Manex** [00:13:41] Which is the current situation of cage use in agriculture in the EU?

**Olga** [00:13:46] There are different practices in different countries, but overall, throughout the EU, cages are used. They are many animals. Hundreds of millions of animals spend their lives in cages and are confined in cages for much of their life. Therefore, we want this to end, and we want this to end now. We have scientific opinions by the European Food Safety Authority, which has confirmed that cage farming is harmful for animal welfare. Well, the EFSA scientists recommended a shift towards alternative systems. They have already issued some scientific opinions, and we expect a few more. With hens, we see that about half of the eggs produced in the EU come from cage systems. Still, we are of course trying to change this. It will require that the farming system be transformed, but we want to make sure that this happens as soon as possible, and we want to make sure that this is harmonised across the EU, that all producers don't use cages in their systems.

**Manex** [00:15:01] Would you say this is due to resources?

**Olga** [00:15:04] Resources exist, but we need to make sure that people know about them and Member States use them.

**Manex** [00:15:12] I have to ask about their citizens. What is their position regarding cages in agriculture?

**Olga** [00:15:19] Citizens obviously want significant reform to take place as far as animals are concerned. We've seen this with our ECI and the fervour, and the wishes, of the citizens who actually signed the ECI. We want the reform to take place so that citizens then will have no option to go for the worst product, but they will be able to choose to have an array of products from animals who are not farmed in cages. Certainly, we want the EU to have... to harmonise its laws.

**Manex** [00:16:02] Thanks for joining us and keep up the good work.

**Olga** [00:16:05] Thank you so much, Manex. And I hope we get to talk again. And good luck with everything.

**Manex** [00:16:13] Time to speak about animal welfare and how the Commission is working to implement the ban on caged animal produce and livestock. Andrea Gavinelli, of the Health and Food Safety DG, thanks so much for joining us on CitizenCentral, and please tell our listeners who you are and where you come from.

**Andrea** [00:16:32] Yes, I am Andrea Gavinelli. I am the Head of Unit for Animal Welfare, and I am a veterinarian. I come from Italy, and we are taking care of animal welfare since practically all my life in the Commission over 20 years in the veterinary issue. But welfare is my passion.

**Manex** [00:16:50] To start off, please tell us more about the Commission's proposal regarding 'End the Cage Age'.

**Andrea** [00:16:57] The proposal of the Commission is always developed through an analysis also of the social and economic implications of this decision. Science is helping us to drive when and in which way we could phase out the cages to get into alternative system for these animals. Because in any case, we talk about farming the animals that are in an intensive condition, they are not in the wild. So, we have to have the clearer opinion of the European Food Safety Authority that will tell us which alternative we have for these animals towards a different life out of a cage. At the same time, the proposal is to be based also on how much it will cost and how much time will take for the farming system of Europe to develop this system and to adapt to this.

**Manex** [00:17:45] Andrea, what does this proposal include and how does it respond to the citizens that supported this ECI? I imagine this is a costly implementation.

**Andrea** [00:17:55] To be clear, what can change is already giving a big sign to the Europeans that the Commission is listening to them, trying to modify a current farming practice that is getting to be more respecting the animals. Despite it will have a cost, [it] will be something to be done for moral and ethical reasons. So, it will be a very important sign to propose to the citizens. Then, as you know, it is only the proposal, [it] will need the legal discussion and negotiation. Of course, this is having a cost... is a cost that we will have to... and we are calculating with the transition period in which the system of farming should adapt and should have supporting measures to do it. The other element that we are considering is that we are not the only one in the work. EU is leading from this legislative point of view compared with many other trading partners. So, it will be also appropriate to

study measures that will allow the European producer to maintain this status or even getting more for animal welfare without being undermined by imports at a very low level of production. But this is not only the case. The most important part, in my opinion, of this is also to respect the consumers demand. So, if you are demanding to buy produce with them produced by an animal that is not in a cage, it doesn't matter the region, even if it is imported, to respect the same. And to conclude, I think is important to say that together with this proposal to improve the standards, we are starting also a proposal on animal welfare labelling for the first time in Europe that we really try to merge all these positive requirements to communicate them to the consumer in a very transparent manner.

**Manex** [00:19:43] Food safety, biodiversity. These are very current topics, but so is inflation. Will this proposal mean that animal origin products will become more expensive?

**Andrea** [00:19:54] All these farming and the way we are eating is connected with the European way of life that in particularly for the new generations, is connected also with important element like the environment, the respect of the animals, a way of consuming less for the future because we are really looking into what will be sustainable. It's an effort to be done for everyone in the food chain to facilitate this process of consuming food – in this case, food from animals – that are less and less invasive. And what is the consumption of the environment, water and the land? Of course, the equation to strike is in the context of inflation of today is also the affordability of this. And it's important, in my opinion, to say that here we don't have to think about producing food like the top of the... like the organic that is really very expensive comparing with the rest. It is important to engage in something that is affordable and so to ensure that this system will be resilient to the future. So will really improve the welfare in a way that is pragmatic, in a way that will give everyone, every consumer the possibility to buy this product and to participate to this change.

**Manex** [00:21:18] Thanks ever so much for this update, Andrea. And to finish off this chapter on successful ECIs, we now reach out to 'Right2Water' [*Water and sanitation are a human right! Water is a public good, not a commodity!*], which in 2013 was the very first ECI to gather over 1 million signatures. We've reached out to the leader of this ECI, Pablo Sanchez Centellas, and here is what his initiative was asking for.

**Pablo** [00:21:39] And we were asking the European Commission to do something that the United Nations had done two years earlier to declare water and sanitation as a human right, to block, to stop and to prevent any further attempt to liberalisation the water sector at the European level, and to promote the concept of a human right to water in the external action of the EU.

**Manex** [00:22:03] Now we head over to Brussels to speak with Bert Leemans of DGENV, who works in the implementation of the outcome of this ECI. Bert, thanks so much for joining us and please tell our listeners a little more about yourself and your work.

**Bert** [00:22:19] So, my name is Bert Leemans. I am Belgian, and I started working as a policy officer for the DG Environment in October 2020 in the unit Marine Environment and Clean Water Services. And my main task is the coordination of the implementation of the so-called Recast Drinking Water Directive and the Recast Drinking Water Directive entered into force in January 2021, and the Member States had, in fact, until January 2023 to transpose the Directive into national legislation and to comply with its provisions. The

implementation of the Recast Drinking Water Directive and also work for the Commission as well in the in the forthcoming year. So that's what I'm dealing with.

**Manex** [00:23:04] But tell us more about the Drinking Water Directive, where it comes from and how it has evolved.

**Bert** [00:23:11] So, I think it's important to note that the previous Drinking Water Directive dated from 98 and the main focus was on the drinking water quality at the tap. If we look at the Recasting Water Directive, which was adopted in December 2020, still focuses on the drinking water quality. But besides the objective to ensure the quality of the drinking water, it additionally includes an objective with regards to maintaining and improving the access to water for all European citizens. So, this is an important change in the objective of the Drinking Water Directive and in particular it focuses on access to water for marginalised and vulnerable groups.

So to give a short overview of what is new in this, in this recast Drinking Water Directive is in the first place, the existing safety standards are updated in line with the latest recommendation of the World Health Organization, and sometimes they are even more ambitious for some parameters. On top of checking compliance at the point of compliance which is usually the household tap, Member States together with their water suppliers, they will now be required to assess and to manage all the water quality risks along the entire water supply chain.

And then also important in response to the European Citizens' Initiative, "Right2Water", new requirements to improve and maintain access to safe drinking water for all EU citizens and in particular for vulnerable and marginalised groups are now included in the recast Directive. And also linked to that is that consumers will receive more information and oversight, not only on the quality of the water supply but also on the efficiency and the effectiveness of their water suppliers, in order, of course, to maintain consumers' confidence in water quality. And then last but not least, water suppliers have the obligation to assess their efficiency of the water supply system and to take measures to improve it. This is actually becoming more and more important as we see that water availability is decreasing and the trend is evident.

**Manex** [00:25:22] Can European citizens be sure they consume highest quality drinking water?

**Bert** [00:25:29] I can say that the European Union has one of the highest drinking water quality standards worldwide due to over 30 years of successful drinking water policies and rules. We have quite some history on drinking water. On the other side, we are still facing challenges, for example, with regard to access to safe drinking water, but also to new emerging substances such as pharmaceuticals and PFAS and microplastic. So PFAS, for example, is quite often in the news lately. It is what we call these forever chemicals, which we find now in the environment and are difficult to eliminate from the water. So, this is why the commission updated the Drinking Water Directive. Which is, by the way, fully in line with the zero pollution action plan of the Commission. It aims at reducing air, water and soil pollution to levels no longer considered harmful to the health and natural ecosystems.

**Manex** [00:26:26] I have to ask about the UN Sustainable Development Goals regarding water.

**Bert** [00:26:31] Maybe first, shortly explain what is the UN Sustainable Development Goals? So, what we call the SDGs, and in particular the SDG6, it's a goal that seeks to ensure safe drinking water and sanitation for all is focusing on the sustainable

management of water resources, wastewater, ecosystems, and acknowledging the importance of enabling environment. So, this is the main objective. Yeah, of course there's a relation between the Drinking Water Directive, access to water, and the SDG six, as we call it. It's important to note that the SDG six is one of the most off-track SDG goals for the moment.

**Manex** [00:27:12] So, which would you say are the main obstacles the directive is facing?

**Bert** [00:27:17] I wouldn't talk of obstacles. I would talk of challenges. There are challenges on the Commission side there are challenges on the Member States side. On the Commission side, this materials in contact with drinking water, this is one of the main challenges, because we are heading towards one EU system, which will be very clear for all Member States and which will be also very clear for the citizens, because at some point you will have products where it's clearly indicated that it can be used in contact with drinking water. So, it gives a reassurance also to the consumers. If I look at the Member States, the main challenge will be the implementation of the so-called risk-based approach, which entails a risk assessment/risk management system with regard to the drinking water quality across the whole entire water supply chain. So, from the abstraction points to the water treatment plants, to the distribution system, until the tap – the household tap. I think the main challenge for the implementation from the Member State side will be the alignment of these responsibilities, of these different competent authorities, and to ensure their cooperation, a good alignment of all these responsibilities and cooperation is really essential.

**Manex** [00:28:27] Thanks for joining us for your time and of course, for your insight.

**Bert** [00:28:31] Thank you.

**Manex** [00:28:46] This brings this chapter of season three of CitizenCentral to an end. Thanks to all our guests and, of course, to you for listening. If you want to learn more about the ECI and these initiatives, please check out our SHOWNOTES. I hope you have learned a little bit more about how the ECI works and how it causes change for all of us in Europe. I am Manex Rekarte Cowie and you have been listening to CitizenCentral.