

## CitizenCentral S2 CH3 final transcripts

**Speaker 1** [00:00:11] That Europe finds itself at the front of the storm is not something new.

**Speaker 2** [00:00:15] The world of tomorrow will be a different place.

**Speaker 3** [00:00:17] It's good that Europe is ambitious in climate policy. We should be ambitious but also realistic.

**Speaker 4** [00:00:23] The task is to learn to live within the boundaries Mother Earth has given us.

**Speaker 5** [00:00:26] Only united we can defend our values, we can protect the interests of all citizens.

**Manex** [00:00:40] Hello there, and welcome to CitizenCentral, the podcast series about the first transnational democracy instrument in the world, the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI). Celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2022, 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 Manex Rekarte Cowie, and on CitizenCentral I'll be finding out how the ECI works, how you can launch or support an initiative, and what drives people to give up their time and energy for a cause they care deeply about. In today's chapter, we will travel to three European countries, starting in the Netherlands, where Kirsten Kossen will present us her ECI "Good Clothes, Fair Pay" that wants to draw attention on the rock-bottom salaries clothes producers earn so we can dress ourselves economically. Then, we will head over to beautiful Brittany to meet Ronan Evain, who with his ECI "Win It On The Pitch" is working hard to protect the European sports model and assure European football fans a fiasco like the European Super League does never happen again. And to finish off, we will head over to Denmark, where Pernille Schriver will tell us about her ECI "Stop 5G, Stay Connected But Protected," which wants to draw attention upon some of the harsh realities of cable-free data systems. A brimful chapter of CitizenCentral showing that the ECI is the tool for people wanting to change European laws and rights in the most diverse of topics. And to kick off, it's time to talk about garments, what we wear and what the economy behind garments means in many cases. Welcome to CitizenCentral, Kirsten, and please tell us a little bit more about yourself.

**Kirsten** [00:02:45] My name is Kirsten Kossen. I'm from the Netherlands. I work at ASN Bank, which is a Dutch ethical bank, and I'm the human rights expert within the bank. So, I'm making sure that all human rights within all our value chains are safeguarded.

**Manex** [00:03:01] So, Kirsten, please tell our listeners what you are asking the Commission for with your ECI.

**Kirsten** [00:03:07] Yes, what we are asking for is legislation on wages throughout the supply chains of garment companies. Workers that are making our clothes are treated very badly, and we have tried, civil society organisations have tried, many more have tried to get the garment companies to do it voluntarily, but that is not working, so I think we need legislation to really make a difference for those that are making our clothes. Somehow it is very abstract, the worker in the factory, and these workers are seen as, I don't know, a raw material, because it's so far away, people do not really think that it is actually people that are making the clothes, so it needs to come closer to mind, I think.

**Manex** [00:03:45] Kirsten, you mentioned wages, but what other example could you share with us? What exactly should companies be doing differently?

**Kirsten** [00:03:52] One example is that, when they cancel an order, they have to do it with a 30-day notice, because you saw, for example, that during COVID, orders that were already produced were cancelled by the garment companies, and those orders were not paid for, so factory owners had to fire people, the workers would not get salaries, so even then, the most vulnerable people took all of the risks. Another example is that they have to pay in time, so the factory owners have the money to pay their workers, they have to be very transparent about where their factories are, how many people are working in the factories, what the entry-level salaries are; it's a very elaborative proposal, but it makes very clear what is expected from garment companies.

**Manex** [00:04:35] So, how did the campaign start? Was it well received?

**Kirsten** [00:04:39] It started quite well, I think, especially when you consider that we started mid-summer, but yes, I think it was picked up by some fashion media. What you see now is that more and more people are supporting the campaign, organisations are joining as supporters. We still have a long way to go to get the one million signatures, but especially in the last few weeks, we have seen a significant rise in the amount of signatures, so I am very hopeful.

**Manex** [00:05:03] Kirsten, but here in the EU this has not been the easiest of times, economically speaking. So, do you think this will raise the prices of garments considerably?

**Kirsten** [00:05:14] To be honest, I think that if the workers would receive a decent pay and a living wage, the products we as consumers buy will not become much more expensive because it's only a very small proportion of the total cost of a garment piece. So, I think it does not have a huge effect on the price people are going to pay. Actually, I believe that a lot of profits are made, and the CEOs of those garment companies have very, very high salaries. So, somewhere these extra costs can be absorbed other than by letting the consumer pay. And yes, I think that goes two ways. I think people within Europe are struggling at the moment to make ends meet because of the inflation, so I would hope that feeling this struggle would also make them, I don't know, empathise more with the workers that are in even worse situations, and they are also affected by inflation because it is not only in Europe.

**Manex** [00:06:08] Kirsten, just so people are aware of this situation, what exactly are we talking about? Do you have any data on what these workers actually get?

**Kirsten** [00:06:17] There are different data. I think the most recent I read, which was really horrifying, is that from Shein I think the workers get four cents per garment piece; that is a very, very low amount. And of course, it varies by country, but it is very, very little money.

**Manex** [00:06:32] Kirsten, why did you decide to carry it to the European level? Would it not be more logical to pressure the brands on this? Do you, by chance, have any garment sector clients at the bank you work at, for instance?

**Kirsten** [00:06:45] I think we as a bank have been using our influence as investors for many years because there's a few fashion companies our investment part is investing in,

but that is only a very small proportion of all garment companies that are active in the European market. So, we need it at scale because if you have one fashion company that is very willing to make a difference, it might very well be that the factory they are sourcing from also supplies, I don't know, 10, 20 other companies, and if they don't do the same, then nothing will change for the factory workers, and I think Europe is the single largest market for garment companies; so it made a lot of sense to start at the European level, and I think it is very important that all these companies get a very clear signal that it's not only investors or civil society organisations, but it's also European citizens that care and are stepping up to change this situation.

**Manex** [00:07:44] Kirsten, but the brands are so engaged right now with the sustainability movement. Every brand is talking about this. Do you think they really are sustainable? It really doesn't seem so when we're talking about the sustainability of worker rights.

**Kirsten** [00:07:58] No, exactly. And it's, of course, under a lot of pressure that these companies are taking those initiatives from civil society, but also regulations getting stricter on the environment, for example. But what you see now is cherry picking. So, I will be a bit sustainable on this topic and a little less sustainable on that topic, but I still call myself sustainable. So, it's the overall system that needs to change. Those issues are also getting more attention, but I think they are all related; they are all a consequence of the current economic system of producing more, buying more, producing more and buying more: everything targeted as economic growth while not calculating what it will cost the environment or the human beings that are being affected. So, I think it's all part of the same problem. But yes, I think also that the human rights aspects could be more in the spotlight as well, especially also because, for example, climate change has very serious impacts, especially also for those people in the same countries we are talking about, where our clothes are produced.

**Manex** [00:08:59] And just to finish off, your initiative relates to manufacturing countries and regions. But I imagine these are also the European manufacturing countries and regions. So, do you expect a big signature boost from those specific regions?

**Kirsten** [00:09:16] Yes, absolutely, and that is true in some of the other European countries as well, because even in those European countries, people that are producing clothes are not getting a living wage so they can even probably relate better to those workers far away than maybe workers, for example, in our country that are already getting a living wage.

**Manex** [00:09:34] Kirsten, it is a very interesting ECI. I wish you the very best of luck and hope you will get the word out there and make people think about what they wear in a more economically sustainable way.

**Kirsten** [00:09:46] It was my pleasure, thank you!

**Manex** [00:09:53] Sport is not a typical topic in the ECI. It is a true pleasure to welcome Ronan Evain to CitizenCentral. Ronan, please tell us who you are and what you do.

**Ronan** [00:10:03] My name is Ronan. I have the pleasure to be the executive director of Football Supporters Europe since 2016. I am originally from and living in Brittany, in France. Our office is in Hamburg, in Germany, but we have staff in five or six countries, and we mostly work remotely from planes and from hotels and conference centres, and yes, I have the pleasure and the pain of supporting FC Nantes, the French club.

**Manex** [00:10:25] Could you explain to us what you do exactly at Football Fans EU?

**Ronan** [00:10:29] Predominantly our role is to bring together and represent the interests of football fans in Europe. The closest comparison is probably a trade union. We represent our members, we canvass their opinion, we bring their voice to institution, whether they are political, European institutions, football governing bodies, UEFA, FIFA... The topics we work on are pretty broad. We work on the defence of fundamental rights of football fans, which is often a challenge, obviously, due to the nature of the UEFA region, which goes from Iceland to Azerbaijan, but also sometimes in our democracy often football fans, as the group with less influence than others in the society, are targeted by old-fashioned policy approach. And our role is to try to improve things so that our fundamental rights are respected. And, yes, we work on anti-discrimination, we work on making European competition more fan-friendly. So, yes, it's a pretty broad range of topics.

**Manex** [00:11:23] Some of our listeners might think that activism and football do not really go hand in hand.

**Ronan** [00:11:29] The biggest achievements in the history of the European fan movement are always when we are able to fight or to push both in the stands and at the political level. Again, this is the analogy of a trade union. You have the demonstration, and you have the negotiation, and that's how things usually work best. We get the credibility and our mandate from the stands, so only when the stands express themselves clearly, then we can take things up to the public authorities or to the football governing bodies to try to make progress.

**Manex** [00:11:56] So, where does your ECI "Win It On The Pitch" come from? And what are you asking the Commission for?

**Ronan** [00:12:01] It starts from the general understanding of sport in general and football in particular as being more than a business, yes? We have all these people investing money in football that try to explain to us that it's a business, but it's not a business. It's not rational. Oh, it's a business maybe in parts, but it's based on people's emotion, attachment, identity and so on. The same way then that music or cinema or literature can be a business because you have companies that have something to sell. It's not just the business. That's when we started to think we need more protection. The crisis of the Super League, which could have led to a complete revamping, an explosion of the sports pyramid as we know it, with redistribution, with the possibility to go up and down the pyramid and so on; if this would have disappeared, that was it, that was the end of sport as we know it. That's when we saw we need to ask for more from the European Union. We need to ask for protection. In the end, that's what it is; the opposition to the Super League, the fight against some of football's worst owners, investors and so on, the protection to the club, making sure your club doesn't disappear, doesn't get bankrupt, and so on, it all shows that we need protection. We need protection for our competitions because that's the basis of the pyramid as it exists. We need protection for our clubs. It's not just a company that can disappear from one day to another. And then what comes together with all of this is our communities. It's all the local communities, the local ecosystem, the people who work for the club, the social environment of the club, that needs protection as well. And if we think that some of our national governments are failing to provide this protection, then we need to also look at the European Union and ask for more.

**Manex** [00:13:26] Ronan, most people know about the Super League. But where exactly did this crisis come from?

**Ronan** [00:13:30] Some clubs became too big. They got control of too much of the football economy, and then they gained too much influence in the governance of football at the domestic and European level. So, that explains why they started to see themselves as bigger than the sport as it exists. They didn't like the rules. They thought they could change the rules. And that shows already a fundamental flaw in the mindset of those people. That was the first factor. The second factor was the fact that they survive on an unsustainable economic model, and COVID just made it more obvious. They have a big turnover. There's a lot of cash coming in and out. The model is unsustainable, but we're talking about people that are incapable of looking outside of the current model. They just looked for a way to make this unsustainable business last a little longer. COVID showed how fragile those big football clubs are.

**Manex** [00:14:15] So, how do you think your ECI can solve this, Ronan? And why exactly did you choose the ECI for this campaign?

**Ronan** [00:14:21] Our ECI, like a lot of ECIs, asks for clarification. The European model of sports, the definition is not very clear. Depends on who you ask, in general. What we know for sure is that the European models wanted two things: one is regulation. There needs to be a regulator. And in football, this role is played by UEFA. And yes, sometimes fans, most of the times, are critical of football's governing bodies and regulatory body, but it's rarely to ask for less regulation. It's rather to ask the regulator to play its role in ensuring there is a proper supporting balance and that everybody plays by the rules, and it's not the rule of the strongest, but rather that everybody is put on the same level. So, we don't want less UEFA, we want more UEFA. More regulation. And the other thing is, at least in sports that have fans – organised fans – the European model of sport cannot be in the hands of the most powerful of the sport's governing bodies because we as fans are sustaining this financial model, we are at the basis of it, we're the ones paying for it. So, just like any other consumers in Europe, but also stakeholders, we should have our word in this. And our view is that it's the role of the European Union to not only speak to the regulators and be the ones that organise those competitions, but also take into consideration the views of the European citizens. And that's the thing. That's also the opportunity an ECI offers.

**Manex** [00:15:34] Ronan, how is the campaign going? Because we're talking of millions of fans, but bringing them over to sign a petition relating to policy must be so complicated.

**Ronan** [00:15:45] One of the biggest challenges is a difference of culture towards petition from one country to another. And obviously in countries where you have the right to petition to your parliament, it's easier because people are used to it. But in other countries, such as France, where this system doesn't exist, it's more challenging. If we want a long-term solution to the Super League, that's our chance to influence the course of things at the European level. And we don't often get that chance as European citizens in general and as football fans in particular. It's a bit of a one-time opportunity. Yes, it's certainly more work than we anticipated. And yes, it's a bit frustrating to see that if this would have been a national petition in a number of the countries, they would have reached the numbers, no problem. But because it's the European Union, people, I don't know, feel less engaged or maybe have the perception that there's less chance to change the course of things at the EU level. And we still have six months, so I think we can still make it work.

**Manex** [00:16:34] Ronan, thank you so much for joining us on CitizenCentral. I wish you the very best of luck with your ECI.

**Ronan** [00:16:39] Hopefully we will manage. Thanks.

**Manex** [00:16:47] Our global world would not be possible without technology. But our engagement with tech sometimes does not allow us to see the complications it brings to European citizens. Pernille Schriver, thanks for joining us on CitizenCentral, and please tell our listeners who you are, where you are from, and what your profession is.

**Pernille** [00:17:06] My name is Pernille Schriver, and I'm from Denmark. I'm educated as a biologist, and for the past 15 years I have been a science teacher, and I teach biology, geography, physics and chemistry from grade four until grade nine.

**Manex** [00:17:23] Oh, so you expose yourself on a daily basis to probably the most technologically addicted generation, right?

**Pernille** [00:17:31] Yes, and I am trying to show them that there is a world without mobile phones, and that that world is really great, so I am really trying to sell the idea that nature and science is a really neat and modern issue to work with.

**Manex** [00:17:49] Please explain what your ECI "Stop 5G" is about and what you're asking the Commission for.

**Pernille** [00:17:54] In the long debates with all the skilled people from all the different EU countries we talked about what the ECI should focus on, and we actually started out only with a focus on 5G in regard of the radiation part. And when I said "5G," it's not only on 5G but on all wireless technology devices, so it's also Wi-Fi, mobile phones, 2G, 3G and 4G, and so on. We found out that especially in Spain they were very concerned about the environmental side effects. They talked a lot about the mining consequences when we had to dig up resources and metals and minerals to produce all the devices that society wants to use for the sake of 5G development and Internet of Things, the energy consumption, the pollution from all the production, and so on. And then there was a part of the ECI group that would like to have the surveillance, the data collection, or leak things in as well. So, our ECI is actually based on three main topics: the radiation part, the environmental part, and the data collection and surveillance issue.

**Manex** [00:19:04] How was the beginning process of the initiative?

**Pernille** [00:19:06] In 2019, we saw a lot of protests and demonstrations around Europe. At that time, it was legal to go on the streets and demonstrate against 5G, and this German guy, he actually started out the ECI process, and he gathered a lot of countries so he asked for other people to help him. So, I said, OK, I'll chip in, and I'll try to help finish the writing process so we can submit the papers to the EU Commission. And that is where my ECI started. So, at that moment where I took over from the German guy, he had already a huge network. We managed to get eight or ten more countries. So, now we have contact persons in all the 27 EU countries.

**Manex** [00:19:53] Pernille, how are you putting the strategy together?

**Pernille** [00:19:56] From the beginning we have agreed that it's up to each country to have their own campaign, to focus on the issues that we know are more important for the

Spanish people than for the Danish people or for the German people. But we have, like, our logo and our banner and a lot of campaign material on our web page that all the different countries can download. They can write their own texts with the logo. We are open for people using the logo and the slogan in a different way, but we have the same ECI that we have to sign.

**Manex** [00:20:32] Pernille, technology is polarising. It always has detractors and supporters. So, what would you tell people that find 5G crucial to their work?

**Pernille** [00:20:42] Yes, well, I think that we should have a debate and discussion about the wireless technology because a lot of the wireless could be cabled. For instance, if you have a city with a lot of houses, the data should be in such and such quality. So, you have to have so much radiation or so much data sent from the antenna to the houses because all the data has to get through the walls – the brick walls or the wooden walls. So, you have to have a lot of radiation sent from the mast to the community for you to have a functional smartphone inside your house. So, what I used to say is that when you have this perspective, it's just like asking your house to be enlightened by the streetlamps. But you have the ability to send all this data in the cable, and that is actually going to be more fast, and it's going to be more cheap. And you don't have to use that much energy either. So, what I think we should start talking about is where do we actually have the benefit of using fast connections, and where can we cable them? Because a cable will be more efficient, it will be less energy consuming, and you have the opportunity to protect data as well more if it's cable, so it will be more secure as well.

**Manex** [00:22:03] You still have time to gather signatures, but do you think that the million signatures is achievable?

**Pernille** [00:22:09] Oh well, it seems like we have realised that we might not hit the million. It's difficult, but we are a growing number of people that are aware of this, and we are a growing number of organisations that are working together, and that is actually one of the positive things. Also with the ECI is that we are about to start an organisation of European organisations called “Europeans for Safe Connections.” So, I think that we can do a better job fighting this and educating our politicians and doctors if we work together.

**Manex** [00:22:43] Pernille, thanks for joining us on CitizenCentral.

**Pernille** [00:22:47] Thank you very much for the nice interview.

**Manex** [00:22:55] Well, 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, please do check our show notes. And 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 a brand new ECI, you can head over to the ECI Forum to learn more about how to get started. I am Manex Rekarte Cowie, and you've been listening to CitizenCentral.