# CitizenCentral CHAPTER 4 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 and 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. Technology is ever-present in our way of life, evolving at a very fast pace, and it's not easy for policy to keep up with this. And that's the case with biometric surveillance. The name of our next guest's ECI is 'Reclaim Your Face.' Ella, thank you so much for joining us on CitizenCentral. First, tell us more about yourself.

**Ella Jakubowska** [00:02:04] I'm Ella Jakubowska, and I work as a policy advisor at EDRi fighting for digital rights. I also help coordinate the 'Reclaim Your Face' campaign to ban biometric mass surveillance in Europe.

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:02:19] Can you tell us more about this technology and your ECI?

**Ella Jakubowska** [00:02:23] In public squares, parks, at protests and in lots of different forums where people rely on being able to attend, to participate, people are now actually being tracked, watched and analysed. Our ECI is calling for a stop in the use of facial recognition and other related technologies when used in ways that treat every person as a criminal suspect. We rely on the state to protect our rights to privacy, to being able to raise our voices and express ourselves. There are only small circumstances that can be intruded on, and that needs to always be proportionate, necessary and legal because you only have to look back in history to see what happens when governments have too much control. But there is a rise in biometric mass surveillance; we're all being controlled, often in ways that we're not even aware of. People are being judged for looking like they might be a shoplifter or like they're aggressive. That can have huge consequences for all of us so everyone is at risk when these technologies are being used constantly. But there are also certain groups in particular that are at increased risk, and this falls along the historical lines of discrimination and prejudice that we see in many areas of society. So, we very much see people of colour and migrants being especially targeted by these technologies. Also human rights defenders, sex workers, LGBT people, people with disabilities, our sexuality, our religious beliefs, our health status. We're meant to be able to be ourselves

without anyone putting limits on that. So, really, these practices pose an existential threat to our societies.

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:04:05] What type of legal measures are you proposing exactly to protect citizens and communities?

**Ella Jakubowska** [00:04:11] We want these practices, when they lead to or could lead to what we call the undue restriction of people's fundamental rights, to be prohibited. They don't even achieve what they claim to. No amount of time is going to make them any better. All that's going to happen is they're going to get more accurate, which in fact makes them even more able to target, follow and monitor people.

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:04:35] But all of these technologies are said to make Europe more secure. What's the counterargument here?

**Ella Jakubowska** [00:04:40] Sometimes, when we're having debates with industry, they say, 'You hate technology, you wouldn't let people unlock their phones with their face or their iris or their fingerprint,' but actually my background is in technology. I love some uses of technology when they are approached responsibly. It's not about not wanting technology or advancement. Actually, what we call for is not for things like biometric authentication on your phone to be banned, because that's very different to actually governments and private companies secretly recording you as you attend a demonstration. So, we're not stopping people from having that autonomy to unlock their phones. It's definitely not the same level of risk as being watched and captured all the time everywhere you go.

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:05:25] Well, technology as a whole is such a hot topic. Have you received many institutional reactions to your ECI?

**Ella Jakubowska** [00:05:31] We have seen some pretty cool developments. The European Commission has proposed something called the Artificial Intelligence Act, which is going to be, when it's adopted, the rulebook for how artificial intelligence is developed and used in the EU. Even a year ago you wouldn't have thought possible to have the beginnings of a ban in that law, but it's a start, and we've had people from the European Commission explicitly say that a lot of those prohibitions wouldn't be in the act if it weren't for the pressure of civil society. So, I think that the really big thumbs-up for our campaign, for the pressure that we've been exerting, is seeing political shifts as a result, even though you get all these extra benefits from having an ECI that you can demand legal change, you can demand new laws. That's definitely a lot more defined and rigorous than starting your own petition through a petition website because you have a quick idea and you think it's worthwhile. We so often talk about the EU as this homogeneous block, and I think some people believe this is the thing that imposes rules on us, and it's abstract when it's far away, and it has no connection to our daily lives. And so, I think the ECI is one way that people can see the connection between their daily lives and the EU.

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:06:44] Ella, what about the press reaction to your ECI? Has it grabbed any headlines or have any MEPs come to you or reacted to it?

**Ella Jakubowska** [00:06:51] Yes, we've had a really great response to it, actually. I think on the day that we launched we had maybe 30 big publications report on it. It's a topic of global relevance or interest. But then also within the EU we've been blown away by the

support that we've had from the European Parliament. I think the Parliament, in general, really gets why this is an important issue for our democracy.

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:07:16] Do we know who in the EU uses biometric surveillance and for what purpose?

**Ella Jakubowska** [00:07:20] Pretty much every EU Member State. Certain authorities have placed whole cities under biometric mass surveillance and other forms of data capture, often without people's knowledge that this is happening, and it's then being used to make judgements about them, including things like their life outcomes or their level of aggression. And we've seen it targeting things like people sitting on a wall because they're considered to be loitering. You hear that all of this is necessary for our security. But actually, if it's stopping a homeless person from being able to sleep somewhere, it seems to be about criminalising certain behaviours and persecuting certain groups of people. You would definitely think twice about attending a protest if you knew that you could be identified for being there, and we genuinely have hundreds of examples of it being done by both companies and local authorities or police forces. It's the antithesis of what we're supposed to have in the EU. A lot of the arguments and justifications that we hear are nothing more than myths if they are not the things that are going to give us freedoms in a democratic society.

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:08:22] OK, Ella, thank you so much for being with us and explaining why your ECI is so important to all of us.

**Ella Jakubowska** [00:08:28] Thank you for having me.

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:08:31] Let's now get an expert take on this ECI, and for that, we're off to Spain to meet Gemma Galdon Clavell, PhD, a historian and social science expert who, through her digital rights foundation, is a global pioneer at auditing algorithms and other technologies that are changing our world. Gemma, welcome to CitizenCentral. First, tell us a little bit more about yourself.

**Gemma Galdon Clavell, PhD** [00:08:55] Thank you for having me. I'm Gemma Galdon Clavell. I'm the director of the Eticas Foundation, whose mission is to protect people in technology processes. I'm a historian/social and political scientist by training. I started working on technology a long time ago, initially in security technologies – I was a police trainer for quite some time – and one of the things I realised when I started out is that we're doing a lot of things wrong. So, I felt that I could contribute something to making technology better through my knowledge not only of technology but also of social issues around technology.

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:09:30] What is your opinion on biometrics and on using them for security purposes?

**Gemma Galdon Clavell, PhD** [00:09:36] For some reason in the last few years, with the advancement of technology and our ability to use body traits as identifiers, we jumped to the conclusion that biometrics are a secure way to identify ourselves. You can fake an ID number, but you cannot fake your fingerprints or your iris. And that makes sense; but then it doesn't. We are turning passwords into these physical traits that we can never change. So, if the person was asking for a physical trait from our biometrics and then doesn't take good care of them, then our face gets stolen. We can't change our face to reclaim our security and our privacy. The whole world has become convinced that biometrics are the

most secure way of identifying someone, when actually we have no data on that. On the long list of dangers that come with using physical traits as identifiers, I think it's something that we need to discuss and talk about. So, I would say biometrics provide an identification method that can be useful in some very specific contexts, but using it to unlock phones and to cross borders like we're doing right now makes no sense.

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:10:47] Would you say that technology is neutral?

**Gemma Galdon Clavell, PhD** [00:10:49] No, it isn't. And that's a very long subject, but it's a fascinating one. I often use the example of archaeologists: when an archaeologist goes to an archaeological site, they unearth physical pieces used by a civilisation, and they rebuild the values of that civilisation through their tools. So, technology is never neutral because it emerges in a context. The tools that we use say something about us in the same way that finding how people were buried or the kind of knives they used in ancient times tell us a lot about their economy, their social relations. A lot of people say a knife is neutral because it can kill someone, but it can also free you from something. True, but knives only emerge when we need to cut meat, for example. So, they say something about our diet, about how we relate to nature. Technology is never neutral because it reflects all of those things. And I think that when archaeologists look back to our era and unearth our technological tools, they will find a very unequal society where the technologies used were always increasing the power of the powerful. In that sense, they can never be neutral because they always emerge in a context. The fact that they are not neutral doesn't mean they were bad; it just means that they're embedded with values, and we need to look at those values. We need to understand them and ensure that our technologies are not making undesirable things worse. And that's one of my greatest fears at the moment: that because we don't understand technology, because we don't have an educated debate around technology, we are just promoting technologies that go against some of the things that we care for, like inequality or climate change.

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:12:32] Do you think that we modify our behaviour when we're being watched?

**Gemma Galdon Clavell, PhD** [00:12:35] There's a long-standing debate on these issues and whether we actually change our behaviour when we are being watched. There are also people who say that we normalise the eye of the watcher. What is problematic is that many of those technologies are designed to change our behaviour. An important part of being free is being able to negotiate your identity and who you are, how you present yourself, also the ability to change and become someone different when you are 50 compared to when you were 30 or 15. I think that's a very important part of being human. If all our data are encoded and kept, if we cannot, as a society, forget who we were, then there's a fundamental change in how we inhabit ourselves.

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:13:21] Do you think that our tech craze is giving technology developers way too much freedom?

**Gemma Galdon Clavell, PhD** [00:13:26] It's not that the field is difficult to regulate, it's that the actors in the field do not want to be regulated.

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:13:31] Thank you so much for sharing your immense knowledge with us and for joining us here on CitizenCentral.

**Gemma Galdon Clavell, PhD** [00:13:37] Very happy to share my experience and expertise with you.

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:13:42] Now, as Ella mentioned, biometrics is a topic of huge interest to the international press. And for more on that, we're off to Italy now to meet Ludovica Jona, an investigative journalist who'll tell us what happened when she tested biometric border control when entering Europe.

**Ludovica Jona** [00:14:00] I have experience as a project leader in various cross-border investigations. One of these investigated the impact of biometric technologies on the management of European borders for security purposes. The new technologies consisted of an artificial intelligence system, which detects the movements of your face and eyes, immediately being able to identify if you are telling the truth or not. At that time it was being tested at the border between Hungary and Serbia. So, I went to the border and interacted with the border guard AI avatar. The avatar appeared as a female police officer and asked me to upload my documents. She asked me where I was from and where I was going. And I answered, honestly. At the end of the interview, I was given a QR code with a score. The day after, I presented this to the Hungarian border policeman, and, according to him, the score was 48 out of 100. I was considered a person that should undergo further checks. I was not really afraid because I knew it was a test. If I had been a migrant or a foreigner, I might have felt differently because the reason for this project is to identify dangerous people. According to the system, I had told the truth only three times and I had lied four times. The system made me think of how dangerous these technologies could be. As a journalist, I think this is a very interesting story. As a citizen, I'm very worried because it shows that more and more funding is going to security technologies but less funding is going to social activities.

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:16:31] Technology has a deep impact on our society, and there's a huge fear that robots will hit many professions hard and limit work opportunities all around the world. A key reason behind the next ECI is universal basic income. Catarina, welcome to CitizenCentral.

**Catarina Neves** [00:16:48] Thank you for having me today. My name is Catarina Neves and I'm a PhD student in Portugal. I've been working on basic income for the past two and a half years and have been working on the ECI for the past year and a half. I started my PhD two years ago. My advisor is the national coordinator for the ECI in Portugal, and so I started collaborating with the Portuguese Agenda for Basic Income. Our main goal is to have the European Commission make a proposal for unconditional basic income (UBI) throughout the EU.

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:17:20] And has it caused a big impact so far?

**Catarina Neves** [00:17:22] For most of the time that the pandemic was raging in Europe, in-person events were very difficult to organise in most countries. We now have 25 countries engaged in the ECI with national coordinators, and we've been able to get a lot of signatures.

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:17:38] Well, it sounds like quite a challenge. Do you think you have learnt a lot so far?

**Catarina Neves** [00:17:42] I've been learning a lot because I am a junior member. There are a lot of people who have been engaged in the UBI movement for quite a long time so

I'm learning a lot from them, every day. Portugal is in the tail of Europe; news reaches it very slowly. But I was not aware how people connect so strongly because of the ECI and the UBI.

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:18:03] What would the ECI look like exactly, if it was successful?

**Catarina Neves** [00:18:06] Different countries have very particular welfare state mechanisms. So, we have countries where a UBI of EUR 800 would be low, but we have other countries where a UBI of EUR 300 could be transformational. So, for example, what we would like to have is a strong debate in several countries of what a UBI is and what it could do to solve some of the challenges they are facing.

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:18:36] Well, Catarina, I imagine most politicians will be wondering how on earth this should be paid.

**Catarina Neves** [00:18:40] I'm always kind of sad when the first question they ask is, 'How should we pay for it?' From my experience talking with people, that's not the first question we should be asking. Is this fair? Should we have this implemented? Should we receive money if we are not working? Those questions would be so much more interesting. You might have wealth tax or inheritance tax implemented, or a progressive tax system and a UBI that's funded through there. We think people could and should work if they would like to, but labour activation should not be the end goal of the UBI.

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:19:11] And would this not turn people off actually setting their alarm clocks and going to work?

**Catarina Neves** [00:19:15] For example, if we had a UBI of EUR 1,000, I'll bet some people would stop working. What is important is to ask, 'Would we like as a society to have people working less or not?'

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:19:31] And how do you think it would impact economic growth if people had more? Would they spend more?

**Catarina Neves** [00:19:35] You give people money for them to spend. So, it's a stimulus policy, and for sure, you will get the economy moving. But it's also a supply side policy. And that's the thing we don't discuss as much because a UBI will probably also change your outlook on work and education. But this is all highly theoretical.

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:19:54] The agricultural sector is pretty subsidised in the European Union, but many people working in it have pretty low incomes. How do you think the UBI would work in their favour?

**Catarina Neves** [00:20:04] So, there's the idea that the UBI could potentially help people decide to work in agriculture on the one hand, and also to invest in more restorative practises instead of intense agriculture. I think that in certain countries it could help more than subsidies have in getting more people to rural areas instead of having them all cramped up in an urban context.

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:20:27] Do you not think that this UBI clashes with the principle of capitalism?

**Catarina Neves** [00:20:34] I can tell you my own perspective. The UBI is one of those topics that can attract people from all over the political spectrum. My take is that the UBI shakes the foundations of capitalism if it is granted at a sufficiently high level because it makes us say no to work. If you decommodify labour that way, you break one of the main foundations of capitalism. And I think that this would be very positive, especially now that we are moving towards a place where we should probably consume less, work less and be more mindful of our environment and of our personal relations. We have been remarkable at creating jobs that no one needed. Some horrible jobs that exist today either we'll have to stop them from existing or they'll have to be very well paid for us to do them. And for sure, this is connected to the future of work because if we are going to have fewer jobs available, then how can you force these types of obligations?

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:21:27] Ok, thank you so much, Catarina, for joining us here on CitizenCentral.

**Catarina Neves** [00:21:31] Thank you very much. Thank you for having me.

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:21:36] The future of work is an important topic for all of us so let's head to Brussels now to bring in Mihai Palimariciuc from the European Policy Centre. Mihai, welcome to CitizenCentral. Tell us about yourself and your work.

**Mihai Palimariciuc** [00:21:51] I am a policy analyst at the European Policy Centre. I work with the Social Europe and Well-Being Programme, where we look at all things Europe that have to do with social. My particular area of expertise is the future of work, labour markets, the impacts of digital on the labour markets and so on.

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:22:12] So, we are speaking to the right person about this.

**Mihai Palimariciuc** [00:22:15] Hopefully I am!

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:22:16] Globalisation and the digital age will probably destroy many existing jobs, and there's a movement all around the world for a four-day working week. Why do you think we don't have a UBI scheme in the EU?

**Mihai Palimariciuc** [00:22:27] Some countries do have programmes that have a kind of globalisation transition mechanism where if you lose your job due to automation, you receive benefits and you can use them to train and so on. So, in short, why don't we have a universal basic income? It is because it's very expensive. Therefore, I think that any welfare problem is a distribution problem that we are trying to solve. We have limited resources, and to create an impact, at some point we have to pick and choose our battles. So, I think that it is important to fight the displacement effect of technologies. And I do believe that we need to fund a lot of training schemes, and we need to really pick up the industries that are suffering the most because of these transformations. But the problem with the UBI is that it doesn't only target that, it also spreads resources thin to the people that might not really need them.

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:23:28] Well, in this respect, age is a big player, right? The future looks very technological. So, is that future also going to welcome mature members of the workforce or will they be excluded?

**Mihai Palimariciuc** [00:23:39] A big part of the problem has to do with what kind of policy mix you need to have for people who are already working, who have a big wealth of

experience, but it might become redundant or cease to be as important. So, how do you transition them to other jobs? I'm afraid there is no easy solution. The blatant truth is that some people will not be able to transition in the highly intensive knowledge economy, but even then, we should support them. And I think that we need to help people retrain and reskill. But there are some people who are close to retirement that can't retrain. The government should step in, subsidise those jobs or perhaps create a public guarantee because what's important is to maintain the social fabric at the end and maintain good lives. Young people are more flexible, and they have the advantage of having so much time ahead of them; they can stop and pick up a new skill, and, in some time, they'll be experts in it. This isn't true for older people. And that's fine. We should see it from both aspects: training new people, reskilling, upskilling, but also helping older people maintain their integrity.

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:24:54] Do you think digitalisation creates geographical differences? Would a UBI be more logical in some areas than in others?

**Mihai Palimariciuc** [00:25:01] One of the big issues with the future of work and the impact of technologies is inequalities. So, one thing that digitalisation can do is increase inequality between high-skilled professions and low-skilled professions, and sometimes you do need different policy responses to combat this. I believe that people who are in the low-skilled jobs, for example, need more help training because they are not encouraged and they don't have the same incentives in some parts of the developing world. I actually think the UBI is a great idea. Sometimes it's all about distribution of welfare and resources, and helping people. But we have infrastructure to distribute those resources and we have, let's say, more efficiency. Even though as Europeans we would really like to point out every time that the government doesn't do a good job and so on, in some other countries and in some other contexts where that institution is fragile the UBI is actually quite efficient and fast. It can enable people to have a good life and to use more time to upskill. The UBI is sometimes popular, but at the same time, I'm a bit wary of chasing too many trends in politics. I think that it's important to increase trust in the public sector and in the government, but that should be done by choosing good policies that have a great impact. Rather than chasing trends, I would rather focus on how you can create new jobs that are enticing for people because people do want to work; I think that what has been shown from all of these experiments is that at the end of the day, people do want to take up one job or another.

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:26:43] OK, Mihai, thank you so much for joining us here on CitizenCentral.

**Mihai Palimariciuc** [00:26:47] Thank you very much for inviting me.

**Méabh Mc Mahon** [00:26:52] 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 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 a brand new 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.