



Taking the European Union forward: The next 50 years

Chat activity

Guest: [Margot Wallström](#), Vice President, Institutional Relations and Communication Strategy, European Commission

Language: English

Age group: 12-19

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Time: 14.00 CET

Participating schools

Belgium, Institut de la Providence, Anderlecht
Bulgaria, Secondary school "Nikola Ionkov Vapcarov"
France, Lycée d'Ingré
Greece, Platon Schools, Katerini
Hungary, Batthyány Lajos Gimnazium, Nagykanizsa
Ireland, De La Salle College, Dundalk
Italy, Scuola Media statale "G. Caloprese", Scalea
Latvia, Engure Secondary school
Poland, Gimnazjum nr 6
Poland, ZSO 5, Gdańsk
Romania, Colegiul Economic Buzau
Romania, Colegiul National "Stefan cel Mare"
Romania, ION CREANGA School, Bacau
Romania, School nr. 1 "Nicolae Simonide", Pitesti
Spain, Ies Alonso Berrguete, Palencia
Spain, IES Fuente Juncal, Aljaraque
Spain, La Farga School, Sant Cugat del Vallès (Barcelona)
Turkey, HEV Okullari - Kemerkooy Schools, Istanbul

Chat transcript

PDumitru: Good afternoon everyone and thank you for joining us today! Our guests, Mrs. Wallström and her team arrived. Let's start! As you know the chat session is in three parts. The participating schools are invited to type their questions according to the schedule we agreed before.

Wallström1: Hello everybody - very nice to have you all here! I want to hear your thoughts about Europe. Let's start the discussion!

Bulgaria: Hello, Commissioner Wallström! We say hello from Bulgaria to everybody in the chatroom today. This is our first year as EU members. Commissioner Wallström, you said in one of your speeches that EU communication must be a two way street. How we can be sure that we are heard in EU?

Wallström1: Bulgaria, hello and welcome to the chat and to the EU! We have to go local! We don't know everything here in Brussels - you know much more about Bulgaria in Bulgaria, right? And we have to engage the citizens much more: in consultations, debates, and dialogues.

Spain2: I'm Carlos from Spain. It would be possible to arrive to a total political union or at least looking for the same interests in due course?

PDumitru: Spain, reword your question please. It is not very clear.

Greece: Good afternoon to you! What do you want to achieve in the next 50 years?

Wallström4: Hello, Greece! There are many things I want the EU to focus on in the next 50 years. We are facing a range of challenges that we have to deal with, such as climate change, globalisation and an ageing population. We need to pool our resources to face these challenges. We need a "smart" growth, where economic growth is combined with environmental and social actions. I want to make the EU more democratic, where the politicians communicate better on EU actions and the citizens can make their voice heard.

Spain2: I'm Carlos from Spain. My question is: It would be possible to arrive to a total political union or at least looking for the same interests in due course?

Wallström1: Spain2, hello Carlos! We already now have a political Union. But we are in the hands of the Member States and the citizens: do you want more of a political Union or not?

Poland2: Hello Mrs. Wallström! Will the countries be divided into older and new members?

Wallström2: Poland, the way I see it the EU is a union which means that we are united.

Bulgaria: Commissioner Wallström, we are informed about the Lisbon strategy for development of education. How can the EU help for the realisation of this Lisbon strategy in Bulgaria, as a new member of EU in the next 50 years?

Wallström1: Bulgaria, education is vital! The Lisbon strategy (for growth and jobs) applies equally for all Member States, so Bulgaria should have its fair share of successes as well. We have to give everyone better opportunities for good jobs, and it has to start with education!

Romania2: Greetings from "Stefan cel Mare" National High-School Suceava, Romania! Some Romanians think that our national values will be wiped out as we are part of the European Union. What do you think about this? Does the European Union want to create common values and erase the old ones that belong to each country?

Wallström2: Romania2, the fantastic thing about being a part of a union with so many different countries are all the different cultures and backgrounds coming together working for the same objectives.

Poland2: Do the Union want to unite all of the European countries?

Wallström1: Poland2, the EU has already managed to unite 27 countries in less than 50 years. That's quite impressive, isn't it? It has to be the countries themselves who decide if they want to become members. And each country will have to meet the same criteria for accession.

Romania2: Would you take into consideration a common education system for all the Member States?

Wallström2: Romania2, the basic idea is that each country is responsible for its own system.

Bulgaria: And now it's turn for our environmental question. As you know Bulgaria is a very beautiful country, but the overbuilding and pollution in our seaside and mountain resorts can lead to an ecological

disaster. Can the EU make some prohibitions in Bulgaria against destroying the environment which can be a step to a cleaner Europe?

Wallström4: Bulgaria, if actions in a Member State are in breach with EU legislation on environmental protection and biological diversity, then the EU can act. Otherwise, it's a national concern.

Ireland: Hello Mrs. Wallström! Will the EU remove tariffs put in place on underdeveloped countries in Europe in the future?

Wallström1: Ireland, we have to improve the conditions for the developing countries! The EU has already very ambitious programmes in place, but we need to do more. When it comes to international trade and questions like tariffs, we also have to follow the rules set up by the WTO. But I agree with you broadly: we have to do more.

Poland2: What are the chances of accepting the European Constitution?

Wallström2: Poland 2, I think that everyone working within the EU is keen on a solution for the future management of the union.

Bulgaria: Commissioner Wallström, as you know, Bulgaria is facing the first elections for EU Parliament. What features must possess the EU politicians in the next 50 years, because they will shape the European future?

Wallström1: Bulgaria, I think all politicians have to be very open-minded. They have to realise that we face so many new challenges. So they will have to be a little bit able to look into the future too. And politicians should always be humble and ready to listen!

Greece: How does the Commission hope to improve decision-making in the area of freedom, security and justice?
Wallström2: Greece, it is true that some believe the JLS (justice, liberté et sécurité) area is moving slow because of the unanimity in decision making. We'll see what can be done within in the near future.

Romania2: What are your future priorities, regarding the environmental issues?

Wallström4: Romania2, we need to tackle the problem of climate change and create more sustainable development policies. I believe the EU should focus on "smart" growth, where economic growth is combined and based on environmentally sound actions, e.g. investments in renewable energy.

Romania2: Thank you, and now our next question: regarding your future projects, will any of them need Romania's help?

Wallström2: Romania2, The Commission is always grateful for support from all Member States.

Spain2: Hello, I'm Javi V-Q from Spain. My question is: Could it be possible, in a near future, a total union of Europe? Europe working as one state with different nations and cultures?

Wallström1: Spain2, it's important to recognise not only what we have in common, but also what differences we have. I think that is the really strong point in the EU. Did you know we even have a motto for that? Is it "United in diversity". Rather telling, isn't it?

Ireland: Is there any plans for the future to make people more aware of the activities done by the EU? In Ireland we (young people) are not very aware about events and plans the EU are undertaking.

Wallström2: Ireland, I'm so glad you asked that. I and my team are constantly working on the question on how to involve young people more in the debate about the future EU.

Poland2: Will there be any chances to lower the age of voting?

Wallström4: Poland2, this is a question for the Member States to decide for themselves.

Spain2: I'm Alex, from Barcelona. Why is so important the paper of Angela Merkel related to the EU Constitution?

Wallström1: Spain2: Merkel's paper is very important because it has paved the way for new discussions on the future institutional set up. We need a new Treaty and we need the preparations Merkel has done.

Bulgaria: And our last question is connected to discrimination. We are Bulgarians and we feel discriminated, because the Roma, Turkish and Armenian minorities in Bulgaria got more rights from EU. Do you think that the rights must be equal for all nationalities in the country?

Wallström4: Bulgaria, yes, there should be no discrimination based on nationality, sex, religion, gender, etc.

Greece: Why is the EU is not more popular?

Wallström1: Greece, two reasons I think: we have not been particularly good at communication (and we have perhaps been communicating the wrong things), and then we have "the blame game": if anything goes wrong someone can always blame the EU - and the EU can blame the Member States. We should end that practice.

Spain2: Will the EU constitution respect minorities and accept non-state languages as official or nations without state?

Wallström2: Spain 2, We will have to wait a few more months to see how the Treaty revision will work out, but it is up to each Member State to decide on how to handle their minorities.

Poland2: Are there any consequences for the Union due to Tony Blair's resignation?

Wallström1: Poland2, we have to wait and see what Blair's successor will do!

Ireland: How is the EU preparing for the increase in population with the addition of many new countries and nationalities?

Wallström4: Ireland, actually, in the future the EU might risk a labour shortage due to lower birth rates and a more ageing population. So, an increasing population in the EU is not a problem as such. However, on our common labour market we need more mobility so that unemployed workers in an EU country with no labour shortage can easily move to an EU country with labour shortage.

Romania2: Could you tell us a bit about one of your most important projects?

Wallström2: Romania 2, right now I'm working on the follow-up to the White paper on a European Communication Policy, how to involve citizens better in the EU debate, like we're doing right now!

Bulgaria: You've already said in Plan D- where D stands for democracy, dialogue and debate. Do you think that democracy starts at school or only adults can "learn" it?

Wallström1: Bulgaria, democracy should start already before school! It is something everyone should know, because everyone should live with it! So those who say it's only for grown ups are very wrong!

Turkey: Some EU politicians keep saying that Turkey is going to have a privileged partnership. What does that exactly mean?

Wallström4: Turkey, that means that Turkey would not be a full member of the EU, but have agreements with the Union on e.g. trade and free movement. Personally, I would like Turkey to join the EU when it's ready - as a full member. That's what both Turkey and the EU should strive for.

Spain2: I'm Miguel, from Barcelona. IF the EU keeps growing as it has done these past years, it will be such a powerful country like the USA, then the 3rd world countries will be even poorer, what has the EU thought to do to avoid this?

Wallström2: Spain 2, one of the current Commission's objectives is to improve relations with the third world, through partnerships and help with infrastructure, education etc.

Greece: One more question: The modern world presents us with new challenges such as climate change and the need for security. What does EU do for that?

Wallström1: Greece, the EU does a lot! Energy policy and energy security, regulations on emissions from cars, ways to help developing countries with sustainable development. I could write a very, very long list!

Hungary: Good afternoon Commissioner Wallström! Here goes our first question: When you personally meet young people all over Europe, do you find it hard to communicate with them on European issues? What is your personal experience?

Wallström1: Hungary, I'll tell you a small secret: I often find it easier to communicate with young people than with older statesmen! And it is very interesting too - I have a lot to learn from you!

Hungary: Thank you for the answer. Here goes our next question. How do you think the communication between the European Union's institutions and its young citizens can be strengthened?

Wallstrom4: Hungary, we need to listen more to what young people have to say. We have different tools for this, like debate fora on the EUROPA website and EU funded projects under the YOUTH Programme. The institutions also need to communicate better, with better and easier language and make sure the information reaches the public.

Turkey: Mr Sarkozy reasons for not accepting Turkey lie in its geography, we don't understand this since the EU has borders with Brazil and Suriname. How do you interpret this?

Wallström1: Turkey, that is Sarkozy's view. I have discussed this issue many times and it is clear that I and Sarkozy do not share the same views.

Romania3: What happens when a country doesn't accept a condition imposed by EU?

PDumitru: Romania, what is a "condition" is that a regulation, a law, a directive?

Turkey: Does free movement mean visa free travel for people between Turkey and the EU?

Wallström2: Turkey, the goal for every Member State is to be able to travel without a visa.

Hungary: Is there a European website (something like the BBC iCan, or TakingITGlobal.org) that is designed exclusively to help young people across the EU to take action on issues that matter to them? That is to say, an online community that connects European youth to find inspiration, access information on up-to-date crucial issues, get involved, and take action in their local communities and which provides ways for them to make a difference? If there isn't, then we strongly recommend setting up one since we believe that would be a must for ensuring a better EU in the next 50 years.

Wallström1: Hungary, I have to admit I don't know exactly where to find all that information. I wish there was such a site. It would be very useful. But have you looked at the European Youth Portal? I know they have a lot of very valuable information.

Romania3: How do you see Romania in ten years?

Wallström1: Romania3, take a look at where Spain is now compared with where it was at the time of accession - incredible and stunning development. That is where Romania will be as well!

Hungary: Thank you. Could you please give us an outstanding communication example from the Commission's side, one that you think really made a difference?

Wallström1: Hungary, Plan D is a very good example! All the debates we have had, and all the meetings. And it has given all European decision makers a lot to think about, a lot of very good views from ordinary citizens.

Romania3: Do you think we are going to have a united Europe in 50 years, still?

Turkey: Turkey hasn't been accepted into the EU yet. Are one of the reasons Turkey being a Muslim Country?

Wallström3: Turkey, no, it has nothing to do with religion. Any country that wishes to join the EU needs to comply with certain criteria (which are the same for all applicants) and they pertain to issues relating to economy, administrative capacities, human rights etcetera. But religion is not one of the criteria.

Hungary: Do you think the EU should be more engaged in world affairs?

Wallström4: Hungary, I think it's important that the EU "speaks with one voice" in its foreign relations. The EU has a lot to contribute with on a global scale. We are the World's biggest provider of foreign aid and we are involved in a range of humanitarian aid, civil and crisis prevention actions around the World. This is a development I would like to see more of - to promote peace and prosperity in the whole World.

Ireland: Do you think that the EU will expand further into the east towards Russia and take in more of the old soviet countries?

Wallstrom1: Ireland, it all depends on what those countries want themselves and what kind of development they have.

Turkey: Mrs. Wallström, what is your biggest ambition with your job?

Wallström2: Turkey, to have a more democratic Europe which is communicating in a better way and listening better to the citizens.

Spain2: I'm Marti from Catalonia. Do you agree that some EU members (like Spain) have nations in it, I mean, do you think that every nation in Europe should have the possibility to be an independent member of the UE?

Wallström1: Spain2, that is entirely up to the Member States themselves. The EU does not take a stand on devolution questions.

Romania3: Do you think that Serbia could be a future candidate?

Wallström2: Romania, Serbia could very well be a future member, as long as they live up to all the criteria that every Member State in the EU has to comply with.

Turkey: Can Turkish be an official language of the EU since it is official on Cyprus (Also spoken in Bulgaria, Greece and many other countries)?

Turkey: Do language barriers between countries make your job harder?

Wallström1: Turkey, barriers always makes things more difficult. It's of course much easier if everybody speaks the same language.

Turkey: How big do you think the EU will be in 2957?

Wallström1: Turkey, do you mean 2957? It's quite long way to go... I don't have that crystal ball, I'm afraid. But the way climate change is going, I think it's safe to say it'll be quite warm!

Spain2: Is the state the unique way to build Europe?

Wallström1: Spain2, the Member States are the natural fundament of the EU - they are the Members! And that is the way the EU is constructed today. But I think we have to listen much more - and interact much more - directly with citizens.

Romania3: Do you think that in the future English could be the official language of EU?

Wallström2: Romania3, English is one of the three working languages of the Commission (along with French and German). It is possible that it will be the only working language of the Commission in the future but I do not think it will ever be the only official language of the EU (which currently has 23 official languages)

Italy: Good afternoon Mrs Wallström, here is our first question: Why are you taking part in this "Spring Day Chat" and what do you think about our participating to this chat?

Latvia: We are glad to have this opportunity to meet you, Mrs Wallström. At the conference devoted to the 50th anniversary of EU in Riga, Latvia, a representative of Latvian youth said the following: "Many people debate on the future of Europe and forward different ideas. In fact, the answer is quite simple: The future of Europe – it is us, the young people at school today. The future depends on what we will do and how we will act. Latvian young people are ready to continue the story of success of the previous 50 years". What qualities do you consider most vital for the people of future Europe?

Wallström1: Latvia, be open and dare to be different, but never forget to be humble as well!

Turkey: Which languages do you think all schools should teach in the EU?

Ireland: What measures are planned for the future to protect each country's individual cultural identities?

Wallström3: Ireland, first of all, the EU does not want to meddle with each country's national identity. I could not envisage the EU from above instigating measures as such to try to influence national cultural identity - it is something which springs from citizens.

Turkey: Our time is up thank you very much for your answers. Now we are going to debate amongst ourselves!

Romania1: Greetings from "Ion Creanga" School, in Bacau, Romania! Some Romanians think that our national language will not be used anymore. Our first question: What do you think about this?

Wallström2: Romania1, Romanian is an official language of the EU.

Romania1: Thank you for the answer. Here goes our next question. What kind of means of communication will we use to talk with our neighbouring countries?

Wallström4: Romania1, by diplomatic contacts, by meeting representatives from governments, national parliaments, NGO's, the civil society, etc. It's important we keep an open and constructive dialogue where we can share our concerns and common views for future cooperation.

Latvia: What communication problems are actual in Europe now?

Ireland: Who do you think will win the Eurovision song contest this year and do you think that this type of competition will still continue in 50 years time?

Wallström1: Ireland, with your track record it will probably be you winning again and again and again.

Latvia: Quality of life depends on education. For many young people higher education is difficult to achieve because of high study fees. Is it possible that in the future higher education will be free of charge?
Wallström1: Latvia, I think education should be accessible to all - and good quality too!

Belgium1: What did you think about Europe when you were a teenager?

Wallström1: Belgium1, Europe was very different then - it was divided. So Europe for me was much of a dream of a better future. I'm happy a lot of that dream has come true.

Spain2: I'm Francesc, from Barcelona. Is there any chance that the immigration we receive from the foreign countries could be distributed equally to all the states from the EU?

Wallström1: Spain2, I think all Member States should act equally and responsibly. Some countries take on more immigrants simply because of their geographical situation, and there is not much we can do about that. But better and more equal responsibilities throughout the whole of the EU is to my mind the way to go forward. But the most important thing is of course to act so that there don't have to be any refugees. Our responsibilities extend to the poor countries where the refugees come from, don't forget that!

Spain1: Hello from Spain, we're 7 students. What is the role of China in its trade with the EU? How can Europe fight and survive?

Wallström2: Spain1, China is a key partner for the future and we should put pressure on them to have good trade and environment situation.

Romania1: How does the Commission hope to improve decision-making in the area of environment?

Wallström3: Romania, we just need to keep on making proposals that aim at sustainability and progress. And we need to get across that for the EU to be at the forefront of technology means getting a competitive edge towards the rest of the world - which is why high environmental standards do NOT mean necessarily a cost to society, but a gain in the long run.

Spain1: Here in Spain, a mortgage is a heavy burden, what can your policy do for that?

Wallström4: Spain1, I understand your concern, but it is not a question for the EU. It's a national issue.

Latvia: Standard of living in different EU countries varies. To earn more many Latvian people and even whole families leave this country in search of bigger wages and living conditions. We think it is a loss for the country. Do you think that - in the next 20 years - the standard of living will level in all EU countries?

Wallström4: Latvia, you are right. I believe that's one of the reasons that the European countries are working together - to fight inequalities, social exclusion, unemployment, poverty etc in all Member States. I really hope that in 20 years, EU policies - based on solidarity - will have resulted in less inequalities and a better living standards for all Europeans.

Italy: What can we do as Europeans to have the human rights respected inside and outside Europe?

Wallström2: Italy, first of all we have to make sure to live up to these values ourselves. But the EU may also include clauses about the respect of human rights etcetera when we set up agreements, i.e. trade with third countries.

Spain1: Which will be the most demanded jobs in the EU?

Wallström3: Spain1, very difficult to say of course, I can only guess....I think we will need engineers and technicians in the new economy, but also people in elderly care since Europeans are getting older.

Latvia: We would like to know if you have been in Latvia and Riga.

Wallström1: Latvia: Yes I have - twice in the last year actually! Lovely city! And I went to Skangale as well.

Spain1: How can Mediterranean countries follow the steps of the northern countries regarding nature? Should nuclear power be considered as a possibility?

Italy: Will the results of the seminars carried out during the celebrations of 50th Anniversary of the Treaty of Rome and the "Declaration of Berlin" help constructing the next 50 years of Europe?

Wallström3: Italy, absolutely, for example the conclusions of the Youth summit in Rome will need to feed into our thinking.

Belgium1: About your book you wrote. It's difficult to motivate all teachers in Belgium to involve their classes on Europe and its contemporary subjects. What can we do?

Wallström1: Belgium1, I think we should give all teacher better possibilities to teach about Europe. In some places there is no school education about Europe. I think that's wrong. So we should give schools better possibilities and - naturally - the teachers.

Turkey: Sizi seviyoruz! Hoşçakalın! Sorry, this means 'We love you, stay pleasant'. It means good bye in Turkish.

Spain1: Will the salaries be updated to prices all around Europe?

Wallström3: Spain1, well, salaries are normally raised as growth and productivity rises. In many countries it is done through the negotiations between trade unions and employers.

Romania1: How can you take the children's concerns into account?

Wallström4: Romania1, we should always take children's concerns into account whatever we do, on parental, local, national and European level. Political actions regarding children is though something for the Member States and not the EU, but the Union is working for more jobs and growth which will lead to more prosperity and less poverty for all, including children.

Belgium1: Could the European Commission take part in the big fight against climate change with an European treaty?

Wallström2: Belgium 1, in the new treaty I want to have a section dealing with climate change and environmental issues.

Italy: Thank you for answering our 2nd question. Our first question was: why are you taking part in this "Spring Day Chat" and what do you think about our participating to this chat?

Wallström1: Italy: This is one of the best days of the year - how could I miss it?! I like your participation and that of all other schools. Thank you!

Italy: Why, in your opinion, did France and the Netherlands reject the Constitutional Treaty? Isn't it a problem for the political future of Europe?

Wallström1: Italy, it is a problem, but it is one we can solve, I'm convinced of that. But we have to respect the no in France and the no in the Netherlands. We can not come back with the same proposal once again. That is why we are now trying to find a new consensus on how to go forward.

Spain1: Will the education be a successful bilingual system somehow?

Wallström2: Spain1, it is up to each Member State to decide on their educational systems, it is not a common European policy.

Italy: According to you, will the number of people who migrate for economical reasons from the South to the North or from the East to the West of Europe increase or decrease in the next 50 years?

Wallström3: Italy, I have a feeling that migratory flows will increase, if not for economic reasons but for environmental reasons. It is a key challenge for the future.

Spain1: Our last question: Which steps should the EU take to deal with African immigration?

Wallström2: Spain1, we should try to help Africa to improve its situation so that people have better prospects there as well.

Belgium1: As ex-commissioner of environment, what do you think about informing the consumer about the means of transport that are used to import certain products in the EU, like boat or plane?

Romania1: In what extent the freedom of the media is respected?

Wallström1: Thank you everyone for this chat. I'm impressed by all the questions and all the knowledge out there! Sorry for not having had the time to reply to all your questions. There were so many. I hope we can do this sometime again. Now I hope you will all have a lovely weekend! Bye!

PDumitru: A big thank you to our guests for answering your questions today. We wish you all the best from Brussels!

Hungary: Goodbye everyone. Thank you once again.

PDumitru: We thank you and see you next time!

Romania1: Thank you very much for this great chat event! It was really exciting!

Wallström3: Hungary, thank you, it has been good chatting with you!

Belgium1: Thank you very much! Tack så mycket!

Italy: Thank you Mrs Wallström. The experience was great and we really feel Europeans today: United in diversity! Thank you Mr Dumitru. Good bye to all our European schoolmates!

Wallström3: Romania1, la revedere!

Wallström4: Belgium1, Thank you, merci, dank U, tack!

Spain1: It has been a good example of communication, but we think a better Europe needs lots of work. Hopefully, we'll collaborate in the future for a better Europe.

Hungary: Thank you very much for this great chat event! It was really enlightening.

Romania1: Thank you to all. La revedere!

Wallström3: To all - can someone send me some nice weather...? ;-D

Spain1: Hasta la vista a todos!

PDumitru: All the best!

Romania2: Goodbye! La revedere!

Bulgaria: Thank you Mrs. Wallström. And whenever you come to Bulgaria, please visit us in Pleven. You will be impressed! Good bye and have a nice weekend!

Romania1: Thank you Mrs Wallström. We hope to meet you again. Goodbye!

Latvia: Good bye to everybody! And thanks a lot to everyone who organised this chat!

Latvia: As we all celebrate Mother's Day on Sunday we are sending you a lot of sunny and warm greetings! Enjoy yourself and have a nice time!