



Spring Day in Europe 2005

*Enlarging the European Union: past
and future*

Chat Transcript

This chat took place on the Spring Day in Europe Web site, on 17 February 2005. Spring Day in Europe is a project in which schools learn about European Union developments and incorporate them into the curriculum. Read more on our Web site: <http://futurum2005.eun.org>

Guest: Alain Servantie

Head of Unit "Information & Communication", Directorate B Candidate Countries, Enlargement Directorate General, European Commission
Language: English

Participating Schools:

Croatia, Primary school 'Josipovac'
Greece, Moraitis School
Poland, Gimnazjum nr 3
Portugal, Escola Secundária De Figueiró Dos Vinhos
Portugal, Escola Secundária Francisco Simões
Romania, Eforie Nord School
Romania, Scoala Generala Nr 7 Brasov
Slovakia, Secondary Chemical School
Slovenia, Gorje Primary School
Slovenia, Valentina Vodnika School, Ljubljana
Spain, La Farga School, Barcelona
Turkey, Istanbul International Community School

PetruDumitru: Hello and warmest greetings from Brussels! Our guest, Mr Alain Servantie is ready to answer your questions. Let's start, please.

Servantie: Hello from Brussels, I am delighted to be with all of you.



Mr Alain Servantie, answering schools' questions

Slovenia2: What do you think about Europe?

Servantie: It is a long question; answers to other questions will show what I think.

Portugal 1: Why is the UE extending to include new countries?

Servantie: Enlargement takes place in all European countries wishing to join the Union and sharing the same values, which means inter alia humans rights, no racism, abolition of death penalty, respect of minorities, etc.

Turkey1: Mr. Servantie, what do you think about racism influencing attitude towards Turkey's accession into the E.U.

Servantie: Attitudes towards Turkey are probably mainly due to lack of knowledge in both directions. We have to work to explain Europeans the real changes happening in Turkey.

Poland1: Mr. Servantie, the EU has undergone five successive enlargements, with 25 Member states so far. What are the main political and economic benefits of it?

Servantie: The main benefits are in first hand peace in Europe, common faster economic growth.

Croatia1: Hello from Croatia. We should start negotiations on March 17th. Will it really happen? Or the problems with the Haag will stop them?

Servantie: As you know negotiations may start only if the issues on human rights are solved (and in the case of Croatia, particularly relations with the Hague ICTY).

Slovenia4: How does EU help to victims of tsunami in South East Asia?

Servantie: The EU has committed 450 millions € to help the victims of tsunami and rebuild the countries; several Member States are also individually contributing. (see <http://europa.eu.int/comm/world/tsunami/>)

Turkey1: Mr. Servantie, what do you think about racism influencing attitude towards Turkey's accession into the E.U? I am an Armenian from Istanbul and waiting for your answer.

Servantie: The Armenian issue has to be discussed between Armenians and Turks, to agree on a common sense of historical facts.

Portugal3: Will the enlargement make security a bigger problem?

Servantie: Enlargement is increasing prospects of peace for the whole of Europe; since the Berlin wall fell, nobody feels there is anymore a direct threat to Europe. Problems lay more in terrorism coming from outside, which may result from differences in economic development and respect of democratic values.

Portugal 1: Mr. Servantie, what other countries can apply for membership? How far can the EU expand? What should be its future geographical limits?

Servantie: the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has applied, and the Commission will give an opinion later to say whether negotiations may start. Ukraine is interested in applying also. All European countries have the right to apply.

Spain01: Hello, I am Jaime from Spain and it's great to participate in this chat. Firstly I'd like to ask some questions. My first one is to talk about the next admission of Bulgaria and Romania. Do you know the date for this new enlargement?

Servantie: Bulgaria and Romania should sign their accession treaty on 25 April 2005 in Luxembourg and accede on 1 January 2007.

Romania3: How will the integration of Romania into the EU affect the school system?

Servantie: Individual member states are free of their own teaching system; however the recognition of diplomas implies a progressive harmonisation of university teaching systems.

Servantie: For FYROM, see my answer to Portugal. Serbia and Albania are in a "pre-accession" process, and should make political and economic reforms before negotiations may be envisaged. The ultimate goal endorsed in Thessalonica is their accession to the EU.

Croatia2: Why is it that everybody wants to join the union, but when we get the chance, the enthusiasm among people goes down?

Servantie: Countries outside the Union have seen the advantage of joining when comparing the growth in Spain, Portugal, Ireland, Greece, etc. Of course, the process means reforms particularly for countries not used to liberal economy; people have to learn to work also...

Poland1: Have the democratic transformations in Ukraine increased the chances of its future accession? How is the EU going to help Ukraine to reform and rebuild its economy?

Servantie: We have already a neighbourhood policy aiming to help Ukraine's modernisation and democratisation - an action plan was recently adopted, which may have to be reviewed in order to take account of new political developments.

Slovenia4: There are only a few Slovenes (2 million in total) we like being a EU member but we wouldn't like to sink in the big European sea? What do you think?

Servantie: No risk to sink in a big European sea, after all Slovenia is an independent country with its own school system and culture.

Greece01: Does the EU have the means and determination to help Turkey to join the EU as an equal member, in a reasonable time frame?

Servantie: The Commission suggested that negotiations with Turkey may last for 8-10 years, this leaves time to reforms in Turkey and better information of public opinion in Member States on the real state of Turkey.

Turkey1: If the answer to my previous question is yes, then do you believe that there is any reason why Russia should not join?

Servantie: Common values are a necessity if we want to live peacefully together and speak with one voice, vis a vis the rest of the world (including the USA).

Bulgaria2: Mr. Servantie how does the EU see the access in INTERNET? What is your opinion for poorer countries in which in every school there is only one computer connected to Internet?

Servantie: This is a start; 10 years ago most European schools did not have Internet either. Actions in favour of modernisation should help bringing Internet to schools.

Slovenia2: We think that our religion will not be in danger once Turkey will join the EU.
Servantie: The EU is not a religious organisation, but a secular one. Nobody should try to impose any religious belief but just respect religious diversity.

Portugal4: We think that Turkey shouldn't enter the EU. I think that it would bring many problems in terms of religion and culture, they've a very different culture. We're not being racist, but it would create many conflicts between the Islamic countries and Europe.

Servantie: Your discriminative attitude vis à vis Turkey means you don't understand that. Peace with neighbours and absence of discrimination on the basis of religion is a basic value of Europe.

Turkey1: I am a Turk who has lived in Europe for over 12 years. I have seen nearly all of Europe and have lived in 4 countries. I have never ever had any problems with integrating culturally. Indeed I have many friends in a plethora of countries. The only thing obstructing integration has been closed-minded attitudes.

Turkey1: Mr. Servantie, what do you think is the main economic argument concerning Turkey's economy if indeed it is the primary argument against its extension?

Servantie: There is no economic argument against Turkish integration; as a matter of fact, the Turkish industry is ahead of many recently acceding countries; but regional discrepancies within Turkey are still an enormous problem to be dealt with.

Spain02: But if Turkey is an Islamic country, this is not a problem to get into the EU because there are also now countries that are protestant and some that are catholic.

Servantie: As I said the EU is not (I repeat not) a religious organisation, but a region where one value is the respect of cultural diversity!

Portugal4: Well, we know everybody could enter to EU, but there are many risks like having different religions.

Servantie: Islam is already the second religion in France and the UK. Don't look to Europe through the only eyes of Fatima.

Portugal 1: Will the controls on people at our borders with new members states be abolished when they join the Union?

Servantie: Controls with new member states at borders will be abolished when the countries join the Schengen agreement (remember that UK has not joined it yet).

Bulgaria1: What would you do about promoting the cultural, ethnic and religions richness of each EU country?

Servantie: Yes, indeed, that's what our programmes try to help.

Poland1: Mr. Servantie, the challenging process of enlargement has taken almost 50 years until now, however, there are some Western Balkan countries, which are still not officially stated as candidates. As "enlargement is no longer a question of 'if', but 'when'" has any EU policy on providing financial support for them been operating in order to prepare the countries for their future association/accession?

Servantie: Indeed in 1945, few people expected that the EU would heal the wounds of WWII, in 1988 nobody was expecting the fall of Berlin wall; we have to rely on political will

of politicians to bring peace and development back in the Western Balkans so they can join the Union.

Croatia1: People are afraid that the EU will have bad influence on our agriculture. What is your opinion about that?

Servantie: EU Agricultural policy promotes the modernisation of agriculture through the Union, and changes have to take into account also environmental needs.

Slovenia3: Which transport will be in future the most used in EU countries?

Servantie: Try the word intermodal transport on Google.

Croatia1: If we ALL join the union, do you think that the richer countries will start leaving the union?

Servantie to Croatia 1: see the debate in the UK, that's the main place where some people suggest leaving the EU.

Romania3: Will the Romanian tourism on the Black Sea coast improve after the admission to the EU?

Servantie: The country may have to accept a lot of foreign investments to modernise the touristical infrastructure. Take example on recent developments in Croatia and Turkey.

Romania3: Will Romanian students have the opportunity to study abroad after the integration of Romania in the EU?

Servantie: They have already the opportunity to take part in some of the EU programmes.

Greece01: Will be funds given to Turkey during this 8-10 years process you described, for its cultural heritage, monuments, etc., which are of great importance for Greece and Europe and all humanity?

Servantie: Yes, already several millions € were used to restore the area of the Fanar in Istanbul.

Romania3: Solving the corruption problem in Romania is vital for the admission of Romania to the EU?

Servantie: Yes, indeed, there will be a special monitoring of this issue for the next 2 years. The European Parliament is quite adamant on this issue.

Portugal4: What will happen to Portugal? We don't have as many help as we used to have before due to the eastern countries...what about now?

Servantie: Because the country is in much better situation than under the Salazar's rule.

Croatia1: Is the fact that we are reluctant to sell most of the properties at the seaside to the foreigners against EU regulations?

Servantie: Indeed after accession and possibly a transition period there should be no discrimination at all between EU citizens whether Croatian or not.

Romania3: If Romania becomes a member in 2007, when do you presume that the national currency will be replaced by the euro?

Servantie: Adoption of the € depends on the implementation of the Maastricht criteria by the acceding countries and of their political will to join the € zone. It may take time for Romania.

PetruDumitru: Our chat session comes to an end. Thank you for preparing the today's topic in your classrooms. On behalf of the European Schoolnet Office, a big "thank you" to you all.

Servantie: Thank you and good-bye to all of you! Study well and many languages.