

The future generation in the enlarged Europe: protecting and preserving the environment

Chat transcript

Age group: 14-20

15 March 2004, 2.00 p.m. (CET)

Guest: **Margot Wallström**

Environment Commissioner, European Commission

Language: English



Commissioner Wallström answering students' questions

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[EUN-Petru] Hello everybody and welcome! I would like to remind you that we have been discussing about having five questions/school to allow all participants to get answers from Ms Wallström.

[Wallstrom1] Hi, this is the commissioner -Margot Wallstrom; Welcome to the chat!

[EUN-Petru] Welcome Ms Wallstrom and thank you for accepting our invitation.

[lala] Which part of the EU buget will be invested in ecology?

[Wallstrom2] Hi Lala, the EU budget comes from several sources. E.g. 50 per cent of the Cohesion Fund 1999-2006 is dedicated to environment under the Agricultural Reform more will be spent for environment. DG ENV spends around 260 Mio Euros on environmental policy.

[avram_iancu_cluj_romania] How do you see the role of the young generation in the environment policy of a country? What can we actually do?

[Wallstrom1] You can do a lot by engaging in NGO-work; political work etc.

[Anci] Recycling waste is something which hasn't been achieved in many parts of Slovenia, especially in the rural areas. Will there be any rules to abide by after we enter the EU about recycling waste or fines to pay if he rules are not obeyed?

[Wallstrom1] There are rules in the EU-aquis on recycling.

[Meta] How can big companies be persuaded to stop polluting nature? Are they the worst polluters in the world and they just don't listen?



[Wallstrom1] Big companies have to comply with EU-rules and they have to be convinced through opinion making by listening to consumers.

[stream] How is the European Union going to solve the problem with toxic substances such as batteries?

[Wallstrom2] We have new proposal to deal with very toxic substances plus an existing legislation on recycling and reuse of batteries. And there will be a mercury strategy 2005.

[avram_iancu_cluj_romania] How will the European Union support the new members to implement the European legislation regarding the environment?

[Wallstrom2] Implementation is prime responsibility of Member State. But we help the future Member States with financial and technical support.

[light] Does the EU have any plans concerning renewable energies?

[Wallstrom1] Yes to double the share of renewable energy by 2010

[Martina] How are the forests in Europe protected? Will the farmers be allowed to chop their own forests?

[Wallstrom2] Forest focus programme concentrates on monitoring the state of European forests. Natura 2000 is available to member states to set aside vulnerable areas.

[dragana] What measures will the European government take to prevent the American genetically changed food from coming to the European market?

[Wallstrom1] We have set up a legal system to ensure that consumers know about the products they eat and ensure a stem which does not harm the environment.

[bridge] Are information and education the only ways o make people aware or environmental problems?

[Wallstrom2] We realize that the future belongs to young people, therefore their role in educating teachers, parents and local authorities is very important.

[ralu_CT] How is going the influence the EU environmental policy, the state of the costal areas?

[Wallstrom1] The Commission is developing a maritime strategy and one aspect might be the protection of coastal areas with special value.

[Manuela] Is there any chance for us, the young generation to live in a unitary and clean Europe?

[Wallstrom2] It is depending on political decisions, so it is important environmentally conscious leaders.

[irenah] One of the democratic values is freedom of thought. The real world has limits. Can the politicians in EU speak their minds freely?

[Wallstrom1] Yes politicians can speak their minds, which is their basic right in a democracy.

[Guest04196] Will the economy grow with our joining the EU?

[Wallstrom1] Yes it offers new opportunities and potential markets for all.



[igor_gimnazjum_3] 1. How could free trade of pollution be of benefit to the protection of the environment in the European Union?

[Wallstrom2] Emissions trading is a very important part of achieving Kyoto climate change objectives for the EU.

[ElenaDinu-LicTraian] Do you think that problem-orientated programmes at national and local level are the answer to the possibility of implementation of existing strategies?
[Wallstrom1] All levels of Government are important, some problems need to be tackled at European level; others at National or local level so Yes.

[ralu_CT] Are there some specific programmes on environmental education that will be developed in the next years by EU (beside the Socrates and Youth)?
[Wallstrom1] No, there are no specific programmes, but there will be new generation of educational programmes and environmental education will be covered by this.

[Hello] As a Swedish teacher (teaching some environmental science) on a visit in Romania, I have to say that we all as elderly people have to take care for those who will come and take over the responsibility for Earth. We have to lead the way.
[Wallstrom1] Yes, we agree.
[Hello] And we can only do that by being those icons for that thinking. Sustainable development. (Tack, Margot = thanks, Margot)

[kiki] Should nuclear plants be closed down for a healthier environment?
[Wallstrom2] The jury is still out: CO₂ have to be reduced. And nuclear gives no CO₂ on the other hand nuclear waste is a big problem which should not passed on to future generations.

[juliusz] How could Poland use the Union's (financial) help in order to take better care of the environment?
[Wallstrom1] Poland is receiving support from the EU. This need to be targeted at the main problems but most of the efforts will have to come from Poland.

[clear] What can a young person do for the environment?
[Wallstrom2] Learn about environment and try to influence others and inform others. When you shop buy "greener" products. Calculate your own "ecological footprint".

[avram_iancu_cluj_romania] Can you suggest some modalities of educating & sensitising the population regarding the problems of the environment?
[Wallstrom1] One example of awareness raising is the European Car free day.

[juliusz] How have Union's funds been used for the protection of the environment so far?
[Wallstrom2] Mainly 2 achieve the objectives set out in more than 200 pieces of EU legislation on environment.

[Carolina] How is the EU going to help the new members protect areas of special natural value (national parks, reserves etc.)?
[Wallstrom1] The new members will belong to a network called Natura 2000 which provides protection to sensitive areas and species.



[ptreck_gimnazjum3] Pollution disregards borders: is it planned to increase the scale of environmental help in a form of so-called eco-conversion to the new EU member countries?

[Wallstrom2] There are special funds to help the new Member States to transpose and implement environment legislation. But most of the hard work has to be done by each country.

[Anci] Water is something scarce in many European countries especially in the draught season. Will clean water become a bigger problem than it is today? Please answer to my question.

[Wallstrom1] We have to be careful with our water resources, and use them in an efficient and environmentally friendly manner.

[cmjc] What action is the EU taking to promote recycling of household waste?

[Wallstrom1] All member states have to ensure recycling of certain products like paper and glass, but everybody has to take responsibility.

[avram_iancu_cluj_romania] What do you think are the most serious environment problems in Eastern Europe?

[Wallstrom1] Some of the most serious problems are air pollution from transport, and treatment of waste water. A lot has been done but more is needed.

[Maria] There is possible to consent the technical progress with the preserving environment

[Wallstrom2] Technical progress is very much of a part of a better environment. The challenge is to convert new technology to reduce pollution, etc. Environmental technology action programme now in preparation.

[juliusz] To what degree do European citizens suffer from the effects of global warming?

[Wallstrom1] At the moment we are seeing an increase in extreme weather conditions like storms, flooding and forest fires.

[juliusz] Over which regions of the world is the hole in the ozone layer the biggest and where are its effects the most disturbing?

[Wallstrom1] Of the biggest areas is over Antarctica.

[All] Do you know anything that all citizens can do to diminish the pollution without giving up their comfort?

[Wallstrom1] By investing in new techniques and promoting energy efficiency

[lala] How do EU states treat with toxic waste?

[Wallstrom2] Toxic wastes are subject to a range of strict controls, e.g. Basel convention of shipment of waste. Plants treating this waste have to be licensed. Big penalties for breaking law.

[Meta] How can big companies be persuaded to stop polluting nature? They are the worst polluters in the world and they just don't listen.



[Wallstrom2] ISO 14000 sets benchmarks for companies to improve environment performance. Integrated product policy (a EU initiative) seeks to convince companies to integrate environment in production process.

[ElenaDinu-LicTraian] Ecological education is not given sufficient attention by central and local authority. What do you think about school curriculum and the position of the authorities? Is an official protocol necessary between the Ministry of Education and the Environmental Ministry?

[Wallstrom1] Education has to be at a national level but in principle I think it's a good idea that environmental information is taught in school.

[All] From Spain: Does the European Union have any plans concerning renewable energies?

[Wallstrom1] The accession treaty allows member states to have a transitional period of up to 7 years. Yes, the idea is to double the use of renewables by 2010.

[Pella] Is it true that a few years there won't be enough drinkable water? And if it is, what suggestions would you make for the confronting of this problem?

[Wallstrom2] In the EU there is no risk to quality of drinking water. In past it constantly improved. In some small areas possibility of desertification (e.g. Spain). Very strict drinking water legislation in force.

[Manuela] What programmes are proposed by UE concerning and preserving the environment?

[Wallstrom1] The EU supports many environment investments through the structural funds and small projects through the LIFE programme.

[Cristina] Which are the toxic substances for the environment?

[Wallstrom1] There are many but they include PCBs, Dioxins, and Flame retardants etc

[All] Is there any global strategy for some preventive measures against possible excessive floods which may hit more European countries?

[Wallstrom2] There is no global strategy. But EU water framework directive focuses also on river flood plain management.

[shakespeare] Which is the policy of the EU regarding the use of pesticides, taking into account on the one hand the necessity of obtaining large crops in order to assure food resources for the world's population and on the other hand the potentially devastating effects these chemical substances may have on the soil, thus endangering the growth of future crops?

[Wallstrom1] We are working on a new strategy on pesticides, it should be ready by the end of this year.

[malgorzata] Hello Mrs Margot and best wishes for from Poland!

[Wallstrom2] Thanks a lot for the best wishes!

[ralu] What is the place of biodiversity conservation in the actual EU environmental programs?



[Wallstrom1] Biodiversity is one of the main areas that the EU supports, It is one of my 5 priorities to halt the decline in biodiversity by 2010.

[ElenaDinu-LicTraian] How can the authorities take action to reduce the population exposure to pollution which affects the health of the residents?

[Wallstrom2] The Commission has produced a proposal for a health and environment programme which will try to improve the quality of life.

[Knecht] Imagine, that someone has invented a water-engine. Will the EU support him to protect the environment?

[Wallstrom2] Research is an important part to protect the environment in future. If there is a viable water engine we would like to know.

[sofi] Hej Margit Wallstrom! We, teachers from Lindesberg, Sweden, are in Cluj Napoca Romania in Comenius project.

[Wallstrom1] Good idea happy that you work together over the borders!

[ralu] How is EU working with the international environmentalist NGO's?

[Wallstrom1] The Commission gives financial support to European environmental NGOs and we also consult them regularly concerning policies.

[Guest29996] Does the free flow of labour also mean that in about eight years we won't need any special permits to work in other EU countries?

[Wallstrom1] That's the idea.

[avram_iancu_cluj_romania] What can we do about recycling considering the lack of money and specialized people?

[Wallstrom1] Information is the key, we need to change behaviour of people and young people are my key allies in this task.

[Maria] Concerning your programmes, we are interested in organising a summer school for teenagers, scouts. Are there any?

[Wallstrom2] Hi Maria, we have no money for that this year. Why not trying to twin with a school in Sweden?

[Anci] What do you think about the overall European knowledge of ecology?

[Wallstrom1] It's good but it can be improved.

[lala] And an interesting question, what could we, as students, do for ecology?

[Wallstrom1] Inform people around you and join environmental networks working at a local level.

[shakespeare] It is estimated that by the year 2100 the average global temperature will rise by 6C, causing immeasurable damage to all the life forms on Earth; what measures can be taken in order to prevent this from happening?

[Wallstrom2] EU is a leader in fighting climate change. We have an EC climate change programme and other aspects like energy conservation r important. In short term we need to adapt to changes in climate change.



[Pella] Loudias is the only Greek river having tide because its altimeter is zero. It is in danger because of pollution. We would like to adopt and protect it. Could you please tell us which is the procedure? Could you help us?

[Wallstrom1] You will need to send more information to DG Environment so that we can help you.

[Danthon_de_Loire] What do you think should be the foundation of healthy live style connected with the environment?

[Wallstrom1] We could start by cycling and walking and using public transportation to work.

[All] Do you think that young people are involved enough in environment matters?

[Wallstrom2] Hi All, the future belongs to the young and therefore it is important that in particular the young generation lobbies for environment change. Get informed and get involved!

[racovita5] Considering your experience in environmental issues and ecological education, we would be grateful if you shared with us some of your most prolific methods dealing with long-term education of masses.

[Wallstrom2] This is the age of the web. Check out DG ENV website:
www.europa.eu.int

[Ion] Please, give us the e-mail address in order to contact them in working on an international project on protecting and preserving the environment.

[Wallstrom1] Email address is envinfo@cec.eu.int

[All] What's the situation of the countries joining the EU as far as environment is concerned?

[Wallstrom1] We can work together to solve common environmental problems. The environment has no borders.

[ElenaDinu-LicTraian] what's your opinion about eco-tourism in Romania?

[Wallstrom2] It is a question of balance between generating income and protecting the environment. So be careful!

[All] From Italy: What are the main strategies for sustainable development for urban and rural areas?

[Wallstrom1] It varies, many good natural areas but there are also many problems like rising car transport.

[lala] Do you go to work by car?

[Wallstrom1] I try to go by bicycle as often as possible

[shakespeare] How can Romania modify its legislation in order to ensure an optimum protection of the Danube Delta?

[Wallstrom2] The EU water framework legislation, which has to be implemented by Romania, should improve the river basin management, including Danube Delta.



[All] By which means does the EU try to improve the quality of the air?

[Wallstrom1] We have many air quality laws to ensure good clean air.

[Kamila] With what kind of problems do you often meet in your work?

[Wallstrom2] It is sometimes difficult to balance EU environmental goals with economic growth and social policy.

[lala] Are you proud of something you have done for ecology?

[Wallstrom1] I'm especially proud of our leading role in Climate change negotiations.

[EUN-Petru] Today we have had on-line Commissioner Wallström. Thank you for answering our questions today!

[Wallstrom1] To all, thank you for this opportunity of taking your questions and goodbye to you all!