

# Small countries in the European Union

## Chat transcript

Age group: 14-20  
13 February 2004, 9.30 a.m. (CET)  
Guest: Dr **Janez Potocnik**  
Minister for European Affairs, Slovenia  
Language: English

## Participating schools

Batthyány Lajos Gimnázium és Egészségügyi Szakközépiskola, Hungary  
Engure Secondary school, Latvia  
Escola Secundária Infante D. Henrique Porto, Portugal  
Halepaghen Schule, Germany  
Ies Fuente Juncal, Spain  
La Farga, Barcelona, Spain  
Osnovna sola Pivka, Slovenia  
Poslovno-komercialna sola Celje, Slovenia  
Preseren Primery school, Slovenia  
Primary school Maksa Pletersnika, Pisece, Slovenia  
Prof. Vassil Zlatarski School, Sofia, Bulgaria  
Riihenmäki Comprehensive School, Finland  
Scoala Horlesti-Rediu, Iasi, Romania  
Solkan Primary School, Slovenia  
'Stefan Procopiu' High school, Iasi, Romania  
Vasaskolan, Gävle, Sweden

[EUN-Petru] Hello everyone! Thank you for joining us today and welcome! Our guest and his assistant are ready to answer your questions.

[Marianna] Good morning from Latvia! We want to know what is the attitude of the Slovenian people to the Enlargement?

[Potocnik1] I think the attitude was the best since the result of the referendum when 90% of Slovenian supported the Enlargement. We see the EU as a kind of natural step, nothing is forced, nothing artificial. We are rather entering back to the Union.

[Pol\_LaFarga] If Catalonia would be a country, would be it possible to enter the EU?

[Potocnik2] Small countries are small in or outside the EU, but inside the EU, our role could be stronger then when outside. The region of Catalonia is very well developed and standards are high and Europeans.



[Marc\_LaFargaSpain] Which measures can be taken by the EU in small countries to encourage them to preserve their cultural identity?

[Potocnik2] There are programmes inside the EU that are supporting access to European Universities, but since joining the EU, these programmes prove to be more efficient. I would say that it is very important for the EU to take care of smaller countries. EU is constituted in a way that it takes care of all cultural identity. But we have to take care of our own identity at home, nobody will do this at our place

[Aljaz] By becoming part of a larger group we will be giving up some of our own identity How do you feel about that?

[Potocnik2] We are not giving up our identity, we are sharing it. We are deciding about issues that are valuable in the whole of Europe, and other countries can also decide about issues, important to Slovenia.

[Robin-T] Education is one of the spheres where legislation doesn't have to be harmonized in EU. Is it true?

[Potocnik2] Yes, that's true, and I feel this is right since this is the area where the countries should take care of themselves.

[Masa] If you become commissioner for the Enlargement, will you and your family move to Brussels?

[Potocnik1] Yes, I will move to Brussels while my family will, at first, stay at home.

[Jelka] We will miss you at Faculty of Law.

[Potocnik1] Jelka, I will miss you to very much!

[Blazni] Magdalena here. I'm so proud to have you as our representative in Brussels. I really think you are the man for the job. After 1st May 2004 will the people from the new EU countries be able to travel to ALL the other countries in the EU without a passport?

[Potocnik2] No, they won't since there will still be internal border controls.

[Guest15595] We live next to Italian border. Italians have arguments against Euro. They accuse it of doubling the prices. Do you think this will be the case also in our country?

[Potocnik2] I think that the introduction of the euro will not double the prices, however, some prices might, of course, go up since shop keepers might use the introduction to raise the prices of their products.

[Xavier\_LaFarga] How is possible to recognize in the European Parliament or Council the values and interests of "very small countries"?

[Potocnik1] We are represented less than bigger nations but we are over-represented if you would start from the number of population. So we are present there, including our values.

[Viljenka] Congratulations! You have been nominated as the first Slovenian Minister for European Affairs. This is undoubtedly one of the turning points in Slovenian history. Do you feel like a historical personality?

[Potocnik2] In fact, we all are part of the project which is a very important moment in our contemporary history. Do not forget that this enlargement brings in for the first time Slavic nations. This will add flavours to European discussions and debates.

[Tadej] You come from Vrba. Do you think Slovenian language is threatened in EU?

[Potocnik1] Slovenian language has big roots coming from Vrba and it will remain important in the EU because is part of the European heritage and it is treated equally.

[Blazni] What will happen to the Slovenian language? Do you think it will be forgotten?

[Potocnik1] We have to take care of our own language at home.

[Pasivity] Do Slovenian pupils study European geography at school?

[Potocnik2] Yes of course, we study European geography in school and our pupils are very well educated about Europe and its countries.

[Marc\_LaFargaSpain] Could the Catalan be an official language of the EU? In which ways does the EU pay attention to small languages in the EU?

[Potocnik1] Each member country has equal status as far as the language is concerned. Of course, if Catalonia would be a member State, the language would also be an official one.

[Viljenka] Education is one of the spheres where legislation does not have to be harmonized in EU. Is it true?

[Brane] Do you see any parallel between Slovenia in EU and Slovenia in Yugoslavia?

[Potocnik1] Of course, there are parallels. But EU is an extremely important as a historical project. We enter because we decided so. I believe that belonging to the EU is an important historical time.

[David\_LaFargaSpain] Is Slovenian threatened by Serbian or German?

[Potocnik2] David, we understand German since we live close to the Austrian border, but we do not really fear that our language is threatened by German or Serbian.

[Aljaz] Will study be cheaper in EU? I'm thinking of going to England.

[Potocnik1] In some case, yes because the rules have to be the same for domestic students and students coming from other members of the EU.

[Klemnuet] Hello from Pisece! We live near the Croatian border. This is about equality of languages: equal does not mean equal treatment. We speak now in English and no one is an English in this chatroom.

[Potocnik2] Klemnuet, you have official languages and working languages. In order to communicate efficiently, you have to agree on a common working language, however, I feel it's important to take care of your own language to communicate.

[Guest52963] What do you think about Latvia as a new EU country?

[Potocnik1] I have visited it last year. It's an extremely nice country with a high potential of development inside the EU.

[Pol\_LaFarga] What advantages has Slovenia for entering in the EU?



[Potocnik2] Entering the EU is beneficial for the economy since our enterprises can enter a more stable and economically prosperous area. The same goes for all the states. They have a lot of potential and I'm not afraid for them.

[Jelka] Dr Potocnik, what does future hold for students, who are interested in working in Brussels?

[Potocnik1] Jelka, there are additional opportunities. For each of the acceding countries, quite an important number of people will work there, they need to enter competitions. If they pass it, they can work in Brussels.

[JoseLuis\_LaFarga] Why do small countries have got difficulties enter in the UE?

[Potocnik2] Small countries don't have difficulties to enter the EU. On the contrary, if you are small, you are more flexible and consequently, can accommodate more easily to new situations.

[blazni] Magda: We know that we have to wait until 2007 before we get the EURO. But what about now? Will our money have the same value or less?

[Brane] To Mr. Potocnik: What EU benefits with Slovenia joining the EU?

[Potocnik1] EU is getting a lot not only by Slovenian, but by all the new members. It is extended the area of peace and stability. It is getting larger trade market and it is becoming more important on an economic point of view on a global stage.

[Marc\_LaFargaSpain] I think that the different languages in the EU, official or not official, wouldn't have to be threatened. I think all of them are part of our common heritage, don't you agree?

[Potocnik2] The differences should indeed be kept, and the same goes for the cultural identity. Therefore, I fully support initiatives in that direction.

[JoseLuis\_LaFarga] The small countries have got little population and have their own feelings.

[Potocnik1] Small countries are small inside or outside EU. Don't be afraid of smallness. What counts is the knowledge and ability to look straight into the eyes of people coming from bigger states.

[Blazni] What about the value of Slovenian money? Will it be any different?

[Potocnik2] I think that there won't be a lot of changes, compared to the current situation. That's why we plan to introduce the euro in the year 2007.

[Brane] When do you think Croatia will join EU?

[Potocnik1] Croatia is doing well, but I think it's not the right question. We should rather ask what to they have to do to enter the EU. I hope this will happen as soon as possible. Slovenia is a good relationship with all the former states of Yugoslavia. We hope that we can help them access the EU. They have suffered a lot and we feel that we have the knowledge to help them. We have been living in the same country, so we still have a lot of friends there, and this will remain so in the future.

[Potocnik1] Thank you for preparing your questions for today's chat. It was a pleasure meeting you on-line.