

Canada-EU Trade Deal

‘Nothing is decided until everything is decided’

Kristen Shane

The Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement has played big on the European Union Delegation to Canada’s agenda for the last three years or more.

While he’s not a trade negotiator, Maurizio Cellini is at the centre of the action in Ottawa, busy with activities like trying to explain the deal to Canadians. He is the head of the EU Delegation’s economic, trade, and commercial section.

He answered written questions Oct. 30 that *Embassy* had posed to the EU by email. The following exchange has been edited for length and style.

Where do the talks stand now? What issues have been decided and what more is left to be decided?

“We are approaching the end of negotiations. All issues are on the table and, as in most trade negotiations, nothing is decided until everything is decided.”

Are you confident that talks will conclude by the end of the year? Why or why not?

“We believe that a conclusion before the end of the year is possible.”

What are the top three ‘asks’ the European Union wants to get out of this deal, in order of priority?

“The EU has a diversified list of interests. They are all important and it would be a mistake to set priorities.”



Embassy Photo: Sam Garcia

The head of the EU Delegation’s economic, trade, and commercial section, Maurizio Cellini.

Canadian professors Patrick Fafard and Patrick Leblond have argued that the federal government decided to give Canadian provinces a limited role at the CETA negotiating table, partly because of European pressure. The provinces can’t veto a deal, but they can frustrate its implementation, which could lead to EU companies going

after the federal government, and ultimately a less effective deal. Do you feel this is a problem? If so, how would you propose the parties to the agreement resolve this?

“We know that, for the first time ever, the Canadian provinces have been directly involved in the negotiation process of a free trade agreement. This is a very important fact. As the Canadian provinces have taken a constructive approach in these negotiations, we do believe that they will implement it in full and in good faith.”

Will the deal definitely need to be ratified by each individual member state?

“It depends on the final content of the agreement and this assessment can only be done after the negotiations have concluded. If areas of exclusive member state competence are covered then, yes, apart from the common ratification by member states and the European Parliament in Brussels, each one will have to ratify it individually.”

The Harper government has made no secret that the CETA is one of its top trade priorities, along with a handful of other talks toward deals with countries such as India, as well as the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Where does the EU place a trade deal with Canada in terms of its overall trade priorities?

“Canada represents 1.6 per cent of EU external trade and it is the 11th most important EU trading partner in goods and services. It is also the EU’s fourth largest source of foreign direct investment. CETA is also one of the first free trade agreements con-

cluded between the EU and a highly developed country. So, yes, a good agreement with Canada is also a priority for the EU.”

Some Canadians are worried the CETA could lead to the privatization of essential public services such as those related to water and health. Some fear lawsuits from transnational water companies if they are discriminated against in contract offerings. Do these people have reason to be concerned? Why or why not?

“CETA does not force either the EU or Canada to privatize public services. Privatization of essential public services remains a matter of domestic decisions.”

Generic pharmaceutical supporters say the EU is pushing Canada through the CETA to extend pharmaceutical patents and data protection that would boost the cost of drugs to Canadians. Why does the EU want drug patent extension and further data protection? Will it boost drug costs?

“EU pharmaceutical manufacturers would like to have the same patent protection as in Europe. It will not necessarily increase drug costs.”

We know the EU wants more access to Canada’s dairy market. What’s the minimum concession you would accept? Do you sense that Canada would be willing to agree to this? Why or why not?

“These matters are currently being addressed by the negotiators. It is very difficult to make any speculation at this stage.”

kshane@embassymag.ca