

Envoys & Events

EU diplomat departs after helping launch trade talks

KRISTEN SHANE

Diplomatic Circles



It's not an overstatement to say **Giovanni Di Girolamo** has helped make history through his involvement in the launch of talks toward deals set to see Canada-European Union relations get closer than ever before.

Having recently started his posting as the first counsellor and head of political and public affairs at the European Union delegation to Canada, he was involved in preparing an October 2008 Quebec City summit when political leaders from both sides decided to set the scope for a possible free trade agreement.

And he was the European Union's top representative to Canada in May 2009 (as the delegation was between ambassadors) when Prime Minister **Stephen Harper** and his European counterparts (including Mr. Di Girolamo) announced in Prague the launch of talks toward a Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement.

In those beginning days, not everyone was convinced a deal would work, as there was much more hope in the conclusion of multilateral trade talks through the World Trade Organization's Doha Round, said Mr. Di Girolamo.

But the world was also in the depths of economic crisis. Some thought it could get much worse and might trigger protectionist measures.

"And I think that did not happen. And Canada and the EU were part of this, in affirming their belief in free trade," said Mr. Di Girolamo.

For both, launching trade talks in the midst of recession was a symbolic gesture to fight protectionism, he said.



Giovanni Di Girolamo says he'll miss the nature he loved to explore in Canada. The Italian-born diplomat enjoys photography, trekking, and canoeing.

Four years later, the two sides are in the final, most delicate and difficult stages of working out the deal they both call ambitious. While both sides have previously said they are aiming to get it done by the end of this year, Mr. Di Girolamo shied away from setting a timeline, preferring just to say both sides would like to conclude talks as soon as possible.

His job, since those early days, has been to support the EU negotiators back in Brussels.

Specifically, once he turned the delegation over to a new ambassador, **Matthias Brinkmann**, in September 2009 and went back to his old job heading the public affairs and political section, his team of six or seven was in charge of supporting the negotiator for the Strategic Partnership Agreement, a parallel deal to the trade agreement.

A busy time

Besides that, during Mr. Di Girolamo's four-year posting in Ottawa, which ended Aug. 31, the EU delegation oversaw the signing of air transport and air safety agreements, he participated in G8 and G20 meetings in Canada, and his office underwent internal transformation.

Reflecting on it all shortly before his departure, in a board room filled with natural light at the EU delegation's 19th-floor downtown Ottawa office, he remarked: "I think this was one of the busiest periods in my life."

But the soft-spoken Italian said he was lucky to have good people helping him.

The public diplomacy aspect of Mr. Di Girolamo's job brought him to university and other speaking engagements across Canada, where he said he was positively impressed by the Canadian public's interest in the European Union. With the European sovereign debt crisis in the headlines, he witnessed an increasing media and public interest in the EU.

Finding the best way to explain this complex institution of enemies-turned-friends to Canadians was sometimes difficult, he said. But so was understanding Canada's complexities, such as its federal-provincial relations.

He said he was struck by Canada's capacity to integrate different immigrant populations who are able to preserve their own identity while being fully Canadian.

"I see that with the friends of my children.

They are of Chinese origin, Indian origin and so on, but they are very Canadian too. It's quite an interesting thing. You did well in that," he said with a soft chuckle.

He said he's been pleased with his own family's integration into Canadian society. It helped that his wife **Carolina Gallardo-Frias Di Girolamo**'s first language is English, and his 16-year-old daughter and 13-year-old son had been learning in English schools.

His family enjoyed travelling in Canada, especially to Tadoussac, Que., where they got very close to a group of whales. Being so near such large mammals was exciting, he said. "It's something I will bring in my heart."

A lover of photography, trekking, and canoeing, he said Canada's wilderness suited him well. "I would almost say it's mystic, the feeling you have when you're in the middle of a Canadian lake, around you only trees and birds," he said.

He recalled flying over Canada's North and peering out at the frozen ocean below.

"For a European, especially a man from Italy, there is a very clear definition between the land and the sea," he said slicing through the air with his hands. "And it's a permanent thing. If you are up North, it's a seasonable thing. In some periods, you walk on the sea."

That astounded him.

Such are the situations confronting someone when they experience two cultures colliding—something he faced in his job too. Explaining the EU position on sealing to Canadians was not easy, he said. Another challenge bubbled up when Canada slapped visa requirements on Czech citizens in July 2009.

"But those are normal irritants in a relation with a friendly country. It's impossible not to have a couple of things where you have disagreements," he said.

He said he's leaving his office in good hands by giving up his job to **Manfred Auster**, who until recently was the German consul in Montreal.

Mr. Di Girolamo returns to EU headquarters in Brussels, where he is now putting to use his Canadian experience alongside that of what he learned from previous postings in South America, the Middle East, Africa, and Eastern Europe, as an adviser to the director responsible for finance and corporate support, which includes working with various EU institutions.

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OTTAWA Listings

WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 12

Seeds of a Collection—A new exhibition, *Seeds of a Collection: The National Gallery of Canada Library 100 Years Ago*, shines a light on the library and archives at the gallery. Until Dec. 21. National Gallery of Canada, 380 Sussex Dr. www.gallery.ca

The Arab Spring: Between Hopes and Challenges—Jonathan Fine, International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, will discuss "The Arab Spring: Between Hopes and Challenges." Presented by the Centre for International Policy Studies at the University of Ottawa. 2:30 p.m. Free. Room 390, Lamoureux Bldg., 145 Jean-Jacques Lussier. http://cips.uottawa.ca

Resource Development and the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples—The Centre for International Policy Studies at the University of Ottawa presents this panel discussion. Panellists include Luis Evelis Andrade Casama, National Indigenous Organization of Colombia, and Anne Marie Sam, First Nations Women Advocating Responsible Mining (of Canada). 3 p.m. Room 3120, Desmarais Bldg., 55 Laurier Ave. E. http://cips.uottawa.ca

FRIDAY, SEPT. 14

Welcoming Coffee Morning—The Canadian Federation of University Women/Ottawa Diplomatic Hospitality Group pres-

ents a welcoming coffee morning featuring a talk with architect T.V. Murray, as well as works by various artists including Argentine visual artist Silvia Bompadre. 10 a.m.-12 p.m. John G. Diefenbaker Bldg., Bytown Room, Old City Hall, 111 Sussex Dr. RSVP by Sept. 12 to Ulle Baum at 613-240-4622 or ullebaum@gmail.com

Dry Area Agriculture: A Challenge that Can Be Overcome—Join speaker Mahmoud Solh, director general of the International Center for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas. Presented by the International Development Research Centre. 2:30 p.m. Free. IDRC, W. David Hopper Room, 150 Kent St., 8th floor. www.idrc.ca/lectures-solh

Classic Car Show—Sparks Street Mall presents a Classic Car Show. 3 p.m. Sparks Street Mall. http://sparksstreetmall.com/carshow.htm

Harlem Gospel Choir—Ars Nova presents the Harlem Gospel Choir in concert. 7:30 p.m., \$20-\$45. Dominion Chalmers United Church, 355 Cooper St.

Giant Used Book Sale—Library and Archives Canada presents its annual Giant Used Book Sale. Until Sept. 16. St. Laurent Centre, Centre Court, 1200 St. Laurent Blvd. 613-943-1544.

SATURDAY, SEPT. 15

Costa Rica celebrates its independence day. It gained independence from Spain in 1821.

For information on any celebrations, please call the embassy at 613-562-2855.

El Salvador celebrates its independence day. It gained independence from Spain in 1821. For information on any celebrations, please call the embassy at 613-238-2939.

Guatemala celebrates its independence day. It gained independence from Spain in 1821. For information on any celebrations, please call the embassy at 613-233-7237.

Honduras celebrates its national day. It gained independence from Spain in 1821. For information on any celebrations, please call the embassy at 613-233-8900.

Journeys of Survival, Resilience and Belonging—Author and journalist Debi Goodwin will discuss her book *Citizens of Nowhere: From Refugee Camp to Canadian Campus*. Presented by the Sahar Literary Forum and the Institute of African Studies at Carleton University. 4:30 p.m. 2017 Duntun Tower, Carleton University, 1125 Colonel By Dr. sahanliteraryforum@gmail.com

Canada's Democracy Week—The theme for this year's Canada's Democracy Week is "discovery." Until Sept. 22. For a list of events, including the National Youth Challenge, visit www.democracy-democratie.ca

SUNDAY, SEPT. 16

Mexico celebrates its national day. Independence was declared from Spain in 1821. For information on any celebrations, please call the embassy at 613-233-8988.

Papua New Guinea celebrates its independence day. It gained independence from Australia in 1975.

Afghanistan: Role of the International Community with a Focus on India and Canada—Nipa Banerjee, University of Ottawa, will give this lecture. Presented by the India Canada Friendship Circle. 3-5 p.m. Rockcliffe Park Community Hall, 380 Springfield Rd. www.icfc.ws

Feast of Fields—Feast of Fields is a unique culinary event featuring offerings from organic farmers and chefs. Organic wines and beers will be sold and other activities include a silent auction and an organic marketplace. 12-4 p.m., \$70. Canada Agriculture Museum. http://www.cag.ca/ottawa/feast_of_fields/

MONDAY, SEPT. 17

House Returns—The House of Commons is scheduled to sit again after a summer break.

Ottawa School of Theology and Spirituality—Registration for weekly classes on scripture, gospel music, mysticism, understanding grief, and more. Open to all, regardless of faith. Presented by the Ottawa School of Theology and Spirituality. 7 p.m. All Saints Anglican Church, 347 Richmond Rd. 613-234-2432 or www.osts.ca

TUESDAY, SEPT. 18

Chile celebrates its independence day. The first government junta is created in 1810. For information on any celebrations, call the embassy at 613-235-4402.

Working to End Human Trafficking—Conservative MP Joy Smith (Kildonan-St. Paul, Man.) will give this talk. Presented by the Centre for International Policy Studies at the University of Ottawa. 12 p.m. Free. Room 12110, Desmarais Bldg., 55 Laurier Ave. E. http://cips.uottawa.ca

Jean Augustine to Address Ottawa Women's Canadian Club—Speaker Jean Augustine, fairness commissioner for Ontario, will discuss "License to Succeed: Tapping the Talent of Immigrant Professionals" at a luncheon presented by the Ottawa Women's Canadian Club. 12:30 p.m. Fairmont Chateau Laurier Ballroom, 1 Rideau St. http://www.owcc.ca/speakers.php

The EU, Russia, and the EU's Eastern Partnership Policy—Speaker Nicu Popescu, European Council on Foreign Relations, will discuss "The European Union, Russia, and the EU's Eastern Partnership Policy." Part of the Jean Monnet Chair's guest lecture series. 3:30-5 p.m. Free. Room 608, Robertson Hall, Carleton University, 1125 Colonel By Dr. Olga.Shapovalova@carleton.ca

WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 19

Maintaining Trust and Engagement in Canadian Elections—Marc Mayrand, chief electoral officer of Canada, will discuss "Maintaining

Trust and Engagement in Canadian Elections: A Call to Action." Presented by the Economic Club of Canada. 11:45 a.m.-1:30 p.m., \$79. The Westin Ottawa, 11 Colonel By Dr. www.economicclub.ca

John Baird to Address Canadian Club of Ottawa—Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird will address the Canadian Club of Ottawa at a luncheon. \$40-\$75. 12 p.m. Fairmont Chateau Laurier Ballroom, 1 Rideau St. www.canadianclubottawa.ca

Canada-EU Law Lecture—Markus Gehring, University of Ottawa, will discuss "The Role of the European Union Law in the Global Economy." 1:20-3:30 p.m. Presented by the Centre for European Studies at Carleton University. Senate and Alumni Rooms, 608 Robertson Hall, Carleton University, 1125 Colonel By Dr. RSVP to www.carleton.ca/ces

Diamond Mobility and Imperial Authority—The Institute of African Studies at Carleton University presents a lecture on "Diamond Mobility and Imperial Authority: From Mine to Market to Pawnshop" with Danielle Kinsey, Department of History, Carleton University, as part of its Brownbag Seminar Series. 1:20-3 p.m. Room 433, Paterson Hall, Carleton University, 1125 Colonel By Dr. african_studies@carleton.ca

Embassy Listings is edited by listings editor Alia Heward who can be reached at 613-232-5952, ext. 200. Information regarding events should be sent to listings@embassymag.ca with the subject line 'Embassy Listings' by Friday at 5 p.m. Send in your event in a paragraph with all the relevant details. Our fax number is 613-232-9055.

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