

Envoys & Events

Pre-election trade window is closing, warns EU envoy



SNEH DUGGAL

*Diplomatic
Circles*

The window in which Canada and the European Union can finalize a trade deal before elections potentially change top officials in both entities is quickly closing, warns the EU's new ambassador to Canada.

Sitting at the EU Delegation in downtown Ottawa, **Marie-Anne Coninsx** seemed hopeful about the talks towards a Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement that have been front and centre in Canadian foreign policy for the past several years.

"The momentum is there," Ms. Coninsx told *Embassy* on Oct. 7, just four days after she presented her credentials to Governor General David Johnston.

She said one reason for this is that the two sides have come a long way with the negotiations.

"If you are nearly there, it would not be good to stop it or delay it more...this momentum, particularly since the last [few] weeks...we are nearly there," said Ms. Coninsx, who was previously heading the EU's delegation in Mexico.

The European Parliament is slated to have its elections next May, after which elected members who are strong supporters of the trade talks may no longer be around.

This would also mean changes to high-ranking officials within the European Commission. Ms. Coninsx said European Commission President **José Manuel Barroso**, for example, would finish his term as head of the union.

Meanwhile the EU's high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, **Catherine Ashton**, has said she would step down after her term expires in 2014.

In addition, "we will have a new president of the European Council," Ms. Coninsx said, adding that the current president, **Herman Van Rompuy**, is a very big supporter of Canada-EU ties.

Then there's **Karel de Gucht**, the current trade commissioner. "[He's] very much in favour; I don't know if he'll still be in the commission or not, he might be, but we don't know if it will be trade, it's all a big question mark," Ms. Coninsx said.

The European Council would nominate the European Commission president, for example, after the parliamentary elections. This would then go to the European Parliament for a vote.

"So the whole year 2014 is a big election year within the EU where [there will be] a lot of change and uncertainties," Ms. Coninsx said. The new leaders will likely also have other priorities and focus initially on getting a new team in place, she said.

Canadian political parties will be just as busy the following year with expected federal elections. To add to that, trade talks between the EU and the United States have also begun.

"They are also very important for the EU, and therefore I think it would be an interest of both Canada and the EU if we could finalize something which is nearly finalized," Ms. Coninsx said.

When asked about an Oct. 3 report in *La Presse* that suggested a deal could be signed this month, with Oct. 18 being a possible date, Ms. Coninsx said, "I would like to know their source."

"I don't know where this is coming from," she said. "It might be true or not, I don't know the source of that information."

Canada and the EU have also been negotiating a parallel political deal called the Strategic Partnership

Agreement, which would cover a wide range of the relationship and replace a 1976 framework. Those talks hit a snag because Canada had a problem with a clause in the deal that could lead to the suspension of the trade deal.

Ms. Coninsx said the two sides are still in talks on the political deal.

Alexandra Bugailiskis, who has been Canada's chief negotiator for the political deal, told the House foreign affairs committee in February 2012 that the goal was to wrap up the agreement that year.

Ms. Coninsx described the two ongoing negotiations as a "whole package," with talks being "quite well advanced."

The European envoy said the EU has 10 "strategic partners" around the world including Canada, Mexico, and the US. While the trade relationship gets a lot of attention, other aspects such as co-operation in eradicating land mines or the training of police officers and judges are not well known to the broad public, she said.

"It's something we have...in common and this is something I would like to advocate...to demonstrate its strengths, all the things we do together," Ms. Coninsx said.

"Also I see it as my task to give visibility to the EU, which does not always have a right impression or perception abroad," she said.

Ms. Coninsx said working with Canada in the Arctic is another priority for her.

Canadian contacts

Prior to her posting in Mexico, Ms. Coninsx was overseeing the unit for European and Latin American ties within the external relations department from 2004 to 2009.

She traveled to Ottawa four or five times during this period for meetings with Canadian officials to compare policies on Latin America and the Caribbean.



The European Union's ambassador to Canada, Marie-Anne Coninsx.

Before that she served as a minister-counsellor at the EU's delegation in Geneva and also in New York.

She has also worked as a staff member of several commissioners.

Ms. Coninsx, who is Belgian, studied law in her home country and said the most interesting course she took was on Europe's diplomatic history. It led her to study international relations at Cambridge University.

Ms. Coninsx said she has often been in contact with Canadian diplomats through her career. This included **Guillermo E. Rishchynski**, who was formerly posted as Canada's ambassador to Mexico during the time when Ms. Coninsx was heading the EU delegation there.

They often exchanged notes on the EU and Canada's work with Mexico on justice and security issues.

"He was a great colleague and I had a lot of contact with him, and it's my intention to inform him provided he doesn't know yet that I am here," she said with a laugh.

Touchdown in Canada

Ms. Coninsx said the credentials ceremony in Quebec City was an "impressive" one.

"It is I think for every ambassador a very important moment not only because then onwards you can start officially your functions, but it's a touching exercise and particularly also because the governor general pronounced some very nice words," she said.

Ms. Coninsx said she would like to visit other parts of Canada—a "huge task" given the size of the country.

She said she would also like to have the European ambassadors go on joint missions to the provinces and territories.

"It's a country which is very pleasant and easy to live in," she said. Ms. Coninsx said Canadians and her fellow diplomatic colleagues have received her very well.

She has been meeting with her European and non-European counterparts and had an informal meeting with Trade Minister **Ed Fast**.

"Everything that I've seen until now is very promising and positive."

Ms. Coninsx and her husband, **Kurt Schelter**, are both fans of winter sports.

"We are looking forward to the winter coming up to do some skiing, that's what we like," she said.

"But everybody tells us we have also to learn some skating; we're not so young anymore but we'll try in any case to do it," she said with a smile.

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OTTAWA Listings

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 9

Uganda celebrates its independence day. It gained independence from the UK in 1962. For information on any celebrations, please call the embassy at 613-789-7797.

Ottawa Economics Association Luncheon—Guest speaker is Mark Jaccard, who will discuss Climate Change-Canada's Contribution to a Global Tragedy of the Commons. 11:45 a.m., \$45 prepaid online; \$75 at door; non-members \$90. Fairmont Chateau Laurier, 1 Rideau St. Details and registration at cabe.ca.

Autumn—The Uruguayan Embassy presents an exhibition "Autumn" by Uruguayan artist Daniel Tomasini. 6:30-9:30 p.m. Exhibit runs until Oct. 13. Saint Brigid's Centre, 310 St. Patrick St.

Fire and Ashes—Former Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff discusses his new book with Craig Oliver, chief political correspondent, CTV News. Presented by The Ottawa International Writers Festival. 7 p.m., \$15-\$20. Southminster United Church, 15 Aylmer Ave. writersfestival.org

THURSDAY, OCT. 10

Fiji celebrates its national day. It gained independence from the UK in 1970.

Equatorial Guinea celebrates its national day. It gained independence from Spain in 1968.

FRIDAY, OCT. 11

Art of Pakistan—The High Commission of Pakistan presents the opening of "Art of Pakistan" featuring works by Sadequain and several contemporary Pakistani artists. 5:30-7:30 p.m. Continues until Oct. 13 (10 a.m.-6 p.m.). Jean Pigott Place, Ottawa City Hall, 110 Laurier Ave. W. 613-238-7881.

SATURDAY, OCT. 12

Celebration of Uganda's 51st Independence Anniversary—The Uganda Association of Ottawa presents an evening of Ugandan food, dance and music in celebration of Uganda's 51st Independence Anniversary. 6 p.m., \$25. Royal Canadian Legion Hall, 330 Kent St. 613-316-0767.

SUNDAY, OCT. 13

Parliamentary Associations—The Canadian Delegation to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe travels to Budva, Montenegro for fall meetings. Until Oct. 15. For more information, please visit www2.parl.gc.ca/iia.

TUESDAY, OCT. 15

Promoting Democracy: What Role for Emerging Powers?—This conference will examine what role the democratic emerging powers can play in promoting democracy beyond their own borders. It is co-organized by the Centre for International Policy Studies at the University of Ottawa, the German Development Institute and IDRC. Presented by the German Development Institute, in partnership with CIPS and the IDRC. Registration is required. Until Oct. 16. Free. Room 4004, Faculty of Social Sciences Bldg., 120 University Ave. To register, please contact Isabelle Karar by email at ikarar@uottawa.ca or by phone at 613-562-5800, ext. 2664 or ikarar@uottawa.ca.

Turn the Tide of AIDS in Africa—The Rideau Grandmothers and Shepard's Fashions present an evening of fun, fashion, and shopping. 6:30-8:30 p.m., \$25. Shepard's Fashions, 145 Train Yards Dr. Tickets available through felicity.garrard@gmail.com or sollyhutchison@hotmail.com; grandmotherscampaign.org.

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 16

Throne Speech—Gov. Gen. David Johnston will read the Throne Speech when Parliament returns after a summer break.

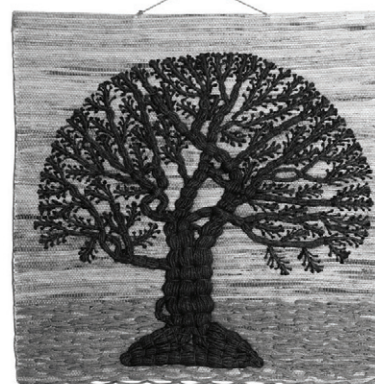
Iran: Challenges and Policies—CIC NCR presents a talk with John Mundy, former Canadian diplomat, and Thomas Juneau, UQAM. They will discuss "Iran: Challenges and Policies." 5:15 p.m. Rideau Room, Sheraton Hotel, 150 Albert St., Ottawa, Ont. Register to 613-903-4011 or ottawa@opencanada.org.

Meeting the Infrastructure Challenge: The Case for a New BRICS Development Bank—The CIGI Global Policy Forum is an exclusive, invitation-only series of talks offering authoritative analysis on policy-relevant issues affecting Canada and its place in the world. 5:30-7 p.m. Rideau Club Lounge, 99 Bank St., 15th Floor. cigionline.org/events

Ask Me More About Brecht—The Austrian Cultural Forum presents Ask Me More About Brecht, featuring conversations between Hans Eisler and Hans Bunge on Bertolt Brecht, a multi-media presentation with music and a dramatic reading. 6 p.m. Free. Rideau Club, 99 Bank St., 15th Floor. RSVP to ottawa-kfa@bmeia.gv.at.

Embassy Listings is edited by Alia Heward at 613-232-5952, ext. 200. Information regarding events should be emailed with the subject line 'Embassy Listings' by Friday at 5 p.m., in a paragraph with all the relevant details. listings@embassynews.ca

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