

EMBASSY

The EU's top diplomat to depart

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Travelling to the 2010 G8 summit in Muskoka was a “fantastic” experience for **Matthias Brinkmann**, the outgoing ambassador for the European Union Delegation in Ottawa.

“I remember going to Muskoka in helicopters and then flying back into Toronto...between the high rises,” Mr. Brinkmann said shortly after speaking with a group of journalists on July 17.

“[It was not] scary, very safe,” he told *Embassy* with a laugh while sitting in a conference room at the delegation's downtown Ottawa office.

The European diplomat leaves Ottawa at the end of month to take on another ambassadorial job in Iceland.

Mr. Brinkmann's Ottawa posting matched with the ongoing Canada-EU trade talks. The two sides held their first round of talks toward a Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement soon after his arrival.

Since then it's been a flurry of activity, with negotiators and officials travelling between Ottawa and Brussels.

‘Unimaginable’ not to seal a deal

European officials were in Ottawa last week hashing out the deal further.

There have been several missed projected dates for the talks to wrap up. But Mr. Brinkmann said negotiators and officials on both sides share the same view: the deal will be done.

“So much has been invested in that and the benefits are so obvious for both sides, that it's also unimaginable that this would not be concluded,” he said.

“I was of course hoping that we could conclude this negotiation within the four years, but...normally such negotiations, they take a long time.”

While the two sides haven't yet sealed a deal, it doesn't diminish their achievement, he said.

“We have come a long way and now it's the fine tuning in the end that always drags out.”

Outstanding issues include agriculture, services, and public procurement, he told reporters.

Mr. Brinkmann said there's very little left to sort out on public procurement.

Of intellectual property protection for pharmaceuticals, he said: “I think we know where we land with that.”

The Europeans are looking for an extension of patents and data protection for pharmaceuticals, and for the right for brand-name drug companies to appeal decisions when patent challenges appear before the court. This has been one sticking point among some stakeholders in Canada.

When asked whether he was pleased with where the IP issue is landing, Mr. Brinkmann said: "Well you have to compromise; it's a give and take on both sides on all issues."

But he called the deal a "win-win situation" for both sides.

He spoke of the dairy sector, for example, where the Europeans are looking for more access to the Canadian market.

"If the variety of dairy products, cheeses and so on, increases in Canada, it will lift consumption overall. So even if our quota [increases], it will not hurt the Canadian dairy producers," he argued.

He said the EU was very encouraged that the provinces were also at the table during the CETA talks, which was something the Europeans wanted.

"The provinces are fully aware at their government level what's going on, so on that side we have no fears or apprehension, that's very positive," he said.

Meanwhile, many analysts were hoping Canada and the EU would sign a deal before the latter started talks with the United States, for fear of the Canadian deal being put on the backburner. But Mr. Brinkmann tried to pacify that concern.

He said that while the EU is focusing on a deal with the US, there's very little left to sort through on the Canadian deal.

About 60 people travelled to Washington for the start of the EU-US talks on July 8.

"I think we will have first the agreement with Canada, and then we will conclude with US," he said. "I don't think that this will drag out indefinitely or that we are waiting for the US."

Political agreement also unfinished

Canada and the EU have 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.

The two sides had reached a stumbling block since the Europeans wanted all their other deals with Canada, including the trade agreement when signed, to fall under this political pact.

"Our idea was to have a framework agreement like the old one where there's a certain hierarchy, but a certain oversight by the Strategic Partnership Agreement on all the agreements," said Mr. Brinkmann.

Foreign Minister **John Baird** confirmed May 30 that Canada has a problem with a clause in the deal that could mean the suspension of the trade agreement.

"Our approach has been and still is that we want it like that," Mr. Brinkmann said on July 17.

Asked whether Canada was now willing to do this, Mr. Brinkmann said: "They are still working on wording, so to make it maybe more palatable."

Explaining 'a strange animal'

Mr. Brinkmann said that it's an uphill struggle for him and his European colleagues around the world to explain the EU and how it works.

"The European Union is a strange animal," he said with a chuckle.

But he said it was the best thing that ever happened to Europe. Together, the states are strong and can influence world events, he said.

"I think it's also good for Canada that the EU is there, because we have the same values, we have the same agenda on the international scene."

Mr. Brinkmann said they weren't happy with the way the economic crisis was portrayed in Canada.

"When you go to Europe...I mean, life goes on," he said. "There are a handful of countries that have public debt problems...but we are 28 of us and a large number of those are thriving."

Raising double twin teens in Ottawa

Mr. Brinkmann and his wife **Madeleine** plan to come back to Canada, but as tourists. One of his daughters, **Louise**, will be staying in Montreal to study.

Mr. Brinkmann has two sets of fraternal twins—Louise and her twin brother **Carl**, and **Hans** and **Josephine**.

He said his children's years here included high school exams and getting their driving and boat licences.

"Ottawa is really a nice city [in which] to bring up a family," he said, adding that his children went to Lycée Claudel, a private school that follows the French curriculum.

"They made many friends and we made many friends here and so we are very sad to leave, but that's diplomatic life," Mr. Brinkmann said.

Mr. Brinkmann's wife was active on the diplomatic scene, attending receptions and networking events for spouses.

Mr. Brinkmann travelled all the provinces and territories and also did the Northern Tour, taking him the furthest north he's ever been.

"That's very good and necessary to do that to understand the country and the vastness of the country," he said.

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