

Canada and the EU are natural partners

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Few partners have as much in common as the European Union and Canada. Our shared desire to promote and defend freedom and democracy, the social protection our societies offer, our rejection of the death penalty and our belief in championing human rights globally are just some of the areas of convergence. What started out in the 1950s as a mainly economic relationship has evolved over the years to become a close strategic partnership. Canada was the first industrialized country to sign an agreement with the EU — then known as the European Economic Community — in 1976, and the same year the EU opened one of its first overseas delegations in Ottawa.

The range of issues we now co-operate on is extensive, from the environment and energy to transport and education. Our economic ties are strong and growing. Two-way trade in goods between Canada and the EU reached \$78.7 billion in 2011 and the [EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement](#) (CETA), currently under negotiation, will further boost our bilateral trade and investment flows. The EU is Canada's second most important trading partner after the U.S. and Canada the EU's 11th most important. In my first EU job, as trade commissioner, I launched EU-Canada trade talks, knowing that a bilateral agreement has the potential to boost commerce considerably and benefit both our economies. Now, as European leaders deal with the challenges facing the Euro and Canada seeks a path through the global economic slowdown, an EU-Canada deal will be all the more important.

Internationally, too, Canada and the EU have found common causes. We have both been among the strongest supporters of

the United Nations. We have joined forces to mitigate the impact of landmines worldwide; since the entry into force in 1997 of the [Mine Ban Treaty](#), known as the Ottawa Convention, the EU has committed \$2.2 billion in support of the convention. We share a concern about the purposes of Iran's nuclear program; European and Canadian sanctions against Iran aimed at kick-starting nuclear talks have been carefully co-ordinated.

The creation of the European External Action Service, the EU's diplomatic arm, which I oversee, now provides an opportunity to broaden our relationship. We are already working hard to upgrade our co-operation in a number of areas.

Our first task is to conclude the three major agreements already under negotiation: the CETA, the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) and the Passenger Name Record Agreement (PNR). Given our shared values and common interests we should seize the opportunity to expand and diversify our network of trade and economic relations, opening up the possibility for a wider free-trade area to emerge between the EU and NAFTA one day in the future.

Second, there is potential to intensify our multilateral and bilateral foreign policy co-operation at all levels, not least in the field. Canada is already a regular and highly valued participant in the EU's civilian and military missions overseas, and is the only country outside Europe regularly to participate in EU electoral observation missions around the world. Taking advantage of the Strategic Partnership Agreement we are now negotiating, I want to build further on that solid platform of co-operation as, together, we face the challenges of democratization, reform and sustainable development in the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere.

The Arctic is a third area where we have strong common interests. Several EU members are Arctic states, and the Sami,

the only indigenous people in the EU, live in the High North. The EU contributes significant sums to polar research and was one of the major supporters of the [International Polar Year](#). I recently travelled to northern Scandinavia to underline the EU's Arctic engagement and believe that there is considerable scope for EU-Canadian co-operation on a range of Arctic issues, especially during Canada's chairmanship of the Arctic Council. The EU has an important contribution to make to the future well-being of the people in the Arctic, which is one of the reasons why we are seeking to become a permanent observer in that organization.

The strongest kind of international relations are those that are rooted in history, supported by common values and nurtured by similar interests. That describes the Canadian-European relationship perfectly.

Canada and the EU are natural partners and I will aim to make our partnership even stronger in the years to come.

Catherine Ashton is the EU's high representative for foreign affairs and security policy and vice-president of the European Commission.