

Canada says no date set to sign EU free trade deal

Mon Jan 28, 2013 2:26pm EST

* Canada, EU deal was supposed to be done in 2012

* Two sides apart on agricultural issues, procurement

By Joe Brock

ABUJA, Jan 28 (Reuters) - Free trade talks between Canada and the European Union are progressing but there is no end date for an deal that was supposed to have been finished by the end of 2012, Canada's Trade Minister Ed Fast said on Monday.

Canada, keen to diversify its exports away from the United States, says a deal with the European Union would increase two-way trade by 20 percent. The talks started in 2009.

Officials and industry sources say several sensitive matters remain to be settled, including access for agricultural goods, opening up procurement markets and the extension of pharmaceutical patents.

"I have not committed to a firm time line. We're not going to be rushed into a deal that doesn't serve Canadians," Fast said during a visit to Nigeria, where he was building bilateral trade ties with Africa's biggest oil producer.

"We continue to make significant progress in addressing the handful of remaining issues, which are the most serious and difficult ones to overcome," he said.

Fast said he would at some point meet with EU Trade Commissioner Karel De Gucht, likely in Ottawa, but no date had been set for that meeting. European officials say such a meeting is likely to take place on February 6-7.

Negotiators have struggled over investment protection, agriculture,

public procurement and intellectual property, particularly regarding [pharmaceuticals](#), trade experts say.

De Gucht told Reuters last week that the EU was ready to start talking about a free trade deal with the United States. European diplomats say this could give Canada further impetus to wrap up its own deal with the EU quickly before the bloc turns its attention to what would be a much richer agreement.

A free trade agreement with Canada, the EU's 12th-largest trading partner, would be the bloc's first with a country from the G7 group of major developed economies.

For Canada, it would be the most significant since the North American Free Trade Agreement with the United States and [Mexico](#) in 1994 and an opportunity to diversify exports away from the United States. The EU is its second-largest trading partner. (Reporting by Joe Brock; editing by Ron Askew)