

Canada-EU trade deal stalls at G20

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The Canadian government's hopes of signing a sweeping new trade deal with the European Union hit what appears to be a significant snag following a meeting of the senior political leadership of both sides.

Generally trade negotiators leave the last few remaining hurdles until the end, meaning the hardest decisions are left to be made by political leaders.

That opportunity came and went Friday in St. Petersburg, where Prime Minister Stephen Harper met with European Commission President José Manuel Barroso on the sidelines of the G20 leaders' summit. Mr. Harper would have also had the opportunity to speak with other European leaders throughout the summit.

Mr. Harper said Canada and the EU have made considerable progress during the years of negotiations, but described a conclusion of talks in terms of "if" rather than when.

"We still have some very significant gaps that have not been bridged and that is the reality of the situation," he said Friday at the end of the two-day summit of G20 leaders. "As I've said all along, we want to see a deal. This would first of all be the biggest trade deal in Canadian history if we could get it done, but we've got to get it done in a way that in our opinion, and the opinion of all the provinces, which are our partners in this, serve the broader interests of Canadians and the Canadian economy and we are not there as of now."

The Prime Minister did not specify what the remaining issues are, however agricultural import quotas have been cited in the past as a roadblock. For months, European officials have been insisting that a deal is very close and could be reached at any time.