Critics point out water not excluded in EU trade deal

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Leaked documents show Canadian negotiators trying to exclude telecommunications and some agricultural sectors from a free-trade deal with the European Union, but not water.

This absence has critics up in arms over the potential privatization of municipal water supplies - as has become common across the Atlantic.

The documents were obtained by Quebec-based civil society group RQIC and show the areas federal and provincial governments had hoped to carve out of any final deal.

The list was presented to the Europeans in October as a "first offer" from which negotiators will have gone back and forth ironing out their final positions.

The Conservative government has been toying with the idea of allowing easing restrictions on foreign investment in telecommunications for years, though it has not yet done so.

At the same time, the government's decision to do away with the Canadian Wheat Board's monopoly last year has prompted some to wonder whether the country's supply-managed egg, dairy and poultry sectors might be next.

Dan Ciuriak, a former economist at the Department of International Trade, said their inclusion means the government wants to keep things the way they are.

The fact water wasn't included, however, means it won't be protected.

"If it's not mentioned, it's free," he said. "It can be liberalized."

Public-private partnerships are common in Europe when it comes to water management, but their application in a number of countries, particularly Central and South America, have prompted major concerns about people being denied access because they can't pay.

Stuart Trew, trade campaigner for the Council of Canadians, said by not including water in the documents, it ties municipalities' hands for the future. "A very simple (mention in the list) would have at least safeguarded municipalities in the future should existing privatizations or future public-private partnerships go

awry," he said.

"Even those stop gaps are not included."