

EU Official Warns Canada May Lose Priority in Trade Talks

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By Nirmala Menon

A senior EU official had a bit of a warning for Canadian officials about the state of trade talks between the two parties: act fast to secure a deal or risk losing the Europeans' attention as they get busy on trade talks with the U.S.

Christian Leffler, who was in Ottawa briefly Tuesday to meet with senior Canadian officials, told the Wall Street Journal that Canada and the EU are "very close, we think, to the finishing line," in terms of inking a trade pact. "I think it would certainly be possible to wrap it up in time for the G-8 meeting," he said. The G-8 Summit, which will bring together the leaders of the world's biggest economies in Northern Ireland, is set for June 17-18.

But Mr. Leffler also said the EU will be launching negotiations with the U.S. in late June or July and is about to start talks with Japan, meaning Canada will get less attention if a deal isn't concluded soon.

"It's obvious that ultimately, you have to prioritize the allocation of time," and "there will be less time available to make that final push with Canada," Mr. Leffler said.

Canada and the EU have been negotiating a trade deal for almost four years and [missed the deadline](#) to reach a pact by the end of 2012.

It should be noted that Mr. Leffler isn't overseeing the EU's

trade talks with Canada—that's the responsibility of Karel De Gucht, the EU Trade Commissioner. But as managing director overseeing the Americas in the EU's diplomatic corps, his words carry weight.

Mr. Leffler's overall message about the trade talks with Canada was still upbeat. He told the Wall Street Journal that he's confident the parties will reach a deal. "We think it's perfectly do-able and we would not like to see a situation with a partner as important as Canada where after all the effort that has gone into this from both sides, we don't make the final mile," he said.

A spokesman for Mr. De Gucht said he had nothing to add to Mr. Leffler's comments.

A spokesman for Canadian Trade Minister Ed Fast said negotiators are meeting frequently "to explore solutions to the remaining issues." Chief negotiators will meet again in Brussels from May 6-8, the spokesman said.

"In the current global economic climate, an ambitious trade agreement between the EU and Canada would be of significant benefit to both Canada and the European Union," Mr. Fast's spokesman said.