

EU's De Gucht coming to Ottawa for CETA endgame talks

By [BJ Siekierski](#) | Feb 4, 2013 3:00 am | | 0 Comments

EU Trade Commissioner Karel De Gucht is coming to Ottawa this week, and is expected to return to Brussels with the Canada-European Union trade agreement (CETA) negotiations concluded, sources say.

Before De Gucht comes to Ottawa for what should be the final round of horse-trading, he'll be stopping in **Washington** on February 5 to continue the push for the launch of EU-U.S. negotiations.

It's those negotiations that have a lot of CETA proponents **worried**.

The narrative goes like this: If *they* start while the CETA crawls along uncompleted — with Canada refusing to budge on key EU demands — the EU's interest in CETA might wane. There'll be a bigger fish to fry.

While it's a narrative that makes perfect sense, there's another, more tangible one that has yet to get any attention.

It looks as though Mauro Petriccione, the EU's chief CETA negotiator, will be taking on a new role as early as March — as chief EU-Japan negotiator.

Though iPolitics tried several times to get this confirmed by Commissioner De Gucht's office, an initial promise to "look into it" was never followed up with an answer.

But sources close to the CETA negotiations told iPolitics that Petriccione's appointment at chief EU-Japan negotiator, while not yet public knowledge, isn't a new development, either.

“My understanding is that that’s been in the works for a quite a while,” one said, adding that the timing wouldn’t necessarily be a problem because the first few rounds of any negotiations are mostly about feeling each other out.

“At a practical level, it’s not unreasonable to think that someone like Mauro could handle the conclusion of one and the launch of another concurrently.”

Furthermore, De Gucht’s presence in Ottawa this week suggests the remaining sensitive decisions will have to be made at the ministerial level, anyway.

The bigger problem with Petriccione’s impending additional workload is the “optics”, they said.

“I think there are a lot of people who would like to wrap this up before anyone has to take on another major project.”