

Free trade talks continue between Canada and EU

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OTTAWA — Canada and the European Union have entered the sixth round of trade talks this week for what could be the largest free trade agreement since NAFTA.

But critics from both sides of the Atlantic are protesting outside the EU Headquarters in Brussels to voice their concerns the deal will be neither good for the environment nor the economy.

The Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, which has largely gone unreported, has been in the works since October 2009 and International Trade Minister Peter Van Loan has said negotiations could be wrapped up by the end of this year.

He has praised the potential deal as the centrepiece of the Conservatives' "ambitious" free trade agenda.

"As Canada's second largest trading partner and the world's single wealthiest market, the European Union holds great potential for Canadian workers, entrepreneurs and businesses," Van Loan wrote in an e-mail Tuesday. "Canada is now negotiating an agreement with the European Union that will be broader than even NAFTA. That's why our provinces and territories are participating in the negotiations in areas that fall within their jurisdiction.

"Together, we are negotiating a trade agreement that will secure access for Canadian companies doing business with Europe and create jobs and stability for Canadian workers."

While Canada reportedly is also keen to open up labour mobility as part of the deal, the 27 European nations want open access to Canadian government procurements, including provincial and even municipal contracts.

According to the government, a 2008 study found Canada and EU two-way trade could increase 20% with a free trade agreement, and Canada's economy stands to gain upwards of \$12 billion annually from such a deal.

But not everyone is happy with the idea of a free trade agreement between Canada and the EU.

Several Canadian and European groups are protesting the talks this week, including the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

According to the Council of Canadians, opening up trade with Europe would wreak havoc on the environment by increasing European investment in Alberta's

oilsands. Also, so called investor-to-state dispute provisions in the deal would allow oil companies themselves to sue the Canadian government if they try to impose stricter environmental rules that cut into oil profits.

"The economic benefits of CETA have been oversold and the environmental costs ignored by the Canadian and European governments," stated Stuart Trew, the Council of Canadians' trade campaigner, in a news statement. "The trade deal on the table leaves little room for badly needed climate change policies. In fact it will undoubtedly increase greenhouse gas emissions from mining, energy and transportation. Without a major re-write, Europeans and Canadians must reject CETA."

The Council of Canadians is calling for the trade talks to be postponed to allow for a public debate.