

Hollande in Canada: Desmarais on why we should ratify CETA

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French President Francois Hollande's visit to Canada, starting Sunday, provides a good moment to remind ourselves of the importance of close ties with Europe, and in particular, why we must ratify the Canada-EU trade agreement.

The successful conclusion of free-trade talks with the 28 nations that make up the European Union marks a historic opportunity for Canada to renew and deepen ties with some of our best and oldest friends. Like no other event in at least a generation, CETA could play a powerful role in nurturing those common values and interests. Many Canadians identify closely with Europe. Our shared values extend from democracy and a respect for the rule of law, to a generous social safety net and universal health care.

around the world, foreign aid and peacekeeping. We are natural allies on a host of other foreign policy and defence issues. Row upon row of headstones in French, Belgian and Dutch cemeteries attest to our shared sacrifice in two world wars. Our relationship has evolved into a close strategic partnership. We now collaborate on a broad sweep of issues, from the environment and energy to transport and education.

Meanwhile, our commercial ties are indispensable to Canada's economic well-being. The EU is Canada's second-biggest trading and investment partner after the US. Two-way trade reached almost \$90-billion last year. European firms – including such household names as Royal Dutch Shell, Siemens, Michelin and Glencore Xstrata – have invested more than \$160-billion in Canada, while Canadian direct investment in the EU reached \$172-billion in 2011.

Even so, we must acknowledge that Canada has relegated relations with Europe to the back-burner since the mid-1980s in favour of closer ties with the rest of North America and Asia. CETA will breathe new life into our relationship with Europe. It will give Canadian businesses of all sizes preferential access to a market of 503 million consumers, 14

times our own population. Europe's current difficulties, deep as they may be, cannot mask the continent's vast long-term potential for Canadian exporters and investors.

Furthermore, CETA is the EU's first comprehensive economic partnership with a Western developed nation, giving Canada a significant "first mover" advantage over the U.S. and other rivals. A reinvigorated partnership with the Europeans is sure to go far beyond commercial ties.

The EU and Canada can still do more to further strengthen our bilateral co-operation. Together, Canada and the EU can address issues of energy security, energy efficiency and innovation. We can also work together in developing rules to address global climate change.

Canadians now must work with President Hollande and other European leaders to achieve swift ratification and implementation of the agreement on both sides of the Atlantic. CETA is the beginning of a new and prosperous chapter in the Canada-Europe relationship – one that will make all of us more secure in a challenging world.

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