

N.L.'s Danny Williams 'nearly derailed' Canada-EU trade talks: Official

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ST. JOHN'S, N.L. — Newfoundland's reticence about Ottawa-led trade talks with the European Union "nearly derailed" negotiations, a diplomatic official says.

"I have to be perfectly frank with you: the statement by (Premier) Danny Williams when he refused to sign up to the Council of the Federation statement nearly derailed the entire process," Anya Oram, charge d'affaires for the European Commission delegation in Ottawa, told the St. John's Telegram Monday.

On Feb. 20, Premier Danny Williams said his government was not willing to support the negotiations because of concerns that his province's issues — including EU opposition to the Canadian seal hunt — may not be handled properly by the federal government.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper was in Prague last week to formally launch trade talks with European officials.

The kickoff was complicated by a European parliament vote to ban Canadian seal products. But Harper said Canada will not let the sealing issue "contaminate" trade negotiations.

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