

Stephen Harper takes fight for free-trade deal with EU to France

France balking at Canadian demand to increase beef and pork sales to Europe. Earlier, Stephen Harper slams Iran, North Korea in rare speech to British Parliament.

By: [Les Whittington](#) Ottawa Bureau reporter, Published on Thu Jun 13 2013

PARIS—Prime Minister Stephen Harper is taking his quest for a free-trade deal with the European Union to France, where he is holding meetings with French leaders said to be posing a key roadblock in the four-year-old negotiations.

Harper, who has a big political stake in a trade pact with Europe, had dinner Thursday night with French Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault and will sit down Friday with President François Hollande.

The talks on a Canada-EU trade liberalization agreement have reached a critical stage after an unexpectedly long series of talks stretching back to 2009. France, along with Ireland, is said to be trying to protect farmers' interests on the domestic front by balking at a key Canadian demand to greatly increase beef and pork sales to Europe. The issue is reportedly one of the last large issues that remains unresolved in the Canada-EU negotiations.

Pushing for completion of the trade deal, which would be the biggest such pact signed by Canada since NAFTA, is a priority for Harper, who needs to land a major agreement of this kind to justify his government's much-promoted strategy of spurring economic growth through expanded exports.

Earlier, in London, Harper delivered an address to British parliamentarians but the special moment may have been marred a bit afterwards when Baroness D'Souza, speaker of the House of Lords, raised the mess back in Canada's Senate in Ottawa.

Thanking Harper for his speech, D'Souza induced a chorus of chuckles from British Lords and MPs when she said the upper chambers of Parliament in both countries are under pressure to

reform.

“The future of both chambers is an issue that often preoccupies commentators and politicians on either side of the Atlantic. And I know that this is a matter of particular interest to you,” she said, addressing Harper. But she added there “are no easy solutions” to Senate reform.

In his address, Harper evoked the ideals of Winston Churchill and [Margaret Thatcher](#) as he stressed the need for shared vigilance in a world threatened by the “monsters” of terrorism.

Striking a combative note, Harper slammed Iran and North Korea while defending Israel, saying “the moral relativism in so much of world affairs” is just a shelter for anti-Semitism.

“This is a profoundly malevolent regime that threatens us all,” he said of Iran, urging global leaders to remain steadfast in opposition to Iran’s attempt to acquire nuclear weapons.

The world faces a “grotesque dilemma” in Syria, Harper stated during an address in the Palace of Westminster.

“Decent people agree that (President Bashar Assad) must go,” he said.

But Harper, who has opposed arming the forces trying to oust Assad, said the extremist nature of some of the rebels “cannot be ignored or wished away.”

Above all, he told Members of Parliament and Lords, “Syria cannot be allowed to become another safe haven for the hydra-heads of terrorism.”

In a reference to the British soldier slain by Islamist radicals here last month, Harper said the monsters of terrorism “already lurk far too close to home.”

This has been seen “in the murder of Drummer (Lee) Rigby ... and the foiled plot in Canada to sabotage a VIA Rail express.”

He lauded the values of freedom and democracy shared by Canada and Britain and urged leaders to uphold these values with “the will and the capacity to act.”

The audience applauded enthusiastically when Harper noted Canada’s support for Britain’s claim to the Falkland Islands: “We have also clung jointly to our values in the South Atlantic, supporting the right of free people living on small islands to determine their own future.”

The wide-ranging, 28-minute address to more than a hundred Members of Parliament and Lords recounted the risks British and Canadian soldiers have shared from World War II to Libya.

“Britons and Canadians have pursued what is right in the world, often at great cost,” Harper said.

In a reference to former Libyan dictator Moammar Gadhafi, he said Canada and Britain had used military might to save Libya from “massive and imminent slaughter at the hands of the psychotic architect of the Lockerbie horror.” That recalled the terrorist bomb that brought down a Pan Am flight over Lockerbie, Scotland in 1988.

On the economic front, he said the world faces “shifts of economic dimensions” that will challenge western industrial nations. In an apparent reference to China, Harper said, “There are also, as there have always been, rising powers that do not share our values.”

He stressed the need for governments to live within their means and maximize economic potential through expanded trade with other nations. On this subject, he expressed hope that the bogged down negotiations on a Canada-European Union free-trade deal can be wrapped up successfully. And Harper thanked British Prime Minister David Cameron for his support in the negotiations.

A handful of environmentalists opposed to oilsands development tried to protest Harper’s appearance at Westminster. One woman who found her way into the halls of the Parliament buildings shouted: “Harper, Climate Criminal.” She was led away by security guards.

The Associated Press reported that police arrested two men and a woman for trespassing on a protected site in Parliament, and that two others were arrested outside.