

Canada benefits from free-trade: Execs

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The majority of business leaders say Canada has benefited from free-trade agreements and reaching an accord with the European Union should be a government priority, according to a new poll.

More than 90% of business leaders agreed the country has done well out of free-trade accords, with 37% saying there is also an urgency to examine our trade relationship with China, according to the survey by business law firm Miller Thomson.

"These results are a testament to how much Canadian businesses are paying attention to markets beyond our borders," said Gerald Courage, chair of Miller Thomson. "As a national business law firm, we can attest to just how important the issue of free trade has become to our domestic and increasingly international client base."

The government is entering the final stages of a comprehensive free trade pact with the EU, which it estimates will give a \$12 billion boost to the economy by 2014. Talks are also ongoing with countries ranging from India to South Korea.

Support for an agreement with the EU was strongest in British Columbia at 72% and Alberta at 69%, while Quebec recorded the lowest level of approval at 44%.

Views towards free-trade accords also varied with the size of the company, with 74% of businesses with an annual revenue of between \$1 billion to \$5 billion in favour, while that number fell to 67% among companies with revenue of less than \$10 million.

The best opportunities for trade were seen with Germany, the U.K. and France, though Germany and the U.K. were also seen as the biggest threat to Canadian businesses.

Miller Thomson's survey polled 200 senior and C-level executives. With a sample of this size, the results are considered accurate to within +/- 6.9 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.