

Canada-EU trade deal: Don't count your chickens yet, Quebec says

By The Canadian Press

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QUEBEC - The new Quebec government says its support for a Canada-Europe free trade agreement is not yet certain and is warning that it should not be treated as a fait accompli.

The Parti Quebecois government said Wednesday that there are grey areas in the negotiation that need to be clarified before the province signs on.

The new minister responsible for the file, Jean-Francois Lisee, said in an interview that he's "moderately optimistic" that the province will eventually support the deal — but he has some concern about going too far in liberalizing certain industries.

The PQ government says it's particularly concerned about energy and cultural policy, along with some other economic sectors.

It is also critical of the level of transparency in the file and says too little information has filtered out from the negotiations. The PQ made that same criticism in opposition while confronting the previous government of Jean Charest, who was among the staunchest and earliest proponents of a Canada-EU deal.

The new provincial government is organizing an information session Friday in Montreal, where Lisee will update industry, union and civil-society groups on the negotiations.

The PQ was an early supporter of Canada-U.S. free trade in the 1980s but the current incarnation of the party, facing threats from smaller left-wing opponents, has positioned itself farther to the left.

Lisee's note of caution comes on the heels of optimistic talk from

Ottawa.

The federal trade minister, Ed Fast, said this week that a trade deal is achievable by year's end and that a conversation with Lisee had reassured him that the PQ government remained on side.