

Critics of Canada-EU trade ideological: Fast

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SEOUL - Critics of deepening economic ties to Europe are "ideologically opposed to free trade" and an "extremely vocal minority," said International Trade Minister Ed Fast.

In an interview with QMI Agency on Tuesday, the government's point man on trade said arguments used against a trade deal with Europe were proven wrong 25 years ago.

"The Canada-EU free trade negotiations - if they're successful - will be the most comprehensive and largest trade agreement Canada has signed since NAFTA," he said.

Critics of the deal include the New Democrats, who say deregulation provisions threaten Canada's public health care system.

They're also concerned drug prices could skyrocket if intellectual property rights on brand-name medication are extended as proposed by the EU.

Labour and civil society organizations have raised concerns that the Canada-EU deal would pose a threat to Canada's jobs and open the door to the privatization of water, as well.

They accuse the government of overstating the benefits of the deal and of failing to fully consult Canadians.

"They are the same arguments that were made 25 years ago when we negotiated the Canada-U.S. free trade agreement," said Fast.

"Today, Canada's culture is vibrant as ever, we've created hundreds of thousands of jobs, we still have full sovereignty over our water. We didn't

hollow out our economy - in fact our economy is stronger than ever."