

EU trade talks set to finish on time

By Laura Payton, [CBC News](#) Posted: Oct 6, 2011

Canada and the European Union are on track to finish negotiations by early 2012 on a wide-ranging free trade agreement, the lead Canadian negotiator told MPs Thursday.

Steve Verheul, who has led the talks on issues ranging from lowering tariffs to recognizing professional credentials to copyright law, says the negotiators are getting into the most intensive part of the talks as they reach the end.

"I think it's clear that we are in range of that [early 2012] deadline. We're very well advanced on the text of the agreement," Verheul told the House international trade committee.

"The negotiator on the EU side, as well as myself, both feel that we can certainly meet the target of early next year to finish the negotiations."

Verheul said it's always possible to get hung up on a particular issue and cause delays, but there's "a lot of momentum" behind the negotiations. He said they're more than halfway through the issues for negotiation and on the remaining issues they aren't far apart.

The agreement, known as the Comprehensive and Economic Trade Agreement, is meant to be the most wide-ranging trade deal ever negotiated. Canadian officials say it would mean a \$12-billion boost to the economy and create 80,000 jobs.

Opposition MPs peppered Verheul and International Trade Minister Ed Fast with questions about supply management, the system where dairy, egg and poultry farmers control the supply of product going into the market. Verheul and Fast denied supply management was up for negotiation, despite a desire by EU exporters to have better access to Canada.

'Sticky issues'

The trade talks started in May 2009, with initial research and discussions going back even longer. Since then, the EU has struggled with managing a debt crisis that could overwhelm the global economy.

NDP Trade critic Robert Chisholm said he's concerned about the impact of the EU's financial situation on the negotiations, but said Fast, his staff and EU representatives have all said they're confident it won't affect them.

"Everybody's pretty bullish. Everybody thinks we're just going to steam ahead and nothing's going to shake us from this," Chisholm said.

"I don't accept that. I think that there continue to be some sticky issues," he said, pointing to subjects like intellectual property rights and copyright.

Verheul said the EU negotiators want to see Canada update its copyright protection, a process the government has started by reintroducing a bill on the issue. Verheul said it doesn't do everything the Europeans would like, but he doesn't see it as a sticking point.

Fast told the committee the government won't sign a deal that's bad for Canada.

"I feel it's vitally important that Canadians understand the great benefits of this agreement and are not misled by those who fear monger and misrepresent the immense opportunities which a free trade agreement with the EU will open up with Canadians," Fast said.

Negotiators are meeting in Ottawa later this month for the next round of talks.