EU's De Gucht Tells Canada to Improve Free-Trade Offer

By Jonathan Stearns on February 21, 2013

European Union Trade Commissioner Karel De Gucht pressed Canada to offer the 27-nation EU more market access two weeks after his visit to Ottawa failed to seal a free-trade accord.

"What was on the table simply didn't please me, so I didn't make an agreement," De Gucht told the European Parliament's international trade committee today in Brussels. "They need to make additional steps and, if not, there will not be an agreement."

De Gucht had sought during his Feb. 6-7 visit to Ottawa to wrap up almost four years of negotiations on a free-trade deal. EU-Canada trade in merchandise was worth 52.5 billion euros ($69.2 billion) in 2011, while services commerce totaled 25.8 billion euros, according to the latest data from the European Commission, the bloc's executive arm.

A negotiated accord, which would need the approval of EU national governments and the bloc's Parliament, may end 97 percent of tariffs on EU-Canada goods trade at the entry into force and 99 percent after seven years. The sticking points have included Canadian access to the EU's beef and pork markets and European access to Canada's dairy market as well as to Canadian public-procurement contracts at the sub-federal level.

"On a number of issues they have to make additional steps,"

De Gucht said. "What was on the table is not enough. Very simple." He didn't elaborate.

Saying "we should only make an agreement when it's a good one," De Gucht pledged to continue talks with the Canadian government and didn't offer a precise outlook of the timing of any agreement. "I hope we can conclude those negotiations rather soon."