

German Chancellor Merkel Offers Support for Canada-EU free trade

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OTTAWA—Following talks with [Prime Minister Stephen Harper](#), German Chancellor [Angela Merkel](#) has promised to push for early completion of the gruelling negotiations for a [Canada-European Union free-trade pact](#).

“We feel very much committed to this; we want a speedy conclusion of this agreement,” Merkel said at a news conference after four hours of talks with Harper on Wednesday and Thursday.

While the negotiations are taking place between Canada and European Commission officials, Merkel — as head of Europe’s largest economy — has considerable clout and her endorsement of the proposed pact was considered valuable by the Harper government.

The free-trade talks, while partly finished, are bogged down on pharmaceutical patent rules, intellectual property rights and trade quotas. Harper would like to have the deal wrapped up by year-end but observers expect the negotiations to go into 2013.

Harper’s talks with Merkel appear to have been very cordial. And both reported that in their discussions they did not link German support for the free-trade deal with Canadian support for a special International Monetary Fund bailout plan for Europe.

Canada and the United States are the only G8 countries not to contribute to the \$450-billion (U.S.) fund. Harper has repeated

that Canada does not intend to change its mind about contributing to the fund, saying that European countries have “the capacity and the will” to solve the debt crisis that is destabilizing banks and governments of countries such as Italy, Spain and Greece. And Merkel said it would be “very wrong” to try to link the IMF bailout issue to Canada-European issues.

Echoing remarks by Finance Minister Jim Flaherty on Wednesday, Harper said more needs to be done by Europeans to end the economic chaos on the continent.

But he said he believes European leaders are committed to overcoming the financial troubles threatening the future of the 17-country eurozone. And he praised Merkel for seeking long-term solutions to the crisis rather than temporary fixes.

“One of the things I appreciate about Chancellor Merkel’s leadership is the willingness, including at times of urgency and stress, to not just find any solution but to find correct and good solutions,” Harper said. He added that Europe needs long-term solutions that reduce government indebtedness, improve overall economic efficiency, and do not reward countries for bad fiscal performance.

Merkel met with Harper on Wednesday evening at his summer residence at Harrington Lake, Que. On Thursday she made a courtesy call on Gov-Gen. David Johnston at Rideau Hall. After more meetings with Harper, the news conference and a luncheon on Parliament Hill, Merkel was scheduled to fly to Halifax, where she visits Dalhousie University and will preside over the signing of a research partnership between Canadian and German scientists.