

MEPs favour EU-Canada trade deal, but worry about seals, tar sand oil and asbestos

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Plenary sessions

Whilst welcoming progress in negotiations for a Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), between the EU and Canada, MEPs nonetheless voiced concerns about seal products, tar sands, intellectual property rights and public procurement in a resolution adopted by a large majority on Wednesday.

The CETA would be the most comprehensive trade agreement that either side has ever negotiated, and includes chapters not only on trade, but also on investment and intellectual property rights. MEPs from most political groups welcomed progress in negotiating the agreement with such an important trading partner for the EU.

Seals, tar sands and asbestos

Parliament nonetheless raised some potential concerns. One was the environmental impact of extracting oil from tar sands, due to its high CO2 emissions and its local impact on biodiversity. Another was serious harm to the health of workers mining asbestos, the processing and use of which is already banned in the EU. Thirdly, MEPs hoped that the conflict concerning the EU's ban on seal product imports could be solved amicably, and that Canada's request for a WTO dispute settlement panel on the EU ban would not impede the CETA negotiations. They specifically called on the Commission to remain firm on the EU ban, and voiced their strong hope that Canada would withdraw its WTO challenge before the European Parliament has to vote on ratifying the CETA.

Canada's federal structure, intellectual property rights

Canada's federal structure also poses some difficulties for MEPs. The resolution notes that whilst the federal government is conducting the negotiations, Canada's provinces and territories will be responsible for implementing any agreement, for instance on opening up public procurement processes. It therefore encourages the provinces and territories to "synchronise policies and procedures" and considers that "a successful negotiation should include explicit commitments from provincial and territorial governments."

On intellectual property rights (IPR), MEPs argue that strict protection must be extended to trademarks, patents and geographical indications, but add that this should not hamper the production of generic medicines.

Parliament is also unhappy that the European Commission had asked that investment be included in its negotiating brief without first waiting for Parliament to adopt its position on EU investment policy in general.