



Geneva WATCH

An overview of the bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral trade negotiations

Charles Akande, Editor

CETA's Timeline Clarified Amid Concerns

Canada's Trade Minister, Chrystia Freeland, joined EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmström to discuss the Canada-EU Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) with European business stakeholders, the European Parliament, trade unions, and civil society in Bratislava (Slovakia) the afternoon of Sept 22nd.

Sources in Bratislava stressed that a number of EU member states remain concerned about the signing of the Canada-EU agreement this fall, thus the need to address, in full, issues such as investment dispute settlement mechanism (to ensure it operates in a truly independent manner), environmental protection, and public services.

Regarding public services, the agreement provides "the full legal certainty that we all want," Malmström said. "Public authorities – local, regional, and national – will keep full freedom to organize public services as they wish. There is no obligation on anyone to privatize any service, anywhere. And there is nothing stopping an authority from bringing a privatized service back into public control if they wish to, after an election," she assured.

On labor rights and environmental protection, Canada and the EU commit to the most important International Labor Organization and United Nations conventions on these issues, the EU Trade Commissioner added.

On the issue of investment protection, the two sides worked hard to find a better way of dealing with the problem, she said, applauding the Trudeau government's willingness to engage with EU,

despite the fact that the agreement was already closed, in order to modify these provisions.

The outcome of the Bratislava discussion on CETA will take the form of an "interpretative declaration" which will be developed by both Canadian and EU representatives in the coming days. EU officials say member-states do not want this to be a lengthy affair.

The declaration would seek to reassure concerned member states, including Belgium, Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Slovenia, that the accord will ensure that concerns on issues, such as investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) and environmental protection are properly interpreted and addressed.

"CETA is the best trade agreement the EU has ever negotiated. It will benefit consumers, workers and entrepreneurs across Europe and in Canada. And it will demonstrate that Europe and Canada mean what we say, when we say we want a trade policy that is progressive and upholds," Malmström stressed.

A number of EU member states have entered, or are about to enter, an electoral period which is why some countries are being vocal on both CETA and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP – a proposed trade agreement between the European Union and the United States). This is the case of Germany, and the Netherlands, European sources explained.

"CETA is CETA. It's not TTIP. It's with a partner, Canada, that is close to us in many ways, historically and in terms of shared values. Their views on how to regulate economic activity for public policy purposes are very close to the ones we have here in Europe," Malmström declared.

The so-called binding declaration will most probably be submitted to the EU committee of permanent representatives (at the ambassadorial level) for their approval at their October 12th meeting.

An extraordinary council of EU Trade Ministers will be scheduled on October 18th to adopt the declaration before the October 27th signing ceremony at the Canada-EU Summit.

Geneva Watch is published by Dairy Farmers of Canada, Chicken Farmers of Canada, Egg Farmers of Canada, Turkey Farmers of Canada and Canadian Hatching Egg Producers to report on the various events occurring in Geneva, particularly on the WTO negotiations on agriculture.

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