

I n t e r v i e w w i t h

James K. Bartleman

Canada's Ambassador to the European Union

Canada World View

Mr. Bartleman, could you describe Canada-European Union relations in the broader context of Canadian foreign policy?

Mr. Bartleman

Relations between Canada and Europe have a long history. We share a similar culture and values, and very often we hold common ideas on a host of major international issues. That explains why Europe has always had an important place in Canada's relations with the world.

About the European Union specifically, I should note that in 1976 Canada was the first developed country outside Europe to conclude a Framework Agreement for Commercial and Economic Co-operation with what was then called the European Communities. And in 1996 our relations reached a new high with the signing of a Joint Political Declaration and Action Plan, which further strengthened our ties in all areas of political activity. In 2001 we are celebrating the 25th anniversary of our relations with the European Union. Through the years we have made significant progress. This is a good time for us to think over the current state of our relations with the EU, and where they are headed.

Canada World View

Do you think that we need to re-assess our relations with Europe?

Mr. Bartleman

It's more a matter of adjusting them. Our relations have always been excellent and they will remain so. However, there have been big, ongoing changes over the last 10 to 15 years. On the political and economic front, Canada must take into account new international realities. We are working to achieve the Free Trade Area of the Americas by 2005, and the EU is debating key questions for its future, such as enlarging its membership, institutional reform and the introduction of the euro. But while focussing on our own continent, we must not allow our historic transatlantic links to weaken and must not slow the deepening of our relations with the EU. They offer many reciprocal advantages.

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Canada World View

How do you expect our economic and commercial relations with the EU to develop in the future?

Mr. Bartleman

We are living now in a time of economic and commercial globalization. For many years until recently the issue of security came first, but now things have changed. The threat of major conflict has lessened in Europe over the last few years, and economic prosperity is the EU's leading concern. Canada must position itself as a close partner of EU member countries. In this context, I am convinced that our respective economies have everything to gain from freer trade between the NAFTA and EU countries. It's also because of our shared interest in trade liberalization that we are working together within the World Trade Organization.

Canada World View

In your opinion, what is the biggest challenge Canada must meet in its trade relations with the EU?

Mr. Bartleman

Canada and the EU benefit from vigorous economic and commercial relations. It's true that we face some trade barriers that are a source of frustration for Canadian exporters.

Nevertheless, the dialogue is open and we are making constant progress in this area. For instance, we have just gained access to European markets for Canadian ice wines.

Our biggest challenge is the struggle against stereotypes and preconceptions, on both sides. Canada certainly has an excellent image in Europe but it is not what we would like it to be. Canadians are viewed as friendly, peaceable people living in a country of wide-open spaces and inexhaustible natural resources. All that is very well but Europeans should also recognize us as an innovative nation at the forefront in many technological fields. For example, we have work to do to better define Canada as a leader in information technology. But what I say applies to both sides. Canadian businesses must change their attitudes toward Europe. They often have the impression that they cannot gain entry to Europe. That is not the case. Greater efforts should be exerted to enter a market that is eager to make purchases in several fields where Canada excels.

Canada World View

Overall, what would you say lies ahead in Canada-EU relations?

Mr. Bartleman

Our relations with Europe do not date from yesterday. They are close but nothing is guaranteed forever. I firmly believe



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that our future is promising but that we should put more effort into the relationship. I'm thinking in particular of a quite recent development in Europe. More and more, the well-being of citizens is a central concern of all member countries of the European Union. There's a whole new agenda consisting of issues such as environment, agriculture and healthful food, the Northern dimension and the quality of life of residents of the Arctic, and education and training. These are also priorities in Canada and we have much to contribute to the search for common solutions. In my view, this is a new area for co-operation that will benefit both Canada and the European Union. ●

For more information, visit the Web site of the Canadian Mission to the European Union:
<http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/eu-mission>



On January 11, 2001, Agriculture and Agri-Food Minister Lyle Vanclief (right) meets with European Agriculture Commissioner Dr. Franz Fischler in Brussels to discuss issues related to agricultural trade.

photo: Canadian Mission to the EU