

# EMBASSY

## EU head accuses Inuit group official of 'EU bashing'

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Published: Wednesday, 10/03/2012 12:00 am EDT

In a show of unusually frank remarks, the head of the European Union's delegation in Ottawa accused a senior adviser in Canada's national Inuit organization of "EU bashing," after the adviser suggested the European Parliament's decision to ban seal products wasn't fully democratic.

Top EU envoy Matthias Brinkmann was speaking on Sept. 27 as part of a panel on the Arctic Council at a workshop on Arctic issues in Canada's capital.

He brought up the issue of the seal ban himself during his speech, after speaking about why it would be beneficial for the EU to be let in to the council as a permanent observer.

He said the EU recognizes the specific rights and interests of the Arctic indigenous peoples.

And then: "Let me say something on the ban on seal products."

"I very much have sympathy for the Canadian point of view on this issue, but...it is democracy," said Mr. Brinkmann, referring to the European Parliament's vote in 2009 to ban most seal products, a move that came into force in 2010.

While Europe's ban offers an exemption for Inuit communities, it has been the cause of heated debate for years—and the panel, part of the Rideau Institute's Circumpolar Challenges workshop, proved to be no exception.

During a question period after Mr. Brinkmann spoke, John Merritt, a senior policy advisor for Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, said the EU seal ban "wasn't the EU's finest hour when it came to the exercise of democracy."

That had Mr. Brinkmann bristling: "We are free countries, and parliamentarians decide like they want. I don't understand this EU bashing, quite frankly," he said.

"Did you ever bring the [United States] before WTO, Mexico, Russia? No...whatever you read in the press is always the EU. US, Mexico is never mentioned," he said.

The International Fund for Animal Welfare states on its website that the US banned the importation of seal products in 1972 under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Mexico banned the import and export of seals and other marine mammals in 2006. Russia banned the import and export of harp seal skins in 2011.

Even as the Canada-EU trade talks seem increasingly closer to wrapping up, Canada is continuing on with a WTO challenge against the EU ban. The Canadian government insists the two issues are separate, but over 100 European parliament members have signed a letter suggesting the EU should use the trade talks as leverage for backing off the WTO challenge.

Mr. Brinkmann's office was contacted for follow-up comments, but the delegation noted that

they had nothing further to add.

Udloriak Hanson, who served as a special advisor to the president of ITK, argued that while she could appreciate that members of the EU felt as though they are constantly attacked, the US decision, for example, wasn't a fair comparison. She said the EU is a much larger potential seal products market than either country.

In 2011, the Canadian government said the EU ban would cost Canada about \$5.4 million each year.

The EU ban came about after Europe was pummeled with years of lobbying from both sides: animal rights groups on one hand, the Canadian government and sealers on the other.

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<http://www.embassymag.ca/news/2012/10/02/eu-head-accuses-inuit-group-official-of-%E2%80%98eu-bashing%E2%80%99/42561>