

Multilateral investment court: Council gives mandate to the Commission to open negotiations

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On 20 March, the Council adopted the negotiating directives authorising the Commission to negotiate, on behalf of the EU, a **convention establishing a multilateral court for the settlement of investment disputes**. The Council also decided to make the negotiating directives public.

The overall objective for creating a multilateral investment court (MIC) is to set up a **permanent body to settle investment disputes**. This multilateral investment court would adjudicate disputes under future and existing investment treaties. For the EU, **the MIC would eventually replace the bilateral investment court systems** included in EU trade and investment agreements.

The initiative is part of the **EU's new approach to investment dispute resolution**, moving away from the traditional arbitration framework towards a **court system**. It aims at responding to some of the legitimate public concerns raised in the context of the traditional investor-to-state dispute settlement, by bringing key features of domestic and international courts to investment arbitration.

On the basis of the mandate provided by the Council, the Commission will start negotiations with its trading and investment partners in the framework of the **United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL)**.

While the exact features of the MIC (such as the composition of the court, its budget, the possibility of getting support from a secretariat, etc.) will depend on the outcome of the upcoming negotiations between the countries that will sign up to the new system, the **EU will favour a system based on the following principles:**

- the court should be a permanent international institution;
- the judges should be tenured, qualified and receive permanent remuneration. Their impartiality and independence should be guaranteed;
- proceedings before the court should be conducted in a transparent manner;
- the court should give the possibility of appeal against a decision;

- effective enforcement of the decisions of the court would be vital;
- the court should rule on disputes arising under future and existing investment treaties that countries decide to assign to the authority of the court.

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8 things you didn't know about Lib Dem members

Recently YouGov & Queen Mary University, London did a massive survey of the membership of the 4 largest political parties in the UK (us 'obvs', Labour, Conservatives and the Scottish National Party). They came out some pretty interesting stuff, such as...

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In government we're working to make sure all our young people get equal chances and choices to succeed in life.

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Henan Liaison Unit hosts "New Year Gathering of Hong Kong Residents in Henan 2018" (with photos)

The Henan Liaison Unit (HALU) of the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Wuhan (WHETO) of the HKSAR Government held "New Year Gathering of Hong

Kong Residents in Henan 2018” in Zhengzhou to celebrate the Chinese New Year with over 100 Hong Kong people who live and work in Henan.

In his welcome remarks, the Director of the WHETO, Mr Vincent Fung, said that since the commencement of operation of the HALU in September 2016, it has been organising a number of activities to foster closer ties with Henan in areas such as trade, economic and cultural exchanges; actively uniting the Hong Kong people living and working in Henan and offering support to them. As 2018 is the 40th anniversary of the reform and opening up of China and Hong Kong will also be connected to the national high-speed rail network this year, the HALU will seize the opportunities to facilitate co-operation between Henan and Hong Kong.

During the reception, Mr Fung spoke with representatives of the provincial government of Henan. He also talked with Hong Kong people who live and operate businesses in the Province to know more about their experiences there.



[Speech: Call for Humanitarian Aid and Government Accountability in DRC](#)

Thank you Mr President.

And thank you to our briefers for their clear and detailed accounts of why there has been such a rapid increase in humanitarian need in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

As Undersecretary General Lowcock reported, the number of people needing aid in the DRC has doubled in the past year. Today 13.1 million people need humanitarian assistance, the same number as in Syria. The United Nations has declared the worst level of humanitarian crisis – “Level 3” – in certain provinces, putting DRC alongside only Yemen, Syria and Iraq. Yet it is often absent from our screens and daily briefings. We must not let it fall down our agenda.

Mr President,

We are particularly concerned about the impact of the crisis on the most vulnerable, especially women and girls, the disabled and children. The United Nation’s Joint Human Rights Office reported that there has been a 53% increase in victims of sexual violence in 2017.

Now, the Representative of EFIM gave us a powerful testimony and I’m grateful to her.

Hope, is a woman from Masisi in the east of the country, where 90% of the women have been raped. Four men in military uniforms raped her as she collected firewood for her family. The attack left her pregnant and HIV positive. She has since fled to a temporary camp in Goma and can no longer feed her eight children. They rely on humanitarian aid, like 8 million other Congolese children. 2 million children currently face starvation. Hope is one of 4.5 million internally displaced people in the DRC – the highest number in Africa. Over 2 million people have been displaced in the past year alone, so just in the last year, an equivalent number to the total number of IDPs in South Sudan has been displaced in DRC. There are a further 740,000 refugees from the DRC in neighbouring countries as a result of ongoing hostilities.

Mr President,

International support is vital to address the crisis and the United Kingdom will continue to play a key role. We have committed to spending \$285 million on humanitarian aid between 2017 and 2022. This support will provide over 3 million people with lifesaving support, including food, clean drinking water and essential health care.

To improve the challenging and limited access for humanitarian actors, DRC Government support is crucial. While we welcome the commitments made to facilitate the work of humanitarian organisations and reduce tariffs for humanitarian imports including medicines and food, this Council, and the people of the DRC, need to see concrete and sustained action.

In particular, we urge the Government to take the following three steps:

First, improve the administrative and financial registration procedures required for international NGOs to operate lawfully in-country, through consultations with NGOs themselves.

Second, reduce the bureaucracy for humanitarian workers to get visas and for essential relief items to get through customs.

And finally, ensure security across the country is maintained so that humanitarian organisations have sufficient access to those most in need.

The upcoming donor conference on 13th April is an opportunity for the Government of the Congo to demonstrate the progress they have made against their commitments to facilitate the improvement of the humanitarian situation.

It is also an opportunity for the international community to pledge our support to the people of the DRC and to show them that the World remembers Africa's "forgotten" crisis.

Mr President,

Let me be clear, humanitarian aid will only ever provide temporary relief in this crisis. The key root cause is political instability, which drives the deteriorating security and humanitarian situations. Too often, peaceful protesters are met with violence for speaking out about their political rights, in violation of their human rights. A number of people have been killed in church-led protests this year which we all must condemn.

Free, fair and transparent elections must be held on 23 December. With an estimated 46 million voters, spread over the world's eleventh largest country, this is no easy task. For the elections to be successful, the right conditions need to be created now.

The international community must remain focussed and united in our support for the people of DRC, and we must remain united in our expectations of its government, and our insistence on accountability and progress. We in the Security Council need to work with the region and sub-region to do so.

Mr President,

Finally, it is with great sadness that we remember the horrific, tragic murders of the UN experts Zaida Catalan and Michael Sharp, killed just over one year ago in the Kasai region of DRC. This Council must continue to push for accountability for their deaths and we call on the Democratic Republic of Congo to ensure that their investigation is thorough and transparent and to ensure that all those responsible are held to account. We should have a full update on the progress of that investigation soon.

Thank you Mr President.