

**UK politics & policy****UK set to secure Brussels' backing for joining legal pact**

European Commission to drop objections to British membership of Lugano convention



London's courts are a favoured global centre for commercial disputes © AP

**Jim Brunsten** in Brussels APRIL 12 2021

Britain is poised to win Brussels' backing to join a key European legal co-operation pact, in a positive sign of EU-UK collaboration after Brexit.

EU diplomats said they expected the European Commission on Monday to give a positive assessment of Britain's application to join the Lugano convention, an accord that determines which countries' courts have jurisdiction over cross-border civil and commercial disputes.

Securing membership of the convention has been a priority for Britain's legal services industry, which has warned that without accession, English court judgments about cross-border disputes risk losing their force within the countries covered by the co-operation pact.

London's courts are a favoured global centre for commercial disputes, but lawyers have said the city's standing could be affected if the UK were unable to join the convention and companies chose to litigate elsewhere.

Failure to obtain membership of the convention would leave the UK reliant on fragmented international agreements that determine in which country any disputes are heard, and could result in multiple court cases taking place on the same issue in different nations, which would increase legal costs.

Britain applied to join the Lugano convention in April last year and the contracting parties — the EU, Denmark in its own right, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland — have a year to make a decision, which must be unanimous. The non-EU countries have already backed the UK's accession.

Endorsement of UK membership would be a turnround for the EU, which stalled on taking any decision during last year's negotiations with Boris Johnson's government on a future relationship deal.

EU member state officials said at the time that the bloc should not rush to hand a prize to Britain, while the commission said there were clear grounds to reject the UK request to join the convention.

But with negotiations on the EU-UK future relationship treaty now over, and the deadline for a decision on Britain's membership of the convention imminent, diplomats in the bloc said the mood was now different.

They added there was an awareness of the practical benefits of having Britain in a co-operation pact that prevented legal disputes from being unnecessarily messy.

A final decision on UK membership of the convention will lie with the European Council, which represents the bloc's national governments.

An EU official said the UK's application had required a lot of technical analysis to assess its implications for the bloc.