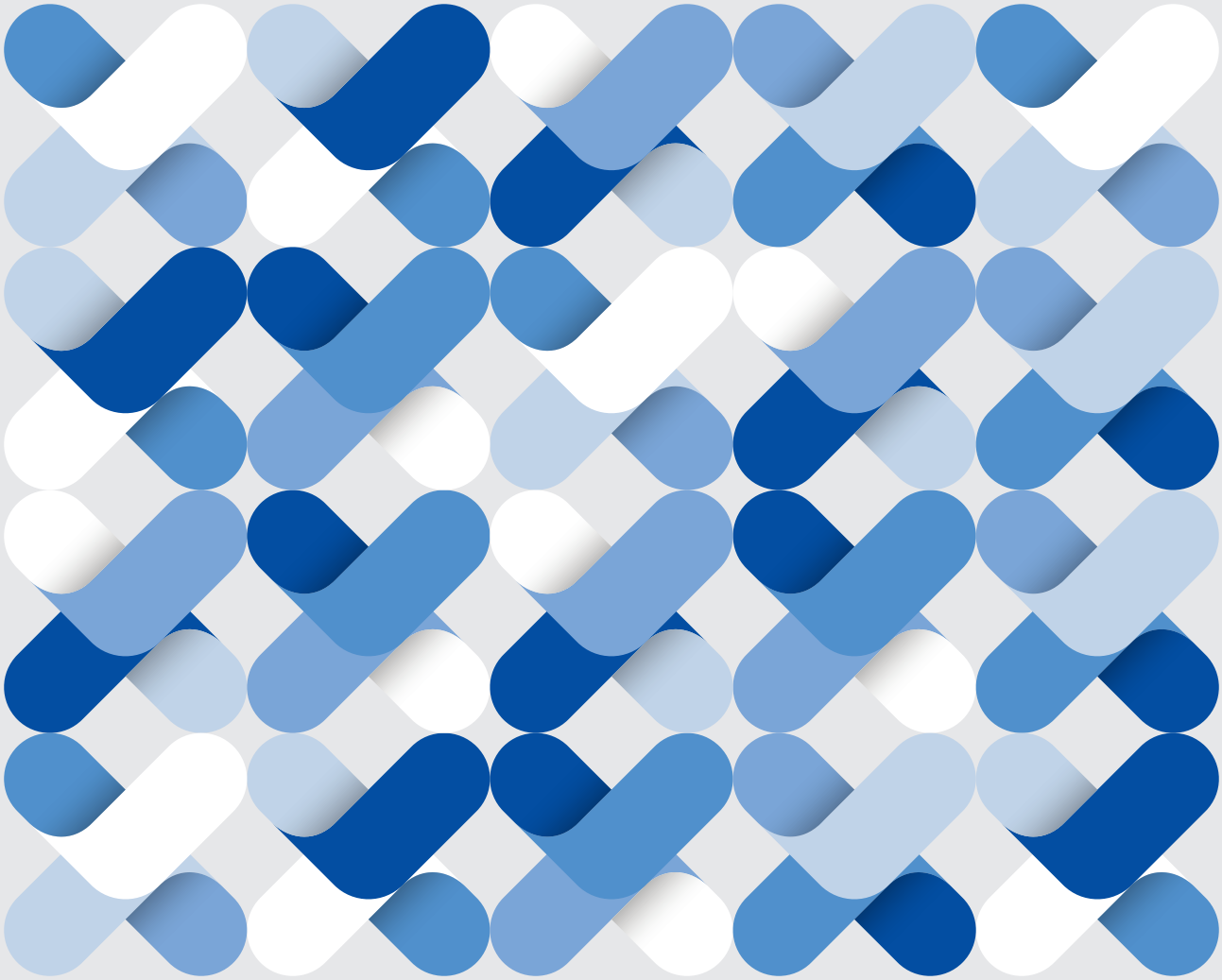
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MUTUAL LEGAL ASSISTANCE GUIDE

CYPRUS



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While this publication was funded by the European Union, its contents are the sole responsibility of UNICRI and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

Acknowledgements

This guide was produced with the generous financial support of the European Union, through the Directorate-General for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf (DG MENA), within the framework of the project *"Transparency Now: Strengthening Anti-Corruption Efforts in the EU Southern Neighbourhood.*"

UNICRI expresses its sincere gratitude to the European Union, the Camden Asset Recovery Inter-Agency Network (CARIN) Secretariat and the relevant national authorities, in particular the Ministry of Justice and Public Order, for their valuable support and guidance throughout the development of this guide.

The guide was developed by Elsa Jarkhedian under the guidance of James Shaw, Senior Legal Officer at UNICRI, with special appreciation extended to Giulia Traverso for her technical support.

Editing: Christopher Plagnol

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Table of Contents

Overview 1

I. Legal Basis for MLA Requests to Cyprus 2

II. Formal Requirements for Submitting an MLA Request 4

III. Key Content Requirements 5

IV. Execution of the MLA Request 8

V. Transmission of Evidence to the Requesting State 10

VI. Confidentiality and Proportionality 11

VII. Asset Disposal and Return 12

Annex 13

Endnotes 16

Overview

This guide provides practical guidance on the preparation and execution of Mutual Legal Assistance (MLA) requests to Cyprus in criminal matters. It is intended to help practitioners from non-European Union (EU) countries identify relevant information and adapt it to the specific needs of each request.

It is not a standardized template.

Important Note on Early Coordination and Informal Contact

Before submitting a formal MLA request, it is considered good practice for the Requesting State to engage in early coordination. Preliminary contact can help identify the appropriate competent authorities, clarify jurisdictional links, refine investigative leads, and ensure that the scope of the request is targeted and proportionate before formal transmission.

Early coordination may take place through central authorities, cooperation networks – such as the Camden Asset Recovery Inter-Agency Network (CARIN) – and technical-support organizations, depending on the nature of the case and the assistance sought.

Type of Contact	Purpose	Examples
Central Authorities	Clarify procedural requirements, applicable legal bases, competent authorities, and formal MLA expectations	Ministry of Justice and Public Order of Cyprus
Cooperation Networks	Verify information, refine leads, trace or identify assets, and facilitate informal contact	CARIN, Egmont Group of Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs), INTERPOL
Technical and Advisory Organizations	Provide expertise, training, and practical assistance in structuring or refining MLA requests, and to facilitate cross-border practitioner dialogue.	UNICRI, International Centre for Asset Recovery (ICAR), Stolen Asset Recovery Initiative (StAR)

Kindly note that these channels do not replace formal MLA procedures. They support early clarification and preparation and may improve the quality and effectiveness of the requests.

The sections below outline the legal basis, formal requirements, and practical steps relevant to MLA requests to Cyprus, providing guidance on how such requests are prepared, transmitted, and executed in practice.

I. Legal Basis for MLA Requests to Cyprus

In Cyprus, MLA requests may be submitted under the following frameworks:

- **Multilateral Conventions:** such as the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) Article 46, or the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) Article 18.[1]

Note: UNCAC applies to the prevention, investigation, and prosecution of corruption offences, including bribery, embezzlement, abuse of functions, illicit enrichment, and related asset recovery measures.

UNTOC applies to serious transnational offences involving an organized criminal group, including money laundering, and other forms of organized crime.

- **Bilateral MLA Treaties:** if in force between Cyprus and the Requesting State.[2]

- **Domestic Law:** The Law on International Cooperation in Criminal Matters (Law 23(I)/2001) provides the general legal framework for mutual legal assistance in Cyprus. Requests are executed in accordance with this law and, where applicable, the Criminal Procedure Law (Cap. 155), which governs procedural measures such as searches or seizures carried out within Cyprus.
  Asset-related assistance, including the recognition and enforcement of foreign freezing and confiscation orders, is regulated under the Prevention and Suppression of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Law (AML/CFT Law 188(I)/2007).[3]

- **Reciprocity:** In the absence of a treaty, Cyprus may execute MLA requests on the basis of reciprocity under Law 23(I)/2001, provided that the Requesting State gives an explicit assurance of reciprocal cooperation.[4]

Draft example (legal basis section of the MLA request):

- If both States are Parties to the UNCAC or the UNTOC:

This request is made pursuant to Article 46 of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), to which both Cyprus and [Requesting State] are parties, and is submitted in accordance with Cyprus's Law on International Cooperation in Criminal Matters (Law 23(I)/2001).

OR

This request is made pursuant to Article 18 of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), to which both Cyprus and [Requesting State] are parties, and is submitted in accordance with Cyprus's Law on International Cooperation in Criminal Matters (Law 23(I)/2001).

- If a bilateral or multilateral treaty exists:

This request is made in accordance with [relevant article] within [relevant bilateral/ multilateral treaty].

- If no bilateral or multilateral treaty exists:

In the absence of a bilateral or multilateral treaty, this request is made on the basis of reciprocity, pursuant to Law 23(I)/2001 on International Cooperation in Criminal Matters. We confirm our assurance of mutual cooperation.

Important: Where the request concerns coercive measures, such as freezing and/ or confiscation, Cyprus may give effect through AML/CFT Law 188(I)/2007, under which MOKAS, the Cypriot Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), is empowered to apply to Cypriot courts for the recognition and execution of foreign freezing and/or confiscation orders.

Note: For requests involving asset freezing, confiscation, or return, the Requesting State should also cite Article 55 UNCAC in addition to Article 46, as it specifically governs cooperation for confiscation and asset recovery.

Depending on the facts of the case, MLA requests may rely on both the UNCAC and the UNTOC, in particular where corruption offences are linked to money laundering or other forms of organized criminal activity.

II. Formal Requirements for Submitting an MLA Request

An MLA request to Cyprus must comply with specific formal requirements in order to be accepted and efficiently processed. Key elements are outlined below:

Criminal Nature and Admissibility of Confiscation Orders

An MLA request is granted only in criminal matters. The underlying conduct must constitute a criminal offence in both the Requesting State and the Requested Jurisdiction, consistent with the principle of dual criminality.[5]

Confiscation in Cyprus is primarily conviction-based. However, confiscation without a conviction may be permitted in narrowly defined circumstances, particularly where criminal proceedings cannot be completed, such as when the suspect is deceased or has absconded and cannot be brought to trial, and subject to judicial authorization and procedural safeguards.[6]

Note: Cyprus does not operate a standalone civil or administrative non-conviction-based confiscation regime. Instead, its legal framework allows for confiscation without conviction in limited circumstances within the context of criminal proceedings. The enforceability of such measures depends primarily on whether the facts of the case fall within the conditions permitted under Cypriot law, subject to the principle of dual criminality and applicable safeguards.

Central Authority

MLA requests are generally addressed to the Ministry of Justice and Public Order of Cyprus. This Authority is responsible for receiving MLA requests, reviewing them, and transmitting them to the competent executing authorities within Cyprus.[7]

Transmission Channels

When a request is made under a treaty, the transmission method specified must be followed. Most instruments, including UNCAC and UNTOC, establish central authorities as the primary channel for the transmission of MLA requests. While bilateral treaties may explicitly name the central authority, most multilateral instruments require States Parties to designate a central authority. Cyprus designates the Ministry of Justice and Public Order as the central authority for MLA requests. Where no treaty exists, requests must be transmitted via diplomatic channels, typically through embassies or foreign ministries.[8]

Note: Early drafts or clarifications should preferably be discussed informally before filing the MLA request.

Official Language

Requests must be submitted in English or Greek. Supporting documents in other languages must be accompanied by certified translations into English or Greek. While no formal provision exists for the use of English in urgent cases, in practice, preliminary exchanges or clarifications may occur in English prior to the submission of the official request in the required language.[9]

Note: The Requesting State should always verify the applicable language requirements under the relevant treaty or domestic provisions before transmission to avoid delays.

Official Form

Cyprus does not require a standardized form for MLA requests. A formal written request on official letterhead is sufficient, provided it contains all required information. Requests are commonly made in the form of a letter rogatory and should be issued and signed by a competent authority of the Requesting State.[10] To enhance clarity and efficiency, requests should be clearly structured and bear the issuing authority's official seal where available. Where multiple copies are submitted, it is good practice for at least one copy to bear an original signature. Notarization or legalization is not generally required, unless expressly provided for in an applicable treaty.[11]

III. Key Content Requirements

The MLA request must include the following:

Description of the Case

The request should include a clear summary of the relevant facts of the offence or suspected offence under investigation. This should identify the persons concerned, describe the alleged criminal conduct, indicate when and where it occurred, and explain the current procedural status of the case. The factual narrative enables Cypriot authorities to assess the criminal nature of the conduct, the necessity and proportionality of the requested assistance, and compliance with applicable legal requirements. The request should also explain the specific connection to Cyprus, including how the persons, assets, evidence, or financial transactions located in Cyprus are linked to the alleged offence. Where available, this may include references to particular bank accounts, transfers, companies, or other factual elements connecting the case to Cyprus.[12]

Legal Provisions

The Requesting State should indicate the legal provisions applicable to the case, citing the specific offences and relevant articles of its own law. Including extracts of these provisions and applicable penalties is considered good practice, as it helps Cypriot authorities assess dual criminality.[13]

For this reason, before submitting the request, it is recommended that the Requesting State reviews the relevant Cypriot offence categories to ensure that the described conduct

can satisfy the dual-criminality requirement. Where the foreign offence does not have an exact equivalent under Cypriot law, the Requesting State should describe the underlying conduct in neutral factual terms. This enables Cypriot authorities to identify the closest corresponding domestic offence, even if the foreign legal title does not exist in Cyprus's legal framework.[14]

Note: The Requesting State should strongly consider discussing the case with an official in the Cypriot central authority to anticipate and address potential dual-criminality issues before submitting the request.

Purpose and Object of the Request

The Requesting State should indicate the purpose of the request and specify the assistance being sought, including but not limited to:[15]

- Identification of assets (bank accounts, real estate, companies in which a defendant may be a beneficial owner)
- Freezing or seizure of assets
- Gathering of evidence (bank records, property deeds, corporate documents)
- Conducting searches or seizures of evidence
- Enforcement of a foreign confiscation order
- Taking of witness statements
- Return of assets post-confiscation

If the connection to Cyprus has not yet been fully established, but reasonable grounds exist to believe that relevant persons, assets, or evidence may be located there, the Requesting State may seek assistance to verify specific leads, such as asset tracing or targeted inquiries. Such requests must be supported by factual basis to demonstrate relevance and necessity and should be narrowly tailored to avoid overly broad or speculative requests.[16]

Note: While a single MLA request to Cyprus can include multiple investigative or provisional measures (e.g. asset tracing, provisional freezing, evidence collection), confiscation and asset return generally require a second request once a final order is obtained. Early consultation with Cypriot authorities is recommended to structure MLA requests accordingly.[17]

Supporting Documentation (with certified or officially translated versions where possible)

An MLA request to Cyprus should be accompanied by supporting documentation to ensure it can be executed effectively. Attachments may include:[18]

- **A certified copy of any freezing, seizure, or confiscation order** issued by a competent authority of the Requesting State. Where provisional measures are sought and no order yet exists, the request should explain the factual basis and urgency and indicate whether one can be issued.

- **Evidence linking the assets, persons, or transactions to the alleged offence**, such as banking or company records, account statements, or property registration extracts. These materials are not legally mandatory, but international best practice encourages including them to strengthen the factual basis, support the assessment of necessity and proportionality, and facilitate dual-criminality review.
- **Copies of the relevant legal provisions from the Requesting State**, particularly those defining the offence and governing confiscation or provisional measures. Where possible, official or certified translations should be provided.
- **Any additional information** that may assist Cypriot authorities in verifying the authenticity of the request, including reference numbers, contact points, or supporting documentation.

Note: Notwithstanding the above, it is generally not good practice to send an entire case file to a Requested State, as this can serve to inundate authorities with too much information. Supporting documentation should therefore be limited to materials that are necessary and relevant to the specific assistance sought.

Early Measures and Urgency

International cooperation networks such as INTERPOL[19] and CARIN,[20] as well as FIU-to-FIU contact through the Egmont Group network21 can support preliminary discussion and information exchange.

Note: These networks are intended solely for the exchange of information and mutual support at the law enforcement or practitioner level. They do not replace formal MLA channels, and any evidence to be used in judicial proceedings must still be obtained through an official MLA request.

The Cypriot FIU (MOKAS) may order the short-term postponement of transactions without obtaining a court order first, including in response to information received from a foreign FIU. Where continued restraint is required beyond the administrative postponement, the competent authorities seek a court freezing or seizure order under the AML Law. In urgent situations to prevent dissipation of assets, it is advised for the Requesting State to pursue an MLA request for a judicial freezing order and FIU-to-FIU engagement with MOKAS for immediate administrative action. These interim measures can be applied before judicial proceedings start.[22]

Note: The request should indicate that contact has been made with MOKAS via the Egmont Group, for example, to support urgent preventive action.

Under UNCAC Article 56 and, in organized crime cases, under UNTOC Article 18(4), a State Party may, without prior request, spontaneously transmit information to another State Party if it believes the information could assist in initiating or carrying out investigations or proceedings. This includes information about criminal assets located in the receiving State, particularly in serious or time-sensitive cases.[23]

IV. Execution of the MLA Request

MLA requests received in Cyprus are generally administered as follows:

Reception and Preliminary Review

The Ministry of Justice and Public Order, as the central authority, reviews incoming requests to ensure they are complete, legally grounded, and issued by a competent authority, in line with international standards. If information is missing, the central authority may seek clarification before deciding on admissibility.[24]

Once admitted, MLA requests are transmitted by the Ministry of Justice and Public Order to the competent body for execution. Depending on the measure requested, execution may involve the Attorney General's Office, a District Court, or any other concerned authority. Asset-related requests often involve coordination between the Attorney General's Office and MOKAS, with judicial authorization by a District Court where required. The Cyprus Police may also be involved, as it is responsible for evidence-gathering, acting under the Criminal Procedure Law and AML/CFT framework, pursuant to the relevant court order or lawful authority.[25]

Judicial Procedure and Legal Assessment

Requests for MLA in Cyprus are executed in accordance with the Law on International Cooperation in Criminal Matters, the Criminal Procedure Law, the Evidence Law, and, where asset-related measures are sought, the Prevention and Suppression of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Law, as well as any applicable international treaty.[26]

Depending on the nature of the request:

- Non-coercive measures, such as the collection of information or documents not affecting fundamental rights, may be executed by the competent authorities in accordance with domestic procedural law.
- Coercive measures, including searches, seizures, freezing or confiscation of assets, require judicial authorization by a District Court upon application by a competent authority.

For coercive measures, the District Court assesses whether the statutory and constitutional conditions for execution are met, including:[27]

- Dual criminality.

- The existence of a sufficient factual basis, demonstrating that the requested measure is relevant to the foreign proceedings and connected to a criminal offence.
- Necessity and proportionality.
- Respect for procedural rights and the protection of bona fide third parties.

Cypriot courts generally do not re-examine the merits of the foreign case or reassess the evidence. Judicial review is limited to verifying legal admissibility and compliance with Cypriot law and applicable international obligations.

Recognition, Enforcement, and Remedies

Where the legal conditions are met, Cypriot courts issue domestic orders to give effect to requests for searches, seizures, or the freezing and, upon conviction or where permitted by law, confiscation of assets. All coercive measures require judicial authorization by a District Court on application by a competent authority, typically the Police or the Attorney General's Office. In financial crime cases, MOKAS may order short-term postponement of transactions without prior court approval and may assist in the preparation and coordination of applications for judicial measures, usually through the Attorney General's Office. Confiscation is pursued by the prosecution before the court under the AML/CFT framework.[28]

Foreign freezing and confiscation orders may be recognized and enforced in Cyprus under the AML/CFT Law. Once registered by a District Court following an application by the Attorney General's Office, which may act in coordination with MOKAS in financial crime matters, such orders may be enforced as if they were domestic court orders.

Affected parties, including bona fide third parties, may appeal enforcement in Cypriot courts. Challenges may be based on a lack of connection between the assets and the alleged offence, rights violations, or an insufficient legal basis. Cypriot courts safeguard procedural fairness and ensure that affected persons have access to the remedies available under national law.[29]

Note: The Requesting State is strongly encouraged to maintain close communication with Cypriot authorities during the execution phase, particularly where clarifications or supplementary information may be required.

Asset Management

Seized or frozen assets are managed under Cypriot law, primarily the AML/CFT Law with judicial supervision. Execution is carried out by the competent executing authority, often the police, under the direction and supervision of the prosecution and the courts as applicable.[30]

- Bank funds generally remain frozen in the original account under a court order. A MOKAS postponement can temporarily suspend transactions pending court action.

- Assets such as vehicles or valuables are secured by the police, and, where provided for, a court-appointed receiver may be used for their management.
- Proceeds may be returned or shared post-confiscation, in line with UNCAC or applicable treaties, and Cypriot law.

Follow-Up and Communication

Once a request for an MLA is sent, it is common practice for the receiving authority to acknowledge its receipt. If the request is incomplete or further clarification is needed, follow-up communication usually occurs through official channels between the designated authorities.[31]

During execution, the Requesting State may inquire about the status of the request and provide any new or supplementary information that may assist in its execution. Any updates, clarifications, or responses are typically transmitted using the same formal channels as the original request.[32]

Note: Engaging proactively with the designated focal point in Cyprus could improve efficiency.

V. Transmission of Evidence to the Requesting State

Once a request is executed, the gathered evidence is typically transmitted through official channels to the Requesting State.

Judicial Transmission

Transmissions often involve the central authorities of both States unless the applicable treaty permits direct transmission between competent authorities. Depending on the treaty and the nature of the material, secure means may include diplomatic channels, official couriers, or verified digital transfers.[33]

Upon receipt, the Requesting State should verify that everything requested is included and, if needed, request additional follow-up.

Another important aspect is the authentication of evidence. If the Requesting State requires the evidence to be certified or accompanied by an affidavit to be admissible in court, it should be specified in the MLA request.

Use Restrictions

Evidence from Cyprus may only be used for the purposes stated in the MLA request. Any secondary use, for example, in another proceeding or shared with third parties, requires Cyprus' prior consent.[34]

Note: To address any concerns about potential misuse, the MLA request should clearly state how the requested assistance or evidence will be used.

VI. Confidentiality and Proportionality

Requests may include a confidentiality clause, particularly when early disclosure could compromise the investigation. While the Requested State should respect confidentiality, it may be limited by domestic legal requirements or defence rights.[35]

Confidential Handling of Requests

Cypriot authorities handle MLA requests confidentially when the Requesting State requires it. Under applicable treaties such as the UNCAC or UNTOC, the Requested State should comply and notify the Requesting State if confidentiality cannot be maintained. Because judicial and coercive measures may require court filings, some disclosure may be necessary under domestic law. Confidentiality is therefore not absolute but is observed to the maximum extent compatible with execution.[36]

Once the investigative phase concludes or secrecy is no longer justified, affected persons must ultimately be informed and have the opportunity to challenge the measure, in accordance with due process guarantees. Any delay in disclosure is subject to judicial oversight and must remain proportionate to investigative needs and consistent with procedural fairness.[37]

Proportionality and Public Order

Any coercive measure sought must be proportionate to the seriousness of the offence and the expected evidentiary value. Overly broad or vague requests may be returned for clarification. Requesting States are encouraged to limit the scope of requests to what is necessary for the case.[38]

Execution of MLA requests must not undermine the Republic's sovereignty, security, or fundamental legal principles. Assistance may be refused in exceptional cases where the rights of defence were not respected, dual criminality is not satisfied for coercive measures, enforcement would contravene fundamental legal principles, or where the request relates to an offence of a political or military nature.[39]

VII. Asset Disposal and Return

Under Article 57 of the UNCAC, confiscated assets stemming from corruption or related crimes are to be returned to the Requesting State in cases such as the embezzlement of public funds by a public official. In other situations, the Convention encourages States to reach agreements on the return or sharing of assets, considering the rights of victims and the legitimate interests of all parties.[40]

It is considered good practice for the Requesting State to consult with the Cypriot central authority regarding the practical arrangements for asset return, including transfer modalities, timelines, and any administrative costs that may arise.

Note: UNCAC encourages pre-request consultations regarding the possible sharing of assets.[41]

To facilitate asset return and build trust, it is advisable for the Requesting State to include in the MLA request a brief explanation of how the returned assets would be managed or monitored. This may include victim compensation or specified public projects. It is also good practice to indicate transparency and oversight measures that would be put in place, for example, through the involvement of an independent civil society organization.

In practice, some Requested States are cautious about returning confiscated assets to the Requesting State fearing that the funds could be misused after repatriation. Highlighting how returned assets will be handled in a transparent manner aligns with international best practices for asset recovery, can help streamline cooperation and avoid delays.

Annex

I. MLA Checklist

1. Preliminary Consultation

- ☐ Identify focal point(s) in Cyprus and hold preliminary discussion about case, including intention to submit an MLA request – ask focal point for what Cyprus may need to see included in any MLA request.
- ☐ Confirm the appropriate transmission channel for the MLA request.
- ☐ Clarify formal requirements, including format, certifications, and supporting documentation.
- ☐ Confirm any specific requirements for coercive measures (e.g., freezing, seizure, searches).
- ☐ Identify any potential grounds for refusal under the Requested State's law.
- ☐ Where relevant, clarify the legal and procedural framework governing the return or disposal of assets.

2. Legal Basis

- ☐ Identify the applicable legal basis for the request (bilateral treaty, multilateral convention, or reciprocity).

3. Central Authorities

- ☐ Identify the competent central authority of the Requested State responsible for receiving MLA requests.

4. Official Language and Translations

- ☐ Confirm the language requirements of the Requested State.
- ☐ Attach required translations of the request and supporting documents where applicable.

5. Scope of Assistance Requested

- ☐ Identification of assets (bank accounts, real estate, companies)
- ☐ Investigative measures requested, such as:
  - Gathering of evidence (bank records, property deeds, corporate documents)
  - Taking of witness statements
  - Conducting searches or seizures

☐ Asset-related measures requested, such as:

- Freezing or seizure of assets
- Enforcement of a foreign confiscation order
- Return of assets following confiscation

6. Description of the Case

☐ Provide a clear, concise summary of the relevant facts of the case.
☐ Explain the link between the facts of the case and the assistance requested.

7. Offences and Legal Qualification

☐ Describe the offences in factual terms.
☐ Identify the relevant legal provisions, where appropriate.
☐ Address dual criminality requirements, where applicable.

8. Confidentiality and Proportionality

☐ Clearly state the purpose of the request.
☐ Explain why the requested measures are necessary and proportionate.
☐ Request confidential handling of the request, where necessary to protect the investigation.

9. Asset-Related Requests (if applicable)

☐ Clearly identify and, to the extent possible, locate the assets concerned.
☐ Explain the link between the assets and the offence.
☐ Indicate the status of confiscation proceedings (e.g., final confiscation order issued or pending).
☐ Include a request for asset seizure, confiscation and/or, when appropriate (if needed in a subsequent request), return of the assets.

10. Supporting Documentation

☐ Attach relevant supporting documents, such as court orders, warrants, judgments, or evidence summaries required for the execution of the request.

II. Offences Recognized by Cyprus Law and Which are Often Linked to the Issue of Asset Recovery[42]

Corruption and Bribery
Money Laundering
Predicate Crimes
Fraud and Property Offences
Terrorism Financing
Organized Crime and Drug Trafficking
Abuse of Office

III. Template

While no national template is provided, Cyprus adheres to international practice. Requesting States may use widely accepted MLA templates, such as the Basel Institute's, to ensure completeness.

It is recommended to consult the relevant central authority.

IV. Contacts

Cyprus:

Ministry of Justice and Public Order
registry@mjpo.gov.cy

MOKAS (Unit for Combating Money Laundering)
mokas@mokas.law.gov.cy

Other useful contact email addresses:

Camden Asset Recovery Inter-Agency Network (CARIN)
carin@europol.europa.eu

International Centre for Asset Recovery (ICAR)
info@baselgovernance.org

INTERPOL
To contact INTERPOL, complete the form available here.

Stolen Asset Recovery Initiative (StAR)
starinitiative@worldbank.org

United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI)
unicri.assetrecovery@un.org

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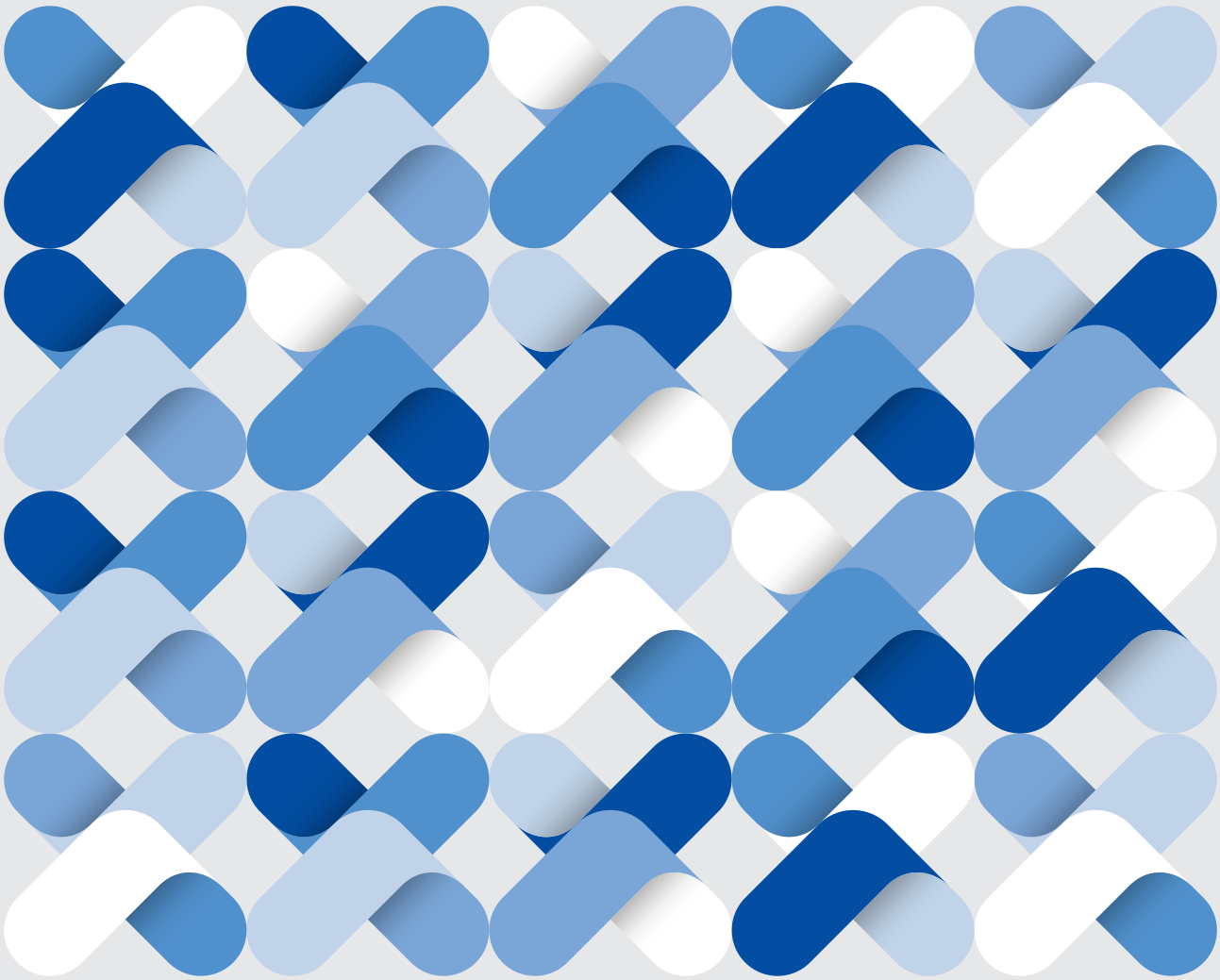
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