

Effective enforcement of the *EVFTA* and the *EVIPA*: enhancing mutual legal assistance on civil and commercial matters between Vietnam and EU Member States

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Abstract: The *EU–Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA)* and the *EU–Vietnam Investment Protection Agreement (EVIPA)* mark a significant milestone in bilateral economic relations. They offer Vietnamese businesses expansive access to the European Union market and enhanced investor protection. However, implementing these agreements presents complex legal challenges, particularly regarding mutual legal assistance (MLA). MLA is critical for safeguarding legal rights, facilitating dispute resolution and strengthening economic cooperation. Though Vietnam has MLA treaties with some EU Member States, further collaboration is crucial to meet the demands of comprehensive integration and ensure the effective implementation of the agreements. Strengthening joint MLA activities with EU Member States can effectively address interconnected legal issues. This can be achieved by formulating concrete solutions to refine the existing legal framework and establishing efficient cooperation mechanisms. This pressing need forms the central objective of this article.

Keywords: *EVFTA, EVIPA, free trade agreement, MLA, mutual legal assistance*

1. Introduction

The *EU–Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA)* and the *EU–Vietnam Investment Protection Agreement (EVIPA)* mark a pivotal moment in the economic partnership between Vietnam and the European Union (EU). The *EVFTA* entered into force in August 2020, while the *EVIPA* awaits ratification by individual EU Member States. These agreements establish a comprehensive legal framework that promotes trade, investment and cooperation. The *EVFTA* eliminates nearly all tariffs on bilateral trade, facilitating Vietnamese businesses' access to the EU market. The *EVIPA* provides robust guarantees for investors, creating a stable and attractive investment environment ('Council Decision (EU) 2019/1096', 2019).

While these agreements provide a substantial legal framework for economic cooperation, introducing a new era of deeper and more effective partnership, they also increase the likelihood of legal issues with foreign elements, necessitating cooperative resolution, including civil and commercial mutual legal assistance (MLA) between Vietnam and EU Member States. MLA is a crucial instrument in international cooperation, allowing individuals and organizations to exercise their legal rights and obligations in cross-border matters. This includes service of process, summonses, evidence gathering, judgment and decision enforcement and investigations involving foreign elements.

However, the agreements primarily address the recognition and enforcement of judgments and decisions, leaving deficiencies in the broader MLA framework. In practice, MLA between Vietnam and EU Member States plays a vital role in protecting the lawful rights and interests of citizens and businesses of both parties, contributing to the development of bilateral economic and legal relations and ultimately leading to the effective implementation of the agreements' provisions (Council of Europe, 2013). Currently, Vietnam has concluded MLA treaties with several EU Member States, including France, Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, to concretize cooperation commitments in this area (Supreme People's Court, 2025). Nevertheless, these existing treaties remain insufficient to fully support the evolving legal demands arising from the implementation of the *EVFTA* and the anticipated entry into force of the *EVIPA*.

Given these challenges, it is crucial to comprehensively assess the current MLA system to identify the existing legal and practical barriers and propose

reforms that will improve its effectiveness. This study assesses the current legal framework for civil and commercial MLA between Vietnam and EU Member States, examines the interrelationship between the implementation of the two agreements and MLA activities and conducts comparative research, drawing on experiences from the EU and other regions. Based on this analysis, the study proposes targeted legal reforms, including refining the domestic legal framework, promoting Vietnam's accession to relevant international treaties, strengthening coordination mechanisms between judicial authorities and promoting deeper international cooperation to facilitate efficient MLA processes.

2. The current legal framework and implementation status

2.1 Legal framework

The *Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Partnership and Cooperation (PCA)*, signed on 27 June 2012 and effective on 1 October 2016, provides the primary legal basis for Vietnam–EU mutual legal assistance. While establishing a foundation for broader bilateral relations, its limited provisions (four articles in Chapter V) focus primarily on criminal matters, including money laundering, terrorist financing and illicit drug trafficking, with limited civil and commercial MLA, specifically concerning personal data protection (*PCA*, Article 26).

While the *EVFTA* and *EVIPA* do not directly address MLA in civil and commercial matters in the conventional sense of international law (i.e., mutual assistance in evidence gathering, service of process or civil judgment enforcement), they incorporate aspects of judicial cooperation within their provisions. This primarily concerns trade and investment dispute resolution mechanisms and the recognition and enforcement of the resulting awards, a common EU approach in FTAs with third countries. Although the *Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)* recognizes judicial cooperation as a central and dynamic policy impacting internal integration, the Directorate-General for Trade (DG Trade), when forming its working groups, includes virtually all relevant stakeholders, yet notably excludes the Directorate-General for Justice (DG Justice) (European Commission, 2015a; 2015b).

Consequently, the PCA currently forms the sole general legal framework for international MLA between Vietnam and the EU. Civil and commercial MLA thus relies on multilateral treaties (e.g., the 1965 *Hague Service Convention* and the 1970 *Hague Evidence Convention* within the framework of the *Hague Conference on Private International Law (HCCH)*), bilateral treaties between Vietnam and certain EU Member States (e.g., France, Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia) and the principle of reciprocity.

Vietnam is a party to several multilateral MLA treaties, including the *Hague Service Convention 1965* and the *Hague Evidence Convention 1970*, and has also concluded numerous bilateral agreements with other countries on civil MLA. The Ministry of Justice is the central national authority for receiving and processing civil MLA requests. The Supreme People's Court is responsible for handling MLA requests related to judicial proceedings. In addition, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides assistance in transmitting MLA requests through diplomatic channels, when necessary.

Vietnam's legal system has undergone adjustments to comply with the *EVFTA* and *EVIPA*, including the promulgation of 'Resolution 113/2020/QH14' to implement obligations with respect to the recognition and enforcement of investment dispute settlement awards in Vietnam under the *Investment Protection Agreement* between Vietnam and the EU and its Member States ('Council Decision (EU) 2019/1096', 2019). Furthermore, a draft law on civil MLA, one of four laws separated from the *Law on Mutual Legal Assistance 2007*, is currently undergoing consultation and will be submitted to the National Assembly for approval to modernize civil MLA law, enhance its practicality, promote international cooperation and address the specific requirements of civil MLA.

From a domestic law perspective, Vietnam's current legal framework for civil MLA is based on domestic legislation and international treaties to which Vietnam is a party or signatory. The *Civil Procedure Code 2015 (CPC)* contains provisions on MLA in Chapter XXXIX (Articles 479 to 491), regulating requests for and execution of foreign MLA in civil cases. The *Law on Mutual Legal Assistance 2007* details MLA activities in various areas including civil, marital and family matters. In addition, a system of detailed guiding documents has been progressively introduced to create a foundation for the elaboration and simplification of the application process. For instance, 'Decree No. 92/2008/ND-CP', issued by the Government of Vietnam, provides guidance for the implementation of the *Law on Mutual Legal Assistance*,

while ‘Joint Circular No. 15/2011/CTLT-BTP-BNG-TANDTC’, issued by the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Supreme People’s Court, provides instructions on applying the MLA provisions in the civil sector under the *Law on Mutual Legal Assistance*.

Although the legal framework establishes the foundations for MLA cooperation, it nonetheless faces certain challenges. One limitation is the lack of a comprehensive mechanism to facilitate timely and efficient execution of MLA requests, especially in complex international cases. Additionally, more detailed regulations are needed to address contemporary issues, such as cross-border digital evidence gathering and the role of technology in MLA processes. While Vietnam has made significant progress in its MLA framework, there is still room for improvement in refining procedures, improving coordination between relevant authorities and ensuring the protection of rights in cross-border legal matters. This includes addressing legal gaps that could hinder cooperation with EU Member States and other international partners, particularly in areas such as privacy laws, data protection and legal access to information across jurisdictions. Improving these areas would cultivate deeper and more effective international legal cooperation, which is crucial for Vietnam’s continued integration into the global economy.

2.2 Implementation in practice

The multilateral MLA treaties to which both Vietnam and European Union Member States are parties, specifically the *Hague Service Convention 1965* and the *Hague Evidence Convention 1970*, have not consistently met the efficacy standards stipulated by the Conventions themselves, nor have they adequately addressed the evolving needs of the contracting parties. Seventeen EU Member States—Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and Sweden—have declared acceptance of Vietnam’s accession to the *Hague Convention 1970*. Consequently, the *Hague Convention 1970* is not yet in force between Vietnam and eight EU Member States: Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania and Slovenia (HCCH, no date).

Furthermore, lacunae in the Conventions impede their implementation between Vietnam and acceding states. For instance, absence of a stipulated timeframe for executing evidence gathering requests results in processing times contingent on individual Member States’ domestic laws and practices,

creating significant disparities in execution timelines. The Conventions also do not require the requesting state to prepay the costs incurred by the requested state. This deficiency creates practical difficulties in executing requests involving, *inter alia*, expert assessments, asset valuations and witness summonses before the Vietnamese courts. As Vietnamese law requires advance payment to expert assessment and valuation agencies, such procedures cannot proceed without prepayment. Consequently, Vietnam must amend the relevant domestic provisions pertaining to expert assessments, valuations and witness expenses in civil proceedings.

The number of bilateral treaties governing mutual legal assistance between Vietnam and European Union Member States remains limited and MLA activities conducted under these agreements continue to face limitations and lack full efficacy. Statistics indicate a response rate from foreign judicial authorities of only approximately 20–22% (Supreme People’s Court, 2023; 2024; Government of Vietnam, 2024), which demonstrates a low level of cooperation in resolving international legal matters, thereby impeding the assurance of legal certainty. The processing time is also a significant factor that influences the effectiveness of these activities. MLA cases are frequently protracted due to administrative impediments and disparities between the respective legal systems. These systemic differences complicate the execution of MLA requests and require a considerable amount of time.

Specific challenges have also arisen under bilateral MLA treaties between Vietnam and certain EU Member States. For example, the ‘Official Dispatch 6513/BTP-PLQT’, dated December 29, 2023, of the Vietnamese Ministry of Justice, reported persistent returns of postal MLA requests to France despite numerous efforts, leading to the suspension of sending judicial entrustment files by postal service to the country (‘Official Dispatch 6513/BTP-LQT’, 2023). Subsequent ‘Dispatch 6382/BTP-LQT’, dated November 5, 2024, indicated a continued lack of response from the French authorities, leaving the reason for the return unclear. Despite France’s lack of objection to postal services under Article 10(a) of the *Hague Convention 1965* and Article 14(1) of the *Vietnam–France MLA Treaty*, the Ministry suggested that Vietnamese authorities could still affect direct postal services with guaranteed receipt under Article 474(1)(c) of the *Code of Civil Procedure 2015* (‘Official Dispatch 6382/BTP-LQT’, 2024). This instance highlights a lack of effective cooperation between the Vietnamese and French authorities.

Similarly, the ‘Official Dispatch 1779/BTP-LQT’, dated April 9, 2024, reported objections raised by the German states of Berlin and Bavaria regarding the service of process, which included questions that required independent

responses. They deemed the question evidence gathering as necessitating separate requests. The Ministry advised against including such questions in requests to these states and cautioned against similar inquiries to other German states ('Official Dispatch 1779/BTP-LQT', 2024). The incident demonstrates diverging practical interpretations among Vietnamese and German authorities.

These challenges stem from several causes, predominantly differences between legal systems, particularly in civil and commercial law, which complicate the application and enforcement of the MLA provisions. Vietnam's judicial system, influenced by socialist legal tradition and civil law principles, emphasizes state-led legal oversight and collective interests. In contrast, EU Member States primarily operate under either civil law or common law systems, which prioritize judicial independence and individual rights. These fundamental differences lead to procedural inconsistencies, differing standards of evidence and variations in approaches to handling MLA requests, all of which hinder effective cooperation. Furthermore, political factors can impact the expediency and approval of MLA requests, especially in cases involving legal sensitivities or national interests.

Linguistic and cultural differences also present significant challenges, making responsive coordination between the two parties necessary. These barriers not only affect the accuracy and efficiency of legal document translation, but also disrupt information exchange, thus prolonging the processing time of MLA requests. Notably, the EU's *General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)* may conflict with Vietnam's data-sharing requirements in MLA proceedings, creating legal obstacles that require resolution. Moreover, the limited experience and capacity of some local Vietnamese judicial authorities in international MLA—especially in handling complex cases involving multiple legal systems—pose additional barriers. Addressing these shortcomings requires substantial investment in specialized training, capacity-building initiatives and the development of more effective coordination mechanisms between Vietnamese and EU judicial bodies. Strengthening these aspects will ensure that the MLA processes are conducted efficiently, promptly and in compliance with international commitments.

Finally, another issue of paramount importance, especially in the current context of the digital revolution, is adherence to information confidentiality regulations. Divergent confidentiality frameworks between Vietnam and the EU pose challenges to information exchange due to concerns regarding sensitive data security. Vietnam prioritizes the protection of state secrets

and information vital to national security and defense, strictly restricting its use for MLA purposes and precluding unauthorized disclosure. Conversely, the EU places a strong emphasis on personal data protection under the *GDPR*, which covers sensitive financial, health and private information, ensuring individual control over their data, transparency in data processing and exchange and restricted access, even within MLA proceedings.

3. Solutions for enhancing mutual legal assistance

3.1 Improving the legal framework

Pursuant to Article 17(5) of the *EVFTA* and Article 4(3) of the *EVIPA*, the established Committee may amend these Agreements, with amendments entering into force upon written notification of completed domestic legal procedures (*EVFTA*, Article 17(16)). Therefore, including a dedicated chapter on Judicial Cooperation within the *EVFTA* is warranted as it complements the FTA's objective of promoting economic integration and, in turn, results in an increase in commercial transactions and potential disputes. This chapter should include a declaration of intent for the parties to accede to key Hague Conventions on judicial cooperation, facilitating cooperation with a broader range of states due to the open accession to Hague instruments ('Regulation (EC) No. 561/2006', 2006).

Based on this proposed supplementary chapter, Vietnam should intensify research on accession to multilateral treaties under the *Hague Conference on Private International Law* and prioritize negotiating and concluding bilateral civil and commercial MLA treaties with the remaining EU Member States. These treaties should clearly outline the scope of cooperation and simultaneously propose measures to mitigate language barrier. Concluding treaties addressing specific areas of cooperation, rather than consolidated MLA treaties, is advisable. Negotiations should precisely define the scope of MLA, encompassing, *inter alia*, service of process, evidence gathering, judgment recognition and the protection of legal entities and individuals in civil and commercial matters, while maintaining flexibility to accommodate diverse legal systems.

Domestically, Vietnam must amend its laws to ensure compatibility between MLA activities and commitments under multilateral treaties, to which both Vietnam and EU Member States are parties, such as the 1965 and 1970 *Hague Conventions* (Terada, 1993; Richard and Hess, 2020). To further legal

harmonization through enhanced dialogue and participation in organizations such as the HCCH and UNCITRAL, it is important to establish common MLA principles and develop standardized models for service of process, evidence gathering and foreign judgment recognition and enforcement. Adopting common legal principles will facilitate agreement negotiation, conclusion and implementation, minimizing potential conflicts and establishing an efficient legal foundation for the recognition and enforcement of cross-border judgment.

3.2 Strengthening the capacity of judicial authorities

It is recommended that Vietnam cooperate with EU Member States through experience exchange and technical assistance that would be similar to the EU and UNDP/UNICEF-funded Justice and Law Sector Reform Program in Vietnam. This program, which includes 71 completed activities, supported Vietnamese agencies in summarizing law enforcement practices to inform of improved law implementation and development, and achieved notable results. These include projects supporting research on international standards, workshops on global best practices informing the promulgation of five trial-guiding sub-law documents and support for implementing and reporting on fundamental international human rights conventions. The latter involved providing support for conducting research to establish monitoring and evaluation indicators; undertaking specialized studies on rights related to justice and the law as it affects vulnerable groups; assisting in the preparation of national reports and facilitating mock defenses/ shadow reporting processes related to the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)*, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)*, the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)* and the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*. The program also included support for working groups summarizing law enforcement in areas such as civil status, the legal profession, judicial records and expungement, court organization, civil MLA, law enforcement organization, administrative violations and judicial statistics, including 26 thematic legal studies for legislative bodies—specifically, improving the quality of consultations with vulnerable groups affected by policies during the law and policy-making process; mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the ICCPR; international experience on mutual legal assistance; access to judicial and legal services for migrant workers; personal data protection; international experience on judicial operating mechanisms, such as jury trial mechanisms, mediation

in criminal matters and laws on states of emergency in the context of the prevention and control of COVID-19 (Ministry of Justice, 2024, p. 12). The success of this program provides a strong foundation for future bilateral cooperation.

Future initiatives should focus on providing in-depth training for legal officials on international law and dispute resolution, emphasize enhancing digital capabilities to ensure proficiency in using IT tools for processing international MLA requests and familiarity with relevant international legal provisions for effective cross-border judicial cooperation. Furthermore, expert exchange programs with the EU and its Member States could prove beneficial, allowing legal officials to acquire skills in file management and processing according to international standards through direct participation in the workflows of foreign judicial authorities. In turn, this would contribute to a sustainable international cooperation network and improve the efficiency of processing cross-border MLA requests.

3.3 Establishing effective coordination mechanisms

Establishing direct communication channels, including dedicated hotlines, between Vietnamese and EU judicial authorities is essential for expeditious resolution of MLA requests. Such channels would facilitate the rapid exchange of essential information, documents and evidence pertinent to the investigation, prosecution and adjudication of cases involving foreign elements.

It is crucial to emphasize that establishing connections through informal administrative channels such as hotlines, email or telephone, must remain compliant with the domestic laws of all parties involved. This particularly requires prior negotiation and agreement that the requested state does not object to this form of communication. The approach not only enhances efficiency but also mitigates the risk of disputes or the non-recognition of evidence in judicial proceedings.

3.4 Utilizing technology

3.4.1 Developing an electronic database system

The development of an electronic database system is highly important for the efficient storage and management of information pertaining to MLA requests. Such a system should ensure accurate and timely delivery of legal documents in the service of process activities (Anthimos, 2013); facilitate the expeditious, accurate and transparent gathering of evidence from other states and, with respect to the recognition and enforcement of judgments, provide a platform to refine the execution of procedures for recognizing and enforcing foreign judgments and decisions.

The system would not only enhance the efficiency of MLA activities but also promote transparency and cooperation between states. Specific applications could include the following.

- *A national e-portal* accessible to judicial authorities, enabling them to access and search for information on cases requiring MLA, monitor the processing status of requests and share necessary legal information. This would minimize paperwork, thereby reducing time and costs for law enforcement agencies.
- *The establishment of a common international database*, shared by states, potentially facilitated through international organizations such as the *Hague Conference on Private International Law* or regional cooperation frameworks such as ASEAN and the EU, would further information exchange and the processing of cross-border MLA requests.

The EU's e-Justice system serves as a compelling example of the effective application of information technology in MLA. This system provides legal information search tools and assists Member States' judicial authorities in handling cross-border cases in 23 languages ('Regulation (EU) 2021/693', 2021). From the EU perspective, the European e-Justice Portal forms the cornerstone, integrating numerous initiatives and functionalities with the aim of becoming a "one-stop shop in the field of justice" (Gascón Inchausti, 2023, p. 536).

Implementing a similar system would enhance states' international cooperation capabilities and promote transparency and harmonization in global judicial activities, which is particularly important given increasing globalization and the corresponding rise in cross-border legal issues. Developing such a system is pivotal for enhancing the effectiveness of MLA,

making its development and implementation necessary for states seeking to promote international MLA, protect citizens' rights and ensure effective justice administration. Furthermore, strengthened information security measures are essential for effectiveness and legal security, including data encryption during electronic exchange, secure storage with restricted access and prohibiting information sharing with third parties without the requesting authority's consent.

3.4.2 Use of digital technology in MLA

Digital technology is an inevitable trend in international MLAs, reducing costs, expediting processing and enhancing the efficiency of legal requests. Secure electronic document transmission using encryption and digital signatures is crucial for safeguarding information and ensuring data integrity during exchanges between judicial authorities. Electronic record management systems are essential for facilitating rapid information exchange between central authorities, enabling online file storage and streamlining cross-border MLA request processing.

For example, the *Hague Service Convention 1965* permits the electronic service of documents, provided it complies with the receiving state's law, demonstrably reducing processing time compared to traditional postal methods (Lopez, 2016). This approach minimizes the time and costs associated with transmitting legal files and documents between states, while simultaneously ensuring data security, integrity and transparency in information exchange. The European Judicial Network (EJN) in civil and commercial matters is an example of an effective digital technology application that simplifies and enhances judicial cooperation between EU Member States. The EJN is an EU body specifically tasked with enhancing cooperation in civil and commercial matters, including MLA. The EJN works to establish direct communication between national judicial authorities, facilitating expeditious and efficient exchange of information and legal assistance. Its functions include facilitating judicial cooperation in cross-border cases (e.g., service of documents and evidence gathering), informing EU citizens about their cross-border justice access rights (primarily through fact sheets and guidance on specific EU laws published on the EU e-Justice Portal) and evaluating and sharing experiences on applying EU law to identify weaknesses and propose improvements (European Commission, 2001).

For Vietnam, establishing closer ties with the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust) or the EJN could be instrumental in enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of MLA. These organizations

could provide mechanisms for improved communication, understanding and coordination between Vietnamese judicial authorities and their EU counterparts, particularly in the context of the *EVFTA* and *EVIPA* agreements. Their support could simplify the processes in serving legal documents, enforcing judgments and gathering evidence in cross-border legal disputes.

One key area in which the EJNI could play a pivotal role is addressing the legal gaps between Vietnam's socialist-oriented legal system and the EU's diverse judicial frameworks. The EJNI could assist Vietnam by providing guidelines, sharing best practices and even offering training to Vietnamese legal officials. By doing so, it would bridge the gap created by differing legal traditions, ensuring that both parties can cooperate more seamlessly. Moreover, the presence of the EJNI could encourage the development of specialized mechanisms for handling cross-border legal issues, ensuring greater consistency in MLA implementation. This would not only reinforce the legal framework but also contribute to the broader goal of strengthening economic and judicial cooperation between Vietnam and the EU.

Furthermore, activities related to evidence gathering, including online meetings and remote evidence collection, which are permissible under the *Hague Evidence Convention 1970* allowing remote testimony via online video technology, mitigate the impact of geographical distance and reduce the costs associated with executing MLA requests. This is particularly beneficial for requests involving evidence gathering or witness testimony abroad, as it not only shortens processing times, but also alleviates geographical barriers and lowers expenses related to transporting witnesses or legal counsel between states.

4. Concluding remarks

The effective implementation of the *EVFTA* and the *EVIPA* unequivocally necessitates enhanced cooperation between Vietnam and the EU in civil and commercial mutual legal assistance. Such cooperation not only safeguards the lawful rights and interests of the parties concerned, but also fosters a conducive investment and business environment, promotes economic development and strengthens bilateral relations. Establishing an ample MLA framework between Vietnam and all EU Member States would improve the accuracy and efficacy of handling civil and commercial

cases involving foreign elements, create a firm legal basis for protecting the lawful rights and interests of citizens and businesses in both jurisdictions, attract foreign investment, promote economic growth and job creation, facilitate the expeditious and efficient resolution of cross-border disputes and enhance international standing. Refining the legal framework for MLA and strengthening international cooperation in this domain is critical for Vietnam's deeper integration into the global economy. EU–Vietnam legal cooperation and common trade policy must be intrinsically linked. International legal matters should no longer be a blind spot in the development of trade relations (Weller, 2018, p. 79).

Looking forward, future research should focus on exploring the economic impact of ineffective MLA on Vietnam–EU trade relations, as the lack of efficient legal frameworks could hinder trade growth and foreign investment. Additionally, the role of emerging technologies such as AI and blockchain in modernizing MLA processes presents a promising avenue for further research. These technologies are expected to revolutionize how cross-border legal assistance is processed, increasing efficiency and reducing barriers.

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