

Eurojust supports successful takedown in Romania of an OCG carrying out elaborated cybercrime and bank frauds in Lithuania and Estonia



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With active judicial support of Eurojust, the Romanian, Lithuanian and Estonian authorities have executed coordinated activities, within a Joint Action Day, to dismantle an Organised Crime Group (OCG) specialized in elaborate cybercrime and fraudulent financial operations, arresting 3 suspects and conducting 4 house searches. The OCG allegedly committed identity theft and lured bank customers in several countries into imputing their access credentials online, via text messages containing links to cloned bank sites, subsequently the perpetrators accessing the victims' accounts and making fraudulent transfers into specially-created accounts they directly controlled. Eurojust played a pivotal role in the entire operation by setting up and financing a Joint Investigation Team (JIT) and facilitating the continuous judicial cooperation between the involved National Authorities.

The fraud started in February last year and lasted until recently this month, in various waves. Almost 600 persons, out of which more than 100 in Lithuania and nearly 500 in Estonia fell victim to the OCG members. The victims were mostly natural persons but also companies, with damages in both countries amounting to over EUR 200.000. Additional bank transfers worth approximately EUR 450.000 into the OCG's were stopped by the banks.

For their fraud, the suspects made counterfeit versions of several banks' sites. By sending SMS and other messages to customers in their banking apps on mobile phones, fraudulent links were sent to account holders to obtain access credentials, so-called phishing. Via multiple online payments, the money was transferred into the bank accounts controlled by the OCG. Through the criminal activities, the OCG also gained fraudulent access to the number of governmental e-services in Estonia. "Further investigative measures will be conducted, to establish the total amount of the proceeds of crime, and the full extent of the criminal activities with possible connections to additional countries".

Since 2019, Eurojust facilitated judicial cooperation in this case, supported the creation of the JIT in March 2020, supported the organisation of four Coordination Meetings to prepare for this week's action day and provided over EUR 38.000 in funding. This enabled the participation of Estonian police officers during the operation in Romania.

Europol supported the operation by facilitating information exchange and

providing analytical support. During the action day, Europol deployed an expert on site to cross-check in real-time operational information against Europol's databases and provide leads to investigators in the field.

In Romania, the operation was lead by the Directorate for Investigating Organized Crime and Terrorism (DIICOT) and Bucharest Brigade for Countering Organized Crime. In Estonia the Riigiprokuratuur (Office of the Prosecutor General of the Republic of Estonia) and Eesti Politsei- ja Piirivalveamet (Estonian Police and Border Guard Board) participated to the action day. In Lithuania, Prosecutor General's Office and Lithuanian Criminal Police Bureau supported the operation.



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