
INTERNATIONAL OPERATION DISMANTLES CRIMINAL GROUP OF CYBER-FRAUDSTERS

10 Jun 2015

[Press Release](#)

Yesterday, a joint international operation led to the dismantling of a group of cybercriminals active in Italy, Spain, Poland, the United Kingdom, Belgium and Georgia, who are suspected of committing financial fraud involving email account intrusions.

The operation resulted in the arrest of 49 suspected members of the criminal group, 58 properties were searched, and authorities seized laptops, hard disks, telephones, tablets, credit cards and cash, SIM cards, memory sticks, forged documents and bank account documents. It was coordinated by Europol's European Cybercrime Centre (EC3) and Eurojust, led by the Italian Polizia di Stato (Postal and Communications Police), the Spanish National Police, the Polish Police Central Bureau of Investigation, and supported by UK law enforcement bodies. Parallel investigations revealed international fraud totaling EUR 6 million, accumulated within a very short time.

The modus operandi used by this criminal group is the so-called man-in-the-middle and involved repeated computer intrusions against medium and large European companies through hacking (malware) and social engineering techniques. Once access to companies' corporate email accounts was secured, the offenders monitored communications to detect payment requests. The company's customers were then requested by the cybercriminals to send their payments to bank accounts controlled by the criminal group. These payments were immediately cashed out through different means. The suspects, mainly from Nigeria, Cameroon and Spain, transferred the illicit profits to outside the European Union through a sophisticated network of money laundering transactions.

To enable swift coordination and communication between the different officers involved in this transnational operation, a coordination centre was established at Europol's headquarters in The Hague. Representatives from law enforcement agencies participating in the action day were present in the coordination centre, facilitating international information exchange along with Eurojust. At the same time, Europol specialists provided operational support on the ground in Italy and Spain, through the deployment of Europol mobile offices.

The Joint Cybercrime Action Taskforce (J-CAT*), hosted at the European Cybercrime Centre at Europol, has played a key role in the coordination of this investigation.

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* The J-CAT, launched on 1 September 2014 as a response to further strengthen the fight against cybercrime in the European Union and beyond, pro-actively drives intelligence-led, coordinated actions against key cybercrime threats and top targets. <https://www.europol.europa.eu/ec3/joint-cybercrime-action-taskforce-j-cat>

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