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Thursday, September 10, 2020

Russian Project Lakhta Member Charged with Wire Fraud Conspiracy

A criminal complaint was filed today charging a Russian national for his alleged role in a conspiracy to use the stolen identities of real U.S. persons to open fraudulent accounts at banking and cryptocurrency exchanges.

According to the allegations in the criminal complaint, Artem Mikhaylovich Lifshits, 27, of St. Petersburg, Russia, serves as a manager in “Project Lakhta,” a Russia-based effort to engage in political and electoral interference operations. Since at least May 2014, Project Lakhta’s stated goal in the United States has been to disrupt the democratic process and spread distrust towards candidates for political office and the political system in general. Since 2014, Project Lakhta has sought to obscure its conduct by operating through a number of entities, including the Internet Research Agency (IRA). The Translator Department, where Lifshits served as a manager beginning around January 2017, is alleged to be responsible for much of Project Lakhta’s influence operations, which are still ongoing.

Lifshits allegedly conspired with other Project Lakhta members to obtain means of identification of real U.S. persons, which the conspirators then used to open fraudulent accounts at banking and cryptocurrency exchanges in the victims’ names. Lifshits and the conspirators allegedly used these fraudulently opened accounts to both promote Project Lakhta’s influence operations and for personal enrichment.

“Today’s charges allege that Russian national, Artem Lifshits, conspired with others to steal Americans’ identities and use them to open fraudulent bank and cryptocurrency accounts,” said Assistant Attorney General for National Security John C. Demers. “Lifshits participated in this fraud in order to further Project Lakhta’s malign influence goals and for his own personal enrichment. This case provides a clear illustration of how these malicious actors fund their covert foreign influence activities and Russia’s status as a safe-haven for cyber criminals who enrich themselves at others expense.”

“Project Lakhta conspirators used the stolen identities of U.S. persons to further their goals of undermining faith in our democratic institutions and for personal gain,” said G. Zachary Terwilliger, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of

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Virginia. “Artem Mikhaylovich Lifshits is yet another Russian national charged in the Eastern District of Virginia with engaging in a conspiracy that victimized real U.S. persons and institutions. This case demonstrates that federal law enforcement will work aggressively to investigate and hold accountable cyber criminals located in Russia and other countries, which serve as safe-havens for this type of criminal activity.”

"According to the complaint, the subject engaged in a wire fraud conspiracy to further Russian foreign influence efforts and to enrich himself and others," said Alan E. Kohler, Jr. FBI Assistant Director of the Counterintelligence Division. "The FBI will move aggressively to uncover and disrupt any efforts aimed at undermining our democratic institutions."

“These designations are notable accomplishments in the Secret Service’s relentless efforts to safeguard the financial system from transnational cyber-crime,” said Matthew S. Miller, Special Agent in Charge, Washington Field office. “International cooperation continues to be an essential element in addressing the global challenge of transnational cyber-crime and we greatly appreciate our law enforcement partners for their assistance in this case. The Secret Service will continue to work closely with our domestic and international partners to bring transnational cyber criminals to justice.”

The criminal complaint does not allege that any U.S. citizens knowingly participated in Project Lakhta’s influence operations.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Jay V. Prabhu and Carina A. Cuellar are prosecuting the case, with the assistance of the National Security Division’s Counterintelligence and Export Control Section.

In addition to these criminal charges, today the Department of Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated Lifshits and two other Project Lakhta actors for sanctions based on the malicious cyber-enabled activity outlined in the complaint.

A criminal complaint contains allegations that a defendant has committed a crime. Every defendant is presumed to be innocent until and unless proven guilty in court.

Attachment(s):

[Download Lifshits_Complaint.pdf](#)

Topic(s):

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