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ROMANIAN MAN PLEADS GUILTY FOR ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL FRAUD SCHEME INVOLVING ONLINE AUCTION WEB SITES

WASHINGTON – A Romanian man pleaded guilty today before U.S. District Judge Matthew F. Kennelly in Chicago to one count each of wire fraud and conspiracy for his role in moving and hiding the illicit proceeds of an international fraud scheme, announced Assistant Attorney General Lanny A. Breuer of the Criminal Division, U.S. Attorney Patrick J. Fitzgerald for the Northern District of Illinois and U.S. Attorney Ronald C. Machen Jr. for the District of Columbia.

Adrian Ghighina, 33, of Bucharest, Romania, was indicted by a federal grand jury in the Northern District of Illinois in April 2008 on seven counts of wire fraud. In May 2010, Ghighina was separately indicted by a federal grand jury in Washington on charges of conspiracy, bank fraud and money laundering.

According to court documents, Ghighina, who entered the United States legally in late 2004, acted as a "money mule" in a complex Internet fraud conspiracy. Ghighina's co-conspirators, many of whom are in Romania, created fraudulent online auctions for expensive items such as cars, motorcycles and RVs on web sites such as eBay, Craigslist and AutoTrader.com. Victims who responded to these fraudulent listings were directed, in some cases by e-mail or telephone, to transmit payment for the non-existent items using Western Union and bank wire transfers to accounts controlled by Ghighina. Ghighina admitted that he moved from city to city opening new accounts at various banks using false identification as part of the conspiracy. The victims never received the items for which they had paid. From approximately September 2005 until his arrest in October 2009 in Miami, Ghighina opened accounts and/or received funds in Illinois, the District of Columbia, Florida, New York, Arizona and elsewhere.

Ghighina faces a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison and a $250,000 fine on the count of wire fraud from the Chicago indictment, and a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison and a $250,000 fine on the count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud from the Washington indictment. Both counts also include up to three years of supervised release following any prison

term. Sentencing is scheduled for May 9, 2011. Ghighina also previously was convicted on related charges of wire and visa fraud in the Southern District of Florida and sentenced on those charges to 27 months in prison.

The Chicago case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Brian Hayes with the Northern District of Illinois. The Washington case is being prosecuted by Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Joseph Springsteen for the District of Columbia. Mr. Springsteen also serves as a Trial Attorney with the Criminal Division's Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Section. Assistance on the Washington case was also provided by CCIPS Trial Attorneys Gavin Corn and Mysti Degani. The Criminal Division's Office of International Affairs provided assistance in this matter. This case is being investigated by the Chicago and Washington Field Offices of the FBI, as well as the Chicago Police Department and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations.