Department of Justice

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ROMANIAN MAN SENTENCED TO 48 MONTHS IN PRISON FOR ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL FRAUD SCHEME INVOLVING ONLINE AUCTION WEBSITES

WASHINGTON – A Romanian man was sentenced today to 48 months in prison for his role in moving and hiding the illicit proceeds of an international fraud scheme, announced Assistant Attorney General Lanny A. Breuer of the Justice Department's 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 sentenced by U.S. District Judge Matthew F. Kennelly in Chicago. Ghighina pleaded guilty in February 2011 to one count each of wire fraud and conspiracy.

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 websites such as eBay, Craigslist and AutoTrader.com.

Victims who responded to these fraudulent listings were directed, in some cases by email 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.

The sentence resolves two separate indictments against Ghighina, one from a federal grand jury in the Northern District of Illinois and a separate indictment from a federal grand jury in the District of Columbia. 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. Based on the plea agreement, the sentence imposed today will run concurrently with Ghighina's sentence in the Florida case, for which he has already served 21 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 (CCIPS). 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.

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