United States Attorney's Office District of Connecticut
Press Release

July 22, 2008 ROMANIAN CITIZEN ADMITS ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL PHISHING SCHEME

Nora R. Dannehy, Acting United States Attorney for the District of Connecticut, announced that OVIDIU-IONUT NICOLA-ROMAN, 22, of Craiova, Romania, pleaded guilty today before United States Magistrate Judge Holly B. Fitzsimmons in Bridgeport to one count of conspiracy to commit fraud in connection with access devices. NICOLA-ROMAN and six other Romanian citizens were charged in an Indictment returned by a federal grand jury in New Haven on January 18, 2007 in connection with an Internet "phishing" scheme.

A phishing scheme uses the Internet to target large numbers of unwary individuals, using fraud and deceit to obtain private personal and financial information such as names, addresses, bank account numbers, credit card numbers and Social Security numbers. Phishing schemes often work by sending out large numbers of counterfeit e-mail messages, which are made to appear as if they originated from legitimate banks, financial institutions or other companies.

The investigation leading to the Indictment stemmed from a citizen's complaint concerning a fraudulent e-mail message made to appear as if it originated from Connecticut-based *People's Bank*. In fact, the e-mail message directed victims to a computer in Minnesota that had been compromised, or "hacked," and used to host a counterfeit *People's Bank* Internet site. During the course of the investigation, it was determined that the individuals had engaged in similar phishing schemes against many other financial institutions and companies, including *Citibank*, *Capital One*, *JPMorgan Chase & Co.*, *Comerica Bank*, *Wells Fargo & Co.*, *eBay* and *PayPal*.

In pleading guilty, NICOLA-ROMAN admitted that he participated in this phishing scheme, that he accessed email accounts containing stolen credit card information, and that the stolen credit card numbers were used to obtain money unlawfully.

According to information provided to the Government by just one of the victim banks, the scheme resulted in losses of approximately $150,000.

NICOLA-ROMAN is scheduled to be sentenced by United States District Judge Janet C. Hall on October 10, 2008, at which time NICOLA-ROMAN faces a maximum term of imprisonment of five years and a fine of up to $250,000.

NICOLA-ROMAN was located in Bulgaria and arrested on an Interpol warrant on June 6, 2007. He was extradited to the United States on Nov. 8, 2007.

This matter is being investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Connecticut Computer Crimes Task Force. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Edward Chang of the U.S. Attorney Offices Computer Hacking and Intellectual Property Unit.

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