

Beat: News

Crackdown on one of the biggest online piracy group

Coordination led by Eurojust

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USPA NEWS - An alleged criminal network of copyright infringing hackers, mainly responsible for pirating movies and hosting illegal digital contents worldwide, was dismantled yesterday in a coordinated action between US authorities and their counterparts in 18 countries around the world, with Eurojust and Europol support. Over 60 servers were taken down in North America, Europe and Asia and several of the main suspects were arrested. The alleged illegal activity was causing tens of millions of USD in losses on an annual basis mainly to the US movie, television, and supporting industries.

Based on allegations contained in court documents, the organised crime group (OCG) called the “Sparks Group” dismantled yesterday was one of the biggest ones in the world responsible for online piracy. By deceiving the legal distributors with fraudulent reasoning, they obtained legal copies of DVD and Blu-Ray disks of blockbuster movies, television shows, and other content in advance of their release dates, compromised their copyright protections and then uploaded and distributed the illegal copies via servers operated by the OCG. The content was made available prior to its retail release date and further distributed via streaming websites, peer-to-peer networks, torrent networks, and other servers accessible to public, causing thus major losses to the film production industry.

The servers were located in several countries around the world, including the Republic of Korea, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Latvia, Romania, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom. The majority were taken down in yesterday’s action and in the days preceding it, with the help of national authorities from these countries, coordinated through Eurojust. Other measures were also taken in Italy, Romania and Canada. One of the members of the alleged criminal network was arrested over the weekend in Cyprus and another suspect was arrested yesterday in the US.

This successful operation was possible thanks to the extensive international cooperation facilitated by Eurojust between judicial and law enforcement authorities from the 19 countries involved.

The case was referred to Eurojust by the US Liaison Prosecutor earlier this year, given its world-wide magnitude and the need to coordinate closely with all countries involved and Europol.

“This case is an excellent example of what can be achieved if we work together across borders and continents. Thanks to the long-standing partnership between the US and the European authorities, we managed to deal a significant blow to online piracy. My sincere congratulations go out to all countries involved in yesterday’s joint action day” said Ladislav Hamran, President of Eurojust.

“In an investigation that spanned several time zones, the Department of Justice and law enforcement agencies in the United States worked very closely with national authorities from all other countries involved, exchanging necessary information in real time in a highly dynamic landscape,” said Vaughn Ary, Director of the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of International Affairs. “The Department extends our gratitude to Eurojust, Europol, and our international partners, who played a critical role in the investigation and takedown of these alleged cyber criminals.”

Eurojust hosted yesterday’s coordination centre, ensuring real-time coordination in the joint action of the national authorities in 18 countries. An operational meeting at Europol and a coordination meeting at Eurojust were organised prior to the joint action day, facilitating the exchange of information between law enforcement and judicial authorities and setting a joint strategy between all the parties involved.

Eurojust also helped transmit and facilitate the execution of over 30 Mutual Legal Assistance requests and Letters of Request necessary for taking down the servers and executing searches, and provided critical support in order to plan and carry out the coordinated operation yesterday.

Europol provided analytical support during the investigation and supported the information exchange between the involved police authorities via the SIENA secure communication system.

Earlier this year, Eurojust helped dismantle another criminal network operating with paid-TV fraud and received a letter of recognition by the Motion Pictures Association of America (MPAA) in the US.

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