

U.S. authorities charge three over "Gozi" computer virus

Bernard Vaughan, Reuters

([Reuters](#) [1]) - Federal prosecutors charged three people in as many countries with creating and distributing a computer virus that infected more than a million [computers](#) [2] around the world, including some operated by the U.S. space agency and others by [banks](#) [3].

Known as the Gozi virus, it infected at least 40,000 [computers](#) [2] in the United States and caused millions of dollars in losses by stealing online [banking](#) [4] credentials, the Manhattan U.S. Attorney's office said on Wednesday.

The defendants, Latvian Deniss Calovskis, Russian Nikita Kuzmin and Romanian Mihai Ionut Paunescu, used Gozi to steal millions of dollars from bank accounts in Europe, the United States and elsewhere, according to the indictment filed in U.S. District Court in Manhattan.

The first indictment against the men was brought against Kuzmin in 2011 under seal.

Kuzmin was in custody in New York, while Calovskis was taken into custody in Latvia and Paunescu was taken into custody in Romania, prosecutors said.

Attorney information for the defendants was not immediately available.

Calovskis and Kuzmin began to design the virus in or around 2005 to steal bank account information of individuals and businesses "on a widespread basis," prosecutors said in the indictment.

Paunescu operated a Web hosting service from computers in Romania, the United States and elsewhere that helped cyber criminals avoid detection by authorities, according to court papers.

Information security experts in the United States named the Gozi virus around 2007 after discovering a malicious computer code that was stealing information including bank account numbers, usernames and passwords, according to the court papers.

From around 2008 to June 2012, the virus infected more than 160 NASA computers, resulting in over \$40,000 in damage, according to the documents. It was unclear if the virus affected NASA's operations. A spokesman from the agency did not immediately return a call seeking comment.

(This story corrects spelling of Gozi in the 3d paragraph)

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