

# Colombia catches hacker wanted in the U.S. for 'Gozi' virus

30 June 2021, by Manuel Rueda



Credit: George Hodan/Public Domain

Colombian officials say they have arrested a Romanian hacker who is wanted in the U.S. for distributing a virus that infected more than a million computers from 2007 to 2012.

Mihai Ionut Paunescu faces computer intrusion and banking fraud charges in New York, where prosecutors say he was part of a ring of criminals that developed and spread the "Gozi" virus and other forms of malware that were used to steal money from [bank accounts](#).

Prosecutors say that Gozi infected computers in at least eight countries, including the United States, Germany, Finland and the United Kingdom.

Victims included individuals, corporations and also computers belonging to NASA.

The virus traveled within PDF documents and once it entered a computer it was able to steal bank account passwords, enabling [cyber criminals](#) to take "tens of millions of dollars" from victims according to an indictment filed in the Southern District Court of New York.

Prosecutors say Paunescu designed hosting systems that helped cyber criminals to share the virus files without being detected. The virus was rented out to criminal operators for a fee of \$500 a week.

In 2016, the virus' creator, Nikita Kuzmin, was sentenced to 37 months in prison and fined \$7 million following a plea bargain. A Latvian programmer who helped design the virus also received a 21-month prison sentence after being extradited to the U.S.

Paunescu had been arrested in Romania in 2012, but was able to avoid extradition. Colombia's Attorney General's office said he was detained at Bogota's international airport, sporting a thick beard and wearing a red t-shirt.

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