

Six arrested in UK as part of international investigation into money laundering network working for top cyber criminals

Six men have been arrested by the NCA as part of an international investigation into the so-called QQAAZZ group, a money laundering network which laundered millions on behalf of the world's most prolific cyber criminals.



The operation, which was coordinated by Europol and involved 16 countries, saw a further 14 individuals arrested across Europe, the US and Australia.

Criminal indictments unsealed in the US allege the QQAAZZ network is responsible for laundering tens of millions stolen by international cyber criminals since 2016.

The crime group is believed to have laundered the money through numerous corporate and personal bank accounts, which they had opened with financial institutions throughout the world. It was often converted into cryptocurrency to hide its original source.

After taking a fee, the network transferred the balance back to the cyber criminals who were responsible for stealing it.

QQAAZZ advertised its services on Russian-speaking online cyber crime forums and was employed by those behind the world's most harmful strands of malware, such as Dridex and Trickbot.

Both strains of malware have had a significant detrimental impact on businesses and individuals in the UK in recent years.

Trickbot has been one of the primary causes of fraud related losses to the UK banking sector, with one UK bank reporting losses attributable to Trickbot worth over £2 million in a 12 month period.

The NCA launched an investigation into the UK arm of QQAAZZ and last year arrested six men with believed links to the network, on suspicion of money laundering.

The men, British, Georgian and Latvian nationals aged 30-33, were detained at various addresses in London between 21 and 25 October 2019.

One of those was 32-year-old Arturs Zaharevics, who has been charged by the FBI as part of their investigation into the network. He currently awaits extradition to the US.

The other five men have been released under investigation as enquiries continue.

NCA officers seized mobile phones, computers, suspected false IDs and financial documents in searches across eleven properties and four vehicles.

Richard Winstanley from the NCA's National Cyber Crime Unit, said:

“Financially motivated cyber criminals rely heavily on the services of money launderers like the QQAAZZ network to access the funds stolen from victims.

“Targeting such networks is just one of the ways the NCA works to cause disruption to the organised cyber criminals who have the most significant impact on the UK.

“Cyber crime, by default, is a threat that crosses borders and international collaboration such as this is crucial to tackling it.

“The NCA investigation into UK-based members of this network remains ongoing.”

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