



U.S. Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PRESS RELEASE

THREE BROOKLYN RESIDENTS CHARGED IN MONEY LAUNDERING SCHEME
WITH STEALING OVER \$30 MILLION FROM FOREIGN BANKS

Defendants and Co-Conspirators Allegedly Created Duplicate Keys to Steal Cash and
Valuables from Safe Deposit Boxes

An indictment was unsealed earlier today in federal court in Brooklyn charging Val Cooper, Alex Levin and Garri Smith with money laundering conspiracy and conspiracy to violate the Travel Act in connection with their roles in a scheme to steal over \$30 million in cash and other valuables from safe deposit boxes located at banks abroad, primarily in Eastern Europe. The defendants were arrested this morning and will be arraigned this afternoon before United States Magistrate Judge Robert M. Levy.

Mark J. Lesko, Acting United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York; William F. Sweeney, Jr., Assistant Director-in-Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation, New York Field Office (FBI); Peter C. Fitzhugh, Special Agent-in-Charge, Homeland Security Investigations, New York Office (HSI); and Dermot F. Shea, Commissioner, New York City Police Department (NYPD), announced the arrests and charges.

“The defendants and their co-conspirators were allegedly part of a sophisticated network of criminals that used high-tech camera equipment to steal millions in cash and other valuables from victims who had tried to protect their property by using safe deposit boxes in foreign countries, and they then laundered the proceeds of their scheme through the United States financial system,” stated Acting United States Attorney Lesko. “This Office will hold accountable anyone who uses our financial system to commit fraud and theft here or abroad.” Mr. Lesko expressed his grateful appreciation to the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol), and the governments of Azerbaijan, Latvia, Moldova, North Macedonia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan for their assistance in the investigation.

“The crimes we allege in this indictment read like something straight out of Hollywood fiction,” stated FBI Assistant Director-in-Charge Sweeney. “The thieves used sophisticated tools to thwart security systems at foreign banks and tried to cover their tracks by

laundering money through U.S. banks. However, thanks to the outstanding work of our FBI Eurasian Organized Crime Task Force and our international partners, these criminals now face real federal charges and the possibility of real time in federal prison.”

“Using state of the art technology, these modern-day bank robbers allegedly exploited small, unsophisticated banks to gain access to safety deposit boxes and looted \$30 million in other people’s cash and valuables. Cooper, Levin and Smith then used bank accounts located in the United States, to launder the proceeds of their illegal activities,” stated HSI Special Agent-in-Charge Fitzhugh. “HSI is proud to work along-side our domestic and international law enforcement partners, including the United States Attorney’s Office, EDNY, and will utilize our unique and broad authorities to bring to justice those who engage in criminal activity for their own financial gain. These defendants must now face our system of justice and answer to the allegations contained in the indictment.”

As set forth in the indictment and court filings, between March 2015 and October 2019, the defendants and their co-conspirators allegedly stole over \$30 million in cash and other valuables from safe deposit boxes at banks in multiple foreign countries, including the Ukraine, Russia, North Macedonia, Moldova, Latvia, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. The co-conspirators targeted foreign banks that appeared to lack security features, including video surveillance cameras in certain areas. After a bank was selected, they rented safe deposit boxes at the location by posing as customers. The co-conspirators entered the safe deposit box rooms of the targeted banks and used sophisticated camera equipment, including borescopes that are typically used in medical procedures, to photograph the insides of locks of safe deposit boxes belonging to other individuals. Another co-conspirator used these photographs to create duplicate keys, and then other co-conspirators used the duplicate keys to open the victim safe deposit boxes in order to steal the contents, including currency, gold bars, jewelry and other property.

Cooper, the leader of the network, directed others, received stolen property and used his bank accounts in the United States to launder proceeds from the scheme. Levin used his bank accounts in the United States to purchase camera equipment used in some of the thefts and also to launder the proceeds. Smith committed some of the safe deposit box thefts himself, flying from the United States to foreign countries to steal property from victim safe deposit boxes at the targeted banks.

Earlier today, agents executed a search warrant at, among other places, Cooper’s residence. There, agents discovered, among other things, safe deposit box keys with no numbering on them, cash, jewelry and high-end handbags. Agents also searched a storage unit in Brooklyn controlled by Cooper and found a borescope and a safe deposit box lock.

The charges in the indictment are allegations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty. If convicted of money laundering conspiracy, the defendants face up to 20 years’ imprisonment.

This case is part of an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) operation. OCDETF identifies, disrupts and dismantles the highest-level money launderers and transnational criminal organizations that threaten the United States by using a prosecutor-led, intelligence-driven, multi-agency approach that leverages the strengths of federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies against criminal networks.

The government's case is being handled by the Office's Organized Crime and Gangs Section. Assistant United States Attorneys Keith D. Edelman, Andrey Spektor and Joy Lurinsky are in charge of the prosecution, assisted by Assistant United States Attorney Brian D. Morris of the Office's Asset Forfeiture Unit.

The Defendants:

VAL COOPER (also known as "Val Konon" and "Valeriy Kononenko")

Age: 56

Brooklyn, New York

ALEX LEVIN

Age: 52

Brooklyn, New York

GARRI SMITH (also known as "Igor Berk" and "Igor Berkovich")

Age: 49

Brooklyn, New York

E.D.N.Y. Docket No. 21-CR-208 (LDH)