

3 arrests over breach claimed by 'Phineas Fisher' hacker

January 31 2017, by Aritz Parra And Raphael Satter



In this Tuesday, Jan. 31, 2017 photo, a computer screen shows an archived copy of the Twitter feed belonging to Phineas Fisher, a hacker who claimed responsibility for breaching the union of the Mossos d'Esquadra, Catalonia's regional police, last year. Spanish police have arrested three people over a data breach linked to a series of dramatic intrusions at European spy software companies—feeding speculation that the net has closed on an online Robin Hood figure known as Phineas Fisher. (AP Photo/Raphael Satter)

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series of dramatic intrusions at European spy software companies—feeding speculation that the net has closed on an online Robin Hood figure known as Phineas Fisher.

A spokesman with Mossos d'Esquadra, Catalonia's regional police, said two men and a woman were arrested Tuesday in Salamanca and Barcelona on suspicion of breaking into the website of the Mossos labor union in May, hijacking its Twitter feed and leaking the personal data of more than 5,500 officers. No more arrests are expected, he added, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with force policy.

The arrests sent rumors flying online because the breach had been claimed by Phineas Fisher, a hacker who first won notoriety in 2014 for publishing data from Britain's Gamma Group—responsible at the time for spyware known as FinFisher. The hacker, or group of hackers, cemented their reputation by claiming responsibility for a breach at Italy's Hacking Team in 2015—a spectacular dump which exposed the inner workings of government espionage campaigns—and appearing as a hand puppet in an unusual interview in 2016.

The Andover, England-based Gamma Group did not immediately return messages left after hours. Neither did FinFisher, the Munich-based company which now sells the eponymous intrusion tool. Hacking Team spokesman Eric Rabe said he had "no special insight" into the arrests but declined to comment on whether his company was in touch with Spanish authorities.

Toni Castejon, the general secretary of the Catalan police union that was hit, said the language used by the hijacked Twitter account led him to doubt Phineas Fisher had been involved. The tweets were written "by somebody with perfect knowledge of a very informal kind of Catalan (language) that would have been impossible to achieve through online translation," he said.

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