

Court: Russian hacker can be extradited to US or Russia (Update)

May 30 2017, by Karel Janicek

A Czech court ruled Tuesday that a Russian man who faces charges of hacking computers at American companies can be extradited either to the United States or Russia—and the suspect immediately appealed his possible extradition to the United States.

Czech authorities arrested Yevgeniy Nikulin in Prague on Oct. 5 in cooperation with the FBI after Interpol issued an international warrant. He is accused of hacking computers and stealing information from LinkedIn, Dropbox and other companies.

Moscow also wants him extradited on a separate charge of internet theft in 2009. Russian officials had previously said they were working to prevent his extradition to the U.S.

Judge Jaroslav Pytloun ruled Tuesday that the extradition requests from both countries meet all the necessary legal conditions.

The 29-year-old has denied wrongdoing.

"I'm innocent," Nikulin said through a translator at the hearing Tuesday. "I haven't done anything illegal. I have nothing to do with that."

Nikulin appealed his extradition to the United States. He has three days to decide if he will agree to being extradited to Russia.

Justice Minister Robert Pelikan will have the final say on where Nikulin

goes after Prague's High Court decides on his appeal.

Nikulin's defense lawyers have rejected the U.S. charges, saying they are based on one FBI agent, and suggested the U.S. was seeking him for political reasons—to use him as a pawn in the investigation into alleged Russian hacking in the U.S. election.

The alleged hacker claimed in the courtroom Tuesday that he was twice approached by U.S. authorities—in November and in February—in the absence of his previous lawyer. He said they urged him to falsely testify that he was cooperating in the hacking attack on the Democratic National Committee ordered by Russian authorities. He said U.S. authorities would, in exchange, give him money and a life in the United States.

"I rejected doing it," Nikulin said.

The U.S. has accused Russia of coordinating the theft and disclosure of emails from the Democratic National Committee and other institutions and individuals in the U.S. to influence the outcome of the 2016 presidential election. Russia has vigorously denied that.

There was no indication that Nikulin's case is connected to the DNC hacking accusation.

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