

PRESS RELEASE

# Married Couple Sentenced for Laundering \$1.4 Million in Proceeds from Jewelry Thefts and Unemployment Fraud During Pandemic

Tuesday, November 21, 2023

## For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of California

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## **NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY – November 20, 2023**

SAN DIEGO – Eduard Ghiocel and his wife, Floarea Ghiocel, were sentenced in federal court today to 36 months and 30 months, respectively, for laundering \$1.4 million in proceeds from dozens of grand thefts, robberies and swindles targeting mostly elderly victims in San Diego County.

According to their plea agreements, the Ghiocels, along with co-conspirators Gabriel Ghiocel, Marius Ghiocel, Larisa Ghiocel, and Argentina Alexandru, conducted a series of 17 grand thefts and robberies of jewelry in elderly communities in San Diego. They then pawned the stolen jewelry and watches for cash in jewelry stores in Los Angeles.

In addition, Eduard and Floarea Ghiocel admitted submitting fraudulent unemployment claims to the California Employment Development Department (EDD) to obtain approximately \$32,250 in California unemployment insurance benefits intended to help workers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Eduard and Floarea Ghiocel admitted wiring proceeds from the jewelry thefts and the unemployment insurance fraud to Romania, as well as using the proceeds to purchase gold bars, gold coins, and high-end luxury vehicles from locations in Southern California

and shipping these items to Romania. In total the Ghiocels sent almost \$1.4 million to Romania, knowing the money was proceeds of theft, robbery, and fraud, the plea agreement said.

Eduard and Floarea Ghiocel agreed to forfeit proceeds of the crime including two Lamborghini Urus, a 2020 Ferrari Portofino, and a BMW X4 all seized by authorities in Romania. The forfeitures will be used pay restitution to victims of the crimes.

The co-conspirators remain at large.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Jessica Adeline Schulberg with assistance from the Department of Justice's Office of International Affairs, FBI's Legal Attaché in Bucharest, and Romanian authorities including the Directorate for Combating Organized Crime (DCCO) Service for Countering of Organized Criminal Groups, Brigade for Combating Organized Crime (BCCO) – Pitești, County Service for Countering Organized Crime – Teleorman, Romanian Gendarmerie Battalion, Romanian Ministry of Justice, and Romanian Criminal Investigative Directorate - Fugitive Unit.

**DEFENDANT**  
**LAB**

**Case Number 23CR0386-**

Eduard Ghiocel (1)	Age: 48	Romania
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aka Eduard Alexandru, aka "Filica"

Floarea Ghiocel (2)	Age: 49	Romania
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aka Floarea Alexandru

**SUMMARY OF CHARGES**

Title 18 U.S.C. § 1956(h) and Title 18 U.S.C. § 1956(a)(2)(A) — Conspiracy to Transport Funds to Promote Unlawful Activity

Maximum penalty: Twenty years in prison and \$500,000 fine or twice the value of the monetary instrument or funds involved in the transportation, transmission, or transfer, whichever is greater

**AGENCY**

Federal Bureau of Investigation

San Diego Police Department Economic Crimes Unit

IRS Criminal Investigation

California Employment Development Department Investigative Division

Department of Labor Office of Inspector General

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

**Contact**

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*Updated November 21, 2023*

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