

Russian Bitcoin Suspect Extradited to U.S. from France

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Alexander Vinnik. **Yuri Malinov / TASS**

Alexander Vinnik, a Russian citizen accused of supervising a cryptocurrency exchange that allegedly helped criminals launder billions of dollars, has been extradited to the United States following a years-long extradition battle between Russia, the U.S. and France.

He now faces up to 50 years in American prison.

Vinnik was in December 2020 [sentenced](#) to five years in French prison for money laundering, but was cleared of an original charge that he had defrauded nearly 200 individuals using ransomware through the cryptocurrency exchange known as BTC-e.

France on Thursday returned Vinnik to Greece, where he was originally arrested in 2017.

From there, Vinnik was flown on a private plane to Boston and then to San Francisco, the Russian state-run news agency RIA Novosti [reported](#) Friday.

Related article: [Russian Sentenced to Jail in France for Money Laundering](#)

“Everything ... was made to look like a kidnapping,” Vinnik’s unnamed family member was quoted as saying by RIA Novosti.

The Russian computer expert is [expected](#) to make an initial court appearance in the U.S. Northern District of California, according to CNN.

A U.S. indictment accuses Vinnik of 21 charges ranging from identity theft and facilitating drug trafficking to money laundering and operating an unlicensed money service in the U.S.

U.S. investigators suspect Vinnik of being the mastermind of what they say has become one of the main ways cybercriminals launder their illegal gains.

He allegedly operated the BTC-e bitcoin exchange until his arrest in the northern Greek tourist resort of Halkidiki. The U.S. Justice Department alleges that BTC-e had received more than \$4 billion in bitcoins before it shut down in 2017.

The U.S. Treasury Department had in 2017 evaluated a \$12 million fine against Vinnik and a \$110 million civil penalty against BTC-e for alleged money laundering.

Vinnik tried unsuccessfully to be extradited to Russia, where he is wanted on lesser fraud charges involving just 9,500 euros.

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