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**ARMS TRAFFICKER SENTENCED TO 20 YEARS IN PRISON FOR
PLOT TO SMUGGLE SHOULDER-FIRED SURFACE-TO-AIR MISSILES,
ROCKET-PROPELLED GRENADES, AND OTHER MILITARY WEAPONS**

LEV L. DASSIN, the Acting United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that CHRISTIAAN SPIES, a leader of an international arms trafficking operation, was sentenced today to 20 years in prison for plotting to smuggle shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles ("SAMs"), rocket-propelled grenades ("RPGs"), anti-tank guided missiles, and other high-powered military weapons into the United States for sale. United States District Judge RICHARD J. HOLWELL imposed the sentence today in Manhattan federal court.

SPIES, 37, and his co-defendants ARTUR SOLOMONYAN and IOSEB KHARABADZE, were found guilty on July 24, 2007, following a one-month jury trial, of conspiring to smuggle SAMs, RPGs, machine guns, and other high-powered weapons from Eastern Europe into the United States. The jury also found SPIES and SOLOMONYAN guilty of illegally trafficking in machine guns and other assault weapons. Judge HOLWELL previously sentenced SOLOMONYAN and KHARABADZE to 22 years and 9 years in prison respectively for their roles in the offense.

According to the evidence at trial:

From December 2003 to March 15, 2005, SOLOMONYAN, SPIES, and KHARABADZE brokered a deal to import RPGs, SAMs, anti-tank missile systems, and other military weapons from Eastern Europe into the United States, for sale to a confidential informant ("CI") posing as an arms trafficker. SOLOMONYAN and SPIES met with the CI in New York City on several occasions to discuss the details of their weapons deal, including the specifications and prices of various weapons that the defendants could ship. In June 2004, at a meeting in New York City, SOLOMONYAN and SPIES provided the CI with a price list of weapons obtained from KHARABADZE that day. In February 2005, SOLOMONYAN

and SPIES provided the CI with digital photographs of military weapons in Armenia that they proposed to import into the United States for sale to the CI. In addition, while SOLOMONYAN and SPIES were arranging to import the military weapons from Eastern Europe, they sold to the CI and delivered one machine gun and seven assault weapons.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation ("FBI") arrested SOLOMONYAN, SPIES, and KHARABADZE before any of them could travel outside of the United States to obtain these weapons.

Judge HOLWELL previously sentenced 15 other related defendants convicted of firearms trafficking offenses in connection with this investigation, including DMITRIY VOROBAYCHIK (33 months), NIKOLAI NADIRASHVILI (41 months) and LEVAN CHVELIDZE (34 months), who were convicted at trial in July 2007 along with SOLOMONYAN, SPIES, and KHARABADZE.

At the sentencing hearing of KHARABADZE on March 11, 2009, Judge HOLWELL described SPIES as one of the "moving forces in the conspiracy."

At the sentencing today, Judge HOLWELL said, with respect to SPIES's role, "the underlying crimes are extremely serious offenses and those who commit them deserve a substantial punishment to deter them and others like them from committing similar crimes in the future."

Mr. DASSIN praised the work of the FBI and the New York City Police Department in their handling of this investigation. Mr. DASSIN also expressed his thanks to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and the United States Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement for their assistance.

Assistant United States Attorneys MARC P. BERGER and DAVID B. MASSEY are in charge of the prosecution.

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