Foreign National Real Estate Fraud Bulletin

U.S. Secret Service, Orlando Field Office
Cyber Fraud Task Force

How does it work?

Foreign Nationals who own property in the US, specifically in Florida, are having their property fraudulently sold right out from under them. Fraudsters are actively searching multiple county property appraiser's websites for property records that list foreign national owners usually through the owner's address being out of the country.

Once they identify their target, they pose as the property owner and reach out to local realtors to list the property for sale. They provide counterfeit or altered identification (foreign passports/identification cards) to the realtors along with various other documents to include counterfeit "notarized" paperwork from US Consulates or Embassies abroad. The realtors facilitate the sale the property/land and the title company wires out the funds to an intermediary (Money Mule) who then sends the funds overseas most likely through crypto currency or wires.

All of this occurs unbeknownst to the actual property owner until it's too late. The fraudsters choose to pose as foreign sellers because it significantly bypasses stateside identity verification measures, and all business is generally conducted through email without the fraudster never having to physically see or speak to the realtor or title company.

Prevention

Communication is critical, attempt to communicate via phone call, Facetime or Zoom when possible, in an attempt to verify the seller's identity. Fraudsters will refuse to communicate through those means and will deliver nothing but excuses.

- Ask for multiple forms of ID such as a Passport and a National ID.

- When requesting these forms of ID, always request scanned color copies.

- NO COPIES OF COPIES, even if "notarized."

- ID photographs should be well defined.

- All printed fonts should be clear and legible without any smudges or blurs.

- The passport must be signed.

- If a booklet number is scanned as well, it should match the passport number.
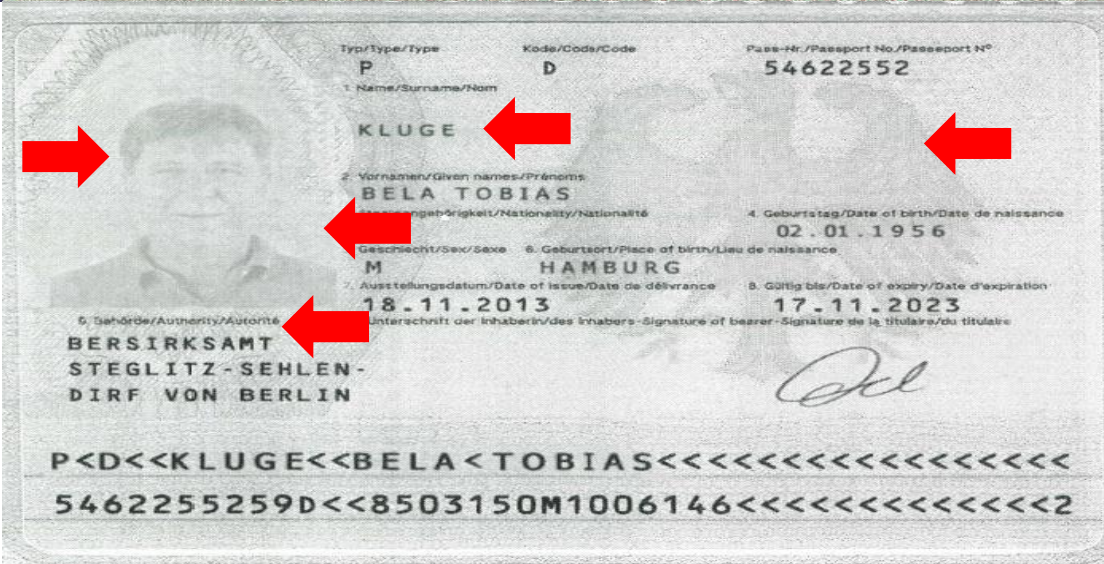
Examples

Legitimate

- Detail, Detail, Detail
- Photo centered and only of face
- All font legible and clear
- Visible security features around photo
- Passport is signed
- German coat of arms is well defined

Discrepancies in the Fake

- Black and White copy of a copy
- Poor quality Photo
- Photo not centered and size of photo is incorrect.
- Inconsistent printing of font
- Faded font for First and Last Name
- No definition in German coat of arms

Examples

Discrepancies in the Fake

- Should not see information page along with bio page on scan. New Passport templates do not include this page currently.

- Black and White copy of a copy

- Poor quality Photo

- No visible security features around picture

- Photo not centered and incorrect size.

- Smudged font under photo

- Inconsistent printing of font

- No definition in German coat of arms

- Missing signature

Additional Information or Questions

**U.S. Secret Service Orlando Field Office
Cyber Fraud Task Force
407-648-6333**

**SSA Roger Fuentes
SA Michael Bocan-Collins
CBP EO Javier Mondejar**