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Six Moldovan 'uranium smugglers' arrested



Moldovan authorities seized another form of uranium - Uranium-238 - last year

Moldovan police have arrested six people suspected of trying to sell a type of uranium that can be used in nuclear weapons.

Those held wanted to sell more than 1kg (2.2lb) of uranium-235 with a value of at least \$20m (14m euros; £12m), an official said.

There were conflicting reports as to whether the men were accused of trying to sell the uranium to an African country, or to an African national.

Four of the suspects are Moldovan.

Two others are from the breakaway Trans-Dniester region, one of whom also holds Russian citizenship, Vitalie Briceag, an official from the interior ministry, told reporters on Wednesday.

Police seized 1.8kg of uranium-238 in Moldova's capital, Chisinau, last year.

Uranium-238 is the most commonly found, naturally occurring form of the substance.

The type needed for nuclear fuel and weapons is the less common uranium-235.

"The container with uranium has been in Chisinau for a week," said Mr Briceag.

"All that time intermediaries were looking for buyers. The container, 20cm [8in] long and 40cm [16in] in diameter, was found at one of the detained men's apartments."

Germany, Ukraine, and the US had helped Moldova with the investigation, he said.

The Associated Press quoted Mr Briceag as saying the uranium had come from Russia and the suspects were trying to sell it to a North African country.

But other reports cited Mr Briceag as saying the men wanted to sell the uranium to a Muslim citizen of an unnamed African state.

It was not clear to what level the uranium was enriched.