

## Nuclear smuggling exposed in secret trial

By Genevieve Roberts

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Nuclear weapons-grade uranium is now available on the black market in Georgia, according to officials who broke up a smuggling ring in the former Soviet republic.

Highly enriched uranium was smuggled from Armenia to Georgia in a lead-lined cigarette packet in March. Two men involved in transporting the substance were arrested in April.

In a closed hearing, Sumbat Tonayan, a former dairy factory owner and Hrant Ohanian, a retired nuclear physicist from a science institute in Armenia, pleaded guilty to smuggling the 90 per cent-enriched uranium from the Armenian capital Yerevan to Tbilisi. They face 10 years in jail. It remains unclear whether the 18g of uranium contained in the cigarette packet was a sample of a larger shipment, which has yet to be located.

Before his arrest, Tonoyan suggested to an undercover agent that he had more uranium to sell. Investigators are now working to determine the origins of the radioactive material.

The investigation has highlighted the difficulty of stopping nuclear smuggling in the region. Radiation detectors on the Georgia-Armenia border failed to identify the substance.

Mr Pavlenishvili, chief of Georgia's nuclear smuggling unit, said: "The dangerous thing is that there might be more material out there somewhere.

"This proves that if a criminal or an extremist is wealthy enough, it is possible to obtain material."

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