

Information Circular

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Communication dated 22 July 2020 from the Resident Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the IAEA

1. The Secretariat has received a communication dated 22 July 2020 from the Resident Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the Agency.
2. At the request of the Resident Representative, the communication and its attachment are circulated herewith for information of all Member States.



PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE

No. 0301 /16 /20
22 July 2020

H.E. Mr. Rafael Mariano Grossi
Director General
International Atomic Energy Agency

Excellency,

As a follow-up to our last meeting, I wish to reiterate that Azerbaijan remains seriously concerned with the functioning of Metsamor NPP in neighboring Armenia, as it is one of a mere handful of remaining nuclear reactors of its kind that were built without primary containment structures.

During the entire period of operation a number of small accidents took place in Metsamor NPP. Along with being situated in a highly seismically active terrain, it is based on an outdated technology, which even in the state of normalcy poses security risks to the region. As it is known, it has two energy reactor blocks constructed respectively in 1976 and 1980. After the earthquake of 1988 in Armenia, the epicenter of which was 75 kilometers away from the plant, operation of both reactors was stopped. However, not only was the site reopened but its license was also extended twice, first to 2021 and then to 2026. By any international standards of nuclear safety protocols the continued operations of Metsamor NPP would be a high risk for entire region due to potential earthquakes in the immediate area.

Azerbaijan is concerned about the lack of transparency and insufficient safety measures in activities of Metsamor NPP. We urge the Agency to conduct an open review of Metsamor NPP, on the basis of a comprehensive and transparent risk and security assessment ("stress tests") aiming at comprehensive evaluation of the plant's overall safety status. Unfortunately, the operational safety review performed by the IAEA Operational Safety Review Team (OSART) from 16 May to 2 June 2011 in the Metsamor NPP, intended just to observe operational safety performance at the nuclear power plant, and its report and findings are not disclosed by Armenian Government. OSART mission reviewed the factors affecting the management of safety and the performance of personnel. However, Design Safety Review, Safety Assessment Capacity and Competency Review, Review of Accident Management Programmes, Periodic Safety Review and Seismic Safety Evaluations are also important elements to measure and realize the dangerous situation of the Metsamor NPP. We remain concerned over persistent refusal by Armenia to provide the access for neighboring states to the information on Metsamor NPP. In absence of transparency as well as in view of serious concerns over outdated technology of the infrastructure, we stand for soonest closure of the Metsamor NPP.

International organizations also raised concerns with regard to the operation of Metsamor NPP. The EU, in particular, classified the light water-cooled reactors VVER-440 Model V230 as the "oldest and least reliable" category of all the Soviet reactors built in Eastern

Europe and the former Soviet Union. The United States and other G-7 countries have been opposed to the restart of the Metsamor reactors due to safety concerns. Both units were listed in the Department of Energy's report on the most dangerous nuclear reactors. Despite international opposition, however Unit 2 at Metsamor was restarted in October 1995.

The nuclear-related threats originating in Armenia are not limited to Metsamor case. According to regional news and media reports a number of cases of smuggling nuclear and radioactive materials from Armenia were registered. Intensity of these cases as well as the scope of actors involved represents a serious ground for concern of security not only of Southern Caucasus, but also for neighboring regions (*See attached fact sheet*).

The latest occasion, took place in July 2019, when the State Security Service of Georgia had detained an Armenian citizen attempting to smuggle a radioactive substance Thorium, packed in four packages, to Russia via the Sadakhlo border-crossing point between Georgia and Armenia. The State Security Service of Georgia noted that the total weight of the packages was 71.63 kg and they contained radioactive isotope Thorium 232, which belongs to the category of nuclear materials.

According to the Agreement of 30 September 1993 between Armenia and IAEA for the Application of Safeguards in connection with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, Armenia shall establish and maintain a system of accounting for and control of all nuclear material subject to safeguards under this Agreement.

Noting with concern the lack of mechanism for nuclear and radioactive control in Armenia and that we are unable to provide proper control along a substantial part of our borders, due to the continued occupation of about twenty percent of our territory by Armenia, we are seriously concerned over efficiency of control and accounting mechanism in this regard. Also we request the IAEA Secretariat to include the July 2019 case at the border-crossing point between Georgia and Armenia into the IAEA Incident and Trafficking Database.

Against this background, Azerbaijan calls on the IAEA and its Member states to take decisive actions to review the proliferation related risks and challenges to security of the region and to prevent systematic attempts of smuggling of nuclear and radioactive materials by Armenian nationals.

I request you to consider the concerns of Azerbaijan with regard to the transparency and safety measures of Metsamor NPP, its geo-seismic sensitivity and outdated technology.

I request the Secretariat of IAEA to distribute this letter to all Member States of the Agency.

I am looking forward to our continued cooperation.

Enclosure:3 pages

Sincerely



Galib Israfilov

Fact - sheet prepared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the issue of trafficking in nuclear and other radioactive materials by Armenia

- **1999, May 22 – Berehovo town, Ukraine:** Two Armenians trying to sell 20 kg of Low-Enriched Uranium (LEU) U-235 ore and a buyer were arrested by Ukrainian law enforcement officials in the town of Berehovo – The Armenians demanded \$35,000 per kg for the Uranium. They received heavy radiation doses because they had handled the material with their bare hands and carried it in rubber bags. According to one source, the material was enriched Uranium in white powder form stolen from a radioactive-materials recycling facility in Krasnoyarsk. Other sources said it was LEU metal suitable for making fuel for RBMK reactors.
- **2001, December 19 – Samtskhe-Javakheti region, Georgia:** 300 g of LEU were intercepted in an intelligence operation. The origin of the material was Armenia.
- **2003, June 26 – Armenia-Georgia border (Sadakhlo-Bagrashen checkpoint):** Smuggling case 170 grams of Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU) U-235 (~90%). Detected by the Georgian border guards. An Armenian citizen Mr. Garik Dadayan was busted when he walked through a nuclear sensor on the Georgia-Armenia border with 170 grams of unsheathed HEU in a tea box in two batches: 70 grams and 100 grams; and in two different forms: UO₂ and U₃O₈. Reportedly, HEU was obtained from the Novosibirsk nuclear fuel fabrication facility, Russia. HEU sample was provided to Russia; remaining HEU was transferred to the USA. Dadayan was handed over to the Armenian government, tried, and sentenced in 2004 just to 2,5 years in prison.
- **2003, December 29 – Megri checkpoint on the Armenian-Iranian border, Armenia:** Armenian customs officials discovered a radiation source in a scrap metal shipment bound for Iran. It was reported that scrap metal was outbound from the Armenian Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant (NPP). Radioactive object discovered at the Armenian-Iranian border was an empty casing from a radioactive source, which previously contained strontium-90 (The presence of the casing for a radioactive source without the radioactive source itself would appear to imply that the source now rests at an unknown location without the protective barriers necessary to avoid injury to the public). Spectral analysis showed that the object has a high radioactivity level.
- **2004, March 13 – Armenia-Georgia border (Sadakhlo-Bagrashen checkpoint):** Armenian citizen with radioactive material detained. The report did not identify the radioactive material.
- **2007, October 24 – Georgia-Turkey border (Sarpi checkpoint):** Georgian police officers and operatives from the Special Operations Center of the Main Directorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia for the Autonomous Republic of Adjara arrested 4 Armenian citizen for attempting to smuggle 2.04g of Lawrencium-103 in a specifically designed gold container.
- **2009 August 26-28 – Armenia-Georgia border (Sadakhlo-Bagrashen checkpoint):** The vehicle belonged to a resident of Noratus village of Gegharkunik region, Armenia, carrying three Armenian citizens entered Georgia from Armenia at the Sadakhlo border crossing. The car set off a gamma alarm on the radiation detection portal monitor. The driver provided a cursory explanation for the alarm, and the patrol

police did not detain the group. On August 27, the same car returned to Armenia through the Sadakhlo crossing, and again set off a gamma alarm. At this point, the patrol police stopped and searched the vehicle. Georgian officials determined that the car was contaminated with Cesium-137. However, because the search did not produce any radioactive material, the occupants were released and returned to Armenia.

- **2010 March – Tbilisi, Georgia:** Two Armenian, Businessman Smbat Tonoyan and Physicist of the Yerevan Institute of Physics Hrant Ohanyan were arrested by Georgian authorities in the hotel room, with 18 grams of 89% HEU brought from Armenia into Georgian territory. Two had concealed the material in a lead lined Marlboro cigarette package before boarding a train from Yerevan to Tbilisi. During the trial in Tbilisi, it was revealed that Tonoyan had demanded \$8 million from a prospective buyer for 120 grams of the enriched uranium, but later dropped the asking price to \$1.5 million. 18 grams would be shown to the buyer as a sample of the product in their possession. Smbat Tonoyan's son Samvel Tonoyan, was a member of the Special Investigative Service of the Republic of Armenia. Interestingly, the seized HEU was provided to the smugglers by the same Armenian national, Garik Dadayan who was arrested in possession of the first sample of HEU intercepted in Georgia in 2003. Having served a relatively light prison sentence of 2.5 years, he resurfaced again in 2010 as a supplier of the same material.
- **2010, September 16 – Tbilisi Airport, Georgia:** Three persons were arrested at Tbilisi airport for attempting to sell a small quantity of mixed powder containing about 0.0004 kg of Plutonium (Pu) and 0.00008 kg of LEU. The individuals said they had brought the Uranium and Pu from the Russian Federation and Ukraine to sell it. One member of the group was from Armenia.
- **2014 August – Armenia-Georgia border (Sadakhlo-Bagratashen checkpoint):** Georgian authorities arrested two Armenians trying to smuggle Cesium 137 into Georgia.
- **2016 January – Armenia-Georgia border (Sadakhlo-Bagratashen checkpoint):** Georgian authorities arrested three Armenians, also for trying to sneak Cesium 137 across the border.
- **2016 mid-April – Georgia's State Security Service** detained three citizens of Armenia and three citizens of Georgia who were trying to sell \$200 million worth of Uranium-238 that was found in the home of one of the Georgians. The prefabricated transportation containers full of uranium were found in one of the detainee's apartment, he further said without disclosing the precise amount of the radioactive material. It is also known that the group of 3 Armenian citizens previously worked at Metsamor NPP. One of the detainees was identified as a former associate of the Armenian secret service. This group planned to sell Uranium-238 to the Middle East region.
- **2019 July 15 -** The latest occasion, took place in July 2019, when the State Security Service of Georgia has detained an Armenian citizen attempting to smuggle a radioactive substance Thorium, packed in four packages, to Russia via the Sadakhlo border-crossing point between Georgia and Armenia. The State Security Service of Georgia noted that the total weight of the packages was 71.63 kg and they contained radioactive isotope Thorium 232, which belongs to the category of nuclear materials.

Repeated seizures at the Armenia–Georgia border and the unusually high number of Armenian nationals implicated in nuclear trafficking cases provide sufficient evidence to

confirm the existence of the Armenian route. Some of these cases involved seizures of weapons-usable nuclear material. Radioactive sources could be also used for malicious purposes, for example in a radiological dispersal device or "dirty bomb." Uncontrolled radioactive sources also have the potential to harm human health or the environment. Unlawfully discarded or disposed of radioactive sources, when melted at scrap metal recycle plants, may lead to severe environmental and economic related consequences.

Sources: *Annual statistics reports of the IAEA Incident and Trafficking Database (IDTB), Database on Nuclear Smuggling, Theft, and Orphan Radiation Sources (DSTO), reports by NTI, SIPRI, and other open media sources.*