
Turkey considers uranium enrichment for own nuclear power plants

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ANKARA, January 15 (RIA Novosti) - Turkey may consider building a uranium enrichment center as part of an ambitious plan to develop the country's nuclear potential, a national newspaper said on Tuesday.

Turkey is preparing to issue a public tender for the construction of its first nuclear power plant and plans to build at least two nuclear reactors by 2015.

"The initiative [to build a uranium enrichment center] is strategically important for the whole world and for Turkey's future," the Hurriyet newspaper said.

The issue may be on the agenda of a nuclear energy meeting in Istanbul on Friday. In addition to representatives from the International Atomic Energy Agency, top-level officials from the United States, Russia, France and the U.K. are expected to attend the meeting.

The development of its own nuclear power industry was one of the priorities outlined for the country's government in Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's address to parliament following his election victory in July last year.

Turkey has been enjoying rapid economic growth for the past five years and is becoming increasingly energy hungry. Some analysts say that the country could soon face an energy shortfall if it continues to rely on traditional energy sources.

Turkey has limited fossil fuel reserves. According to various sources, it produces only 50,000 barrels of oil per day, but consumes over 700,000, while its coal reserves are of a poor quality.

Meanwhile, Turkey's interest in uranium enrichment may allay U.S. concerns over growing nuclear ambitions among Middle East countries, primarily Iran.

With Washington's blessing, Turkey, a traditional U.S. ally and a NATO member, might become one of the key suppliers of nuclear fuel for Muslim countries if they decide to build their own nuclear power plants.

"If Turkey, as a NATO member, becomes an important regional center for uranium enrichment, it would be beneficial not only for the U.S., but also for the countries in the region, because they would be able to buy fuel for their future nuclear reactors from Turkey," Hurriyet said.
