

Wealthy Moldovan accused of coup plot

by UPI

CHISINAU, Moldova -- A Moldovan billionaire businessman has been arrested on suspicion of attempted coup and inciting mass riots, officials said Friday.

Gabriel Stati, said to be worth \$1 billion, and bodyguard Auril Marinesku were expected to remain in custody in Chisinau for 30 days during an investigation into the charge, Maria Vieru, a spokeswoman for the prosecutor general's office, said. They were extradited from the Ukraine earlier this week.

If found guilty, Stati could face up to 25 years in jail for the attempted coup and 15 years for the riots. Protests to the April 5 parliamentary results turned violent last week as some 10,000 rioters, mainly students, broke into the presidential residence and parliament, the RIA Novosti, a Russian news agency, said. Several hundred protesters and police were reported injured.

Stati, considered one of Moldova's richest businessmen, works in the oil industry and in construction and is promoting martial arts in Moldova.

President Vladimir Voronin's Communist Party won almost 50 percent of the vote in the parliamentary election, touching off two days of public disorder.

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