

Date Set for Hartmann Trial

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Proceedings against French journalist to take place next month.

Judges at the Hague tribunal have set a start date for the trial of the prosecution's former spokeswoman, Florence Hartmann, after they denied a request from her lawyers to drop the charges against her.

Hartmann is accused of contempt of court for allegedly disclosing the contents of confidential decisions made by appeal judges in the trial of former Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic.

Her trial will take place from June 15 to 17, according to an order made by the new pre-trial judge in the case, Judge Bakone Maloto, on May 22, following a court meeting between the parties this week.

Hartmann, who was spokeswoman to former chief prosecutor Carla Del Ponte from 1999 until 2006, last appeared in court on January 30 ahead of her trial which had been scheduled to start on February 5.

However, on the eve of the trial, her lawyer, Karim Khan, filed a request for two of the judges set to hear the case to stand down on the basis that they appeared to lack impartiality.

An independent panel of judges granted Khan's request on March 25, ruling that the relationship between the judges and the appointed prosecutor, Bruce MacFarlane, "may lead an objective observer to conclude that the chamber has an interest in the investigation and prosecution of the case against Ms Hartmann".

Judges Carmel Agius and Alphons Orié were replaced by Judge Mehmet Guney and Liu Daqun on April 2.

Following their replacement, Khan then requested that the charges against his client be dropped on the grounds they were no longer valid, as they were initiated by the previous judges. He also argued that the new judges should neither reinitiate nor continue with the contempt proceedings against Hartmann.

However, after revisiting the basis on which proceedings were originally brought against Hartmann in August 2008, the new trial judges this week denied Khan's submission.

"The Chamber has reviewed the underlying supporting material and confirms that there were - and are - sufficient grounds to proceed against the Accused for contempt," wrote Judge Maloto in the decision on May 19.

Hartmann is charged with revealing elements of two confidential decisions - made by appeals judges on September 20, 2005 and April 6, 2006 - while at the same time acknowledging that they were confidential.

The decisions are thought to relate to the court's handling of certain documents in the Milosevic trial, including minutes of meetings of Serbia's Supreme Defence Council, SDC, during the wars in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s.

Milosevic's war crimes trial for atrocities in Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo, which began in 2002, was never completed as he died in his cell in March 2006. The contents of these documents have been kept confidential by the court, under rules that enable it to protect a state's national security.

Hartmann is expected to appear in court once more before the case starts.

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