

Milosevic Wants a Break

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Former Yugoslav president says he needs more time to put together case.

Slobodan Milosevic this week demanded a two-year gap in his trial to prepare his defence.

He told the Hague tribunal he needs the time, and to be let out of jail, to assemble a defence against the massive prosecution case against him.

"I cannot begin to calculate the time I would need," he told the court on September 2. "In the barest minimum it would have to be in excess of two years.

"If I were to bring forward as many witnesses as the prosecution has brought to date, it's quite obvious that there will be a large number. I should also need free unsupervised access to sources of information and documents."

He said he had to get to grips with at least half a million pages of documents, and that it would be impossible to assemble a case if he stayed in jail.

Judge May told Milosevic he "cannot be released provisionally".

Next, he turned down the request for a two-year delay, "There can be no question during a trial of a break of two years. However, we will consider what is a reasonable period of time for the accused to prepare his case. I am simply thinking aloud now - it may be that the hours of sitting will have to be lessened instead to give time for (Milosevic's) preparation."

Stephen Kay, a court-appointed lawyer who can provide advice to the defendant, told the court that the defence was a complicated task, "Many a football manager says that its easier to attack than defend."

And Kay said the sheer enormity of the accusations facing Milosevic meant his defence was a huge job, "[With] three indictments involving three wars and involving two NATO bombings," he said. "This is not going to be an easy or simply done task."

But prosecutor Geoffrey Nice objected to the idea of a long break, saying the task for the defence was simpler than for prosecutors.

"The difference between the accused and the prosecutor is that he was a participant who knows from his own knowledge the truth and doesn't have to investigate," said Nice. "The thing is much less complicated for him."

And he pointed out that Milosevic has assistance from outside The Hague, with advice and information being channelled to him, "He is, if not in The Hague, then elsewhere, extremely well resourced as is substantiated by his questions. He elected to appear unrepresented despite the clear opportunities for him to have assistance."

Milosevic replied, "What the prosecution has said is absurd. They feel they are on an equal footing to me. I have already told you that I do not recognise this trial."

The judges will announce at a later date what time, if any, is given to Milosevic. The prosecution is expected to finish its case by the end of the year.

Milosevic will then have equal time to the prosecution, likely to be about 22 months, to conduct his own defence.

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Focus: International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia

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