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MH17 Trial Postponed as Prosecution Slams Russian 'Misinformation'

The defense team for one of the four suspects has asked for additional time.

By Pjotr Sauer

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The scene outside the court before the start of the trial. **AP**

SCHIPHOL, The Netherlands — The presiding judge in the MH17 murder trial on Tuesday postponed the hearings until March 23, when the court will decide on how the trial should proceed following judical requests from the defense and relatives of the victims of the plane crash.

Monday was the first day of the long awaited trial. Dutch prosecutors allege that the defendants, three Russians and a Ukrainian who are being tried in absentia, were instrumental in the 2014 shooting down of the passenger plane that killed all 298 people on board, most of them Dutch nationals.

The defendants — Russians Sergey Dubinsky, Oleg Pulatov and Igor Girkin and Ukrainian Leonid Kharchenko — held senior posts in the pro-Russian militias in eastern Ukraine in 2014, according to prosecutors.

The four face preliminary charges of the murder of 298 people and of causing the aircraft to crash. The suspects are believed to be in Russia.

On Tuesday, the court decided to adjourn until March 23 after the defense team for Russian suspect Oleg Pulatov asked for additional time to analyze the case while a lawyer representing many of the family members of the victims asked to have access to the case file.

Related article: Everything You Need to Know About the MH17 Trial

Earlier in the day, public prosecutors presented an account from a witness who said he was a Russian volunteer in 2014 in the Donbass region. The witness, who has asked to remain anonymous, said he was near the village of Snizhne, close to the crash site, when the missile was launched, where he had been told to guard the site. The witness said he was happy the plane came down until he realized a civilian plane had been shot.

According to the prosecutors, it was vital the witnesses remained anonymous as they had direct information that suggested his life was in danger.

On Tuesday, Dutch prosecutors also slammed Russia for "constantly spreading misleading information" regarding the case and "conducting hacking operations to disrupt the MH17 investigation." Russia has repeatedly denied any involvement in hacking attacks on the investigation.

The prosecutors finished by saying that their overall investigation was almost completed.

Reuters contributed reporting to the article.

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