News
Vatican



Faithful gather to listen to Pope Francis' Angelus noon prayer in St. Peter's Square, at the Vatican, Sunday, Nov. 14, 2021. (AP Photo/Gregorio Borgia, File)

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The Vatican’s big fraud and embezzlement trial, which opened to great fanfare in July, suffered another delay Tuesday as the tribunal postponed any further decisions until prosecutors finish redoing their investigation of four of the original 10 defendants.

The delay means the trial, which had already been proceeding at a snail’s pace even by Italian standards, won’t get off the ground until mid-February at the earliest. Tribunal president Giuseppe Pignatone said that by then he could “finally, hopefully” unify the two branches of the trial and start in earnest.

“We’re in an open construction site,” Pignatone said of the current status. “The key thing is that the trial needs more time before it can open for real.”

After two years of investigation, Vatican prosecutors in July charged 10 people — including a once-powerful cardinal — with a host of financial crimes related to the Holy See’s 350 million-euro investment in a London residential property.

Prosecutors allege some Vatican officials and Italian brokers fleeced the Holy See of millions of euros in fees and commissions, much of it donations from the faithful. They have charged one broker with then extorting the Vatican out of 15 million euros to get full control of the building. The defendants have denied any wrongdoing.

Pope Francis’ own role in the deal has come under scrutiny since several witnesses have said he approved negotiating an exit deal with the broker accused of extortion.

In October, Pignatone ordered prosecutors to throw out their indictments for four of their suspects and start over because they failed to respect basic procedural steps during the investigation meant to protect the rights of the accused, including summoning them for questioning so they could respond to the accusations.

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On Tuesday, assistant prosecutor Gianluca Perone said to date prosecutors had only heard from one person. He said he expected to know by Jan. 20 whether prosecutors would ask for new indictments or for the charges to be dropped.

Pignatone set a procedural hearing for Jan. 25 — “hopefully the last one” — and said he hoped by mid-February to then unify the proceedings against both sets of defendants and open the trial in earnest.

Pignatone has also repeatedly ordered prosecutors to turn over to the defense the videotaped recordings of a key suspect-turned-star witness so the suspects can adequately prepare their defense. The prosecutors initially agreed, then refused, then deposited most of the tapes but with cuts that in some cases amounted to an hour.

On Tuesday, Pignatone announced he had appointed technical experts to provide written transcripts of the main witness, Monsignor Alberto Perlasca, as well as all the other defendants. He didn’t rule on defense requests to provide the full, uncut tapes.

In a motion to the court Tuesday, prosecutors doubled down on their refusal to provide the full tapes, saying the cuts concerned information unrelated to the trial that needed to remain secret for investigative reasons. They also pushed back against defense claims that documents were still missing from the nearly 30,000 pages of evidence gathered during the investigation.

The claims of missing evidence by lawyers for one of the defendants, Cecilia Marogona, are “surprising, as well as radically unfounded" since the documents are all available for the defense's consultation, prosecutors Alessandro Diddi and Perone wrote, indicating where in the CD files the lawyers could find the material.