

Former Panamanian President Ricardo Martinelli faces trial



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Panama City, May 22 (RHC)-- Judge Baloisa Marquinez is setting up the "New Business" hearing, in which former President Ricardo Martinelli (2009-2014) and 20 others will be tried for the purchase of a media publisher with public funds.

The trial hearing should have been installed on April 17th. On that occasion, however, the defense managed to postpone the hearing in a case whose trial was called in December 2022. The hearing could be postponed again due to multiple circumstances, National Bar Association President Juan Carlos Arauz said, explaining that the defense lawyers could allege that Martinelli recently underwent spinal surgery and is unable to attend the hearing.

However, Judge Marquinez could decide that Martinelli give a statement from the hospital using telematic means, the constitutional expert Ernesto Cedeño said, recalling that Martinelli also did not appear at the preliminary hearing in January alleging spinal problems.

In March 2017, the Panamanian Prosecutor's Office began the investigation of the "New Business" case due to the purchase with public funds of shares of the company Editora Panama America S.A. (EPASA). This purchase occurred between in December 2010, when \$44 million U\$D was transferred to an

account belonging to New Business Service Ltd in an offshore bank.

Martinelli, who intends to run for the 2024 presidential elections, is also charged with money laundering in the Odebrecht case, whose trial is scheduled to begin in August with 36 defendants, including former President Juan Carlos Varela (2014-2019).

Two of Martinelli's sons were jailed for the Odebrecht case in the U.S., where they pleaded guilty to laundering \$28 million USD and bribing the Brazilian company "by order of their father."

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