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Fiery Speech by Serbian Leader at Trial

By [MARLISE SIMONS](#)

THE HAGUE, Nov. 8 — On the second day of his war crimes trial, [Vojislav Seselj](#), a radical nationalist who is still an influential and popular politician in [Serbia](#), had the chance on Thursday to demonstrate some of his legendary speechmaking prowess. And so he did.

For four hours, the time allowed for his opening statement, Mr. Seselj lectured the court on Serbian linguistics and history, told his judges they were paid not to think, was scathing about [Slobodan Milosevic](#), the United States, Germany and the [Vatican](#), quoted from Tolstoy and dissected the legal aspects of the notion of “hate speech,” for which he stands accused.

But for melodrama, nothing could match his oratorical drumroll near the end of a long morning. Evidently addressing his television audience at home, Mr. Seselj said he was especially grateful to the court and the prosecution “for allowing me to suffer for my ideology,” that of Serbian nationalism.

However, his greatest regret, he said, was that the founders of the tribunal had not envisaged the death penalty, “so that proudly, with dignity, my head upright like my friend [Saddam Hussein](#), I could die and put the final seal on my ideology. It would become immortal. I have lived long enough.”

Reporters from Belgrade, following the proceedings, described the address, not given under oath, as a “vintage Seselj speech.”

It has been almost five years since Mr. Seselj, 53, a sociologist and former warlord who commanded his own violent militia that the indictment says was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of civilians, and still the leader of the Radical Party in Serbia, voluntarily arrived at the [United Nations](#) detention center in The Hague. He has awaited his turn amid others — Serbs, Croats and Bosnian Muslims — facing charges of crimes from the 1990s wars of the former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Seselj has been indicted for inciting crimes against humanity and war crimes, which, prosecutors argue, are the result of years of his delivering fanatical and war-mongering speeches and the orders he gave to his own militia operating both in Croatia and Bosnia as they terrorized, robbed and killed civilians to drive them from what he regarded as Serbian lands.

His case has been delayed by the court’s slow pace and heavy workload, as well as by multiple obstructions set by Mr. Seselj himself. Last year, as soon as his trial began, he went on a 28-day hunger strike over various demands. Acting as his own lawyer, Mr. Seselj has demanded that thousands of documents disclosed by the prosecution be translated into Serbian and delivered in print; he has returned all materials that the prosecution provided electronically.

On Thursday, he was complaining that the court still had not translated into English two of his books, “The

Ideology of Serbian Nationalism” and “The Roman Catholic Criminal Creation of the Artificial Croatian Nation,” which he insists on introducing as evidence.

The Seselj trial is under way in the same glass-enclosed courtroom where former President Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia faced his judges until his death last year, shortly before the trial’s end. The two men, variously rivals and allies, knew each other but were never friends.

Mr. Seselj said Thursday that he, not Mr. Milosevic, was the creator of the ideal of “Greater Serbia.” Mr. Seselj said that Greater Serbia would encompass all lands outside Serbia where, he said, the “true Serbian language,” the Stokavian dialect, was spoken. The use of Stokavian, a root dialect for South Slavic languages, has been a flash point for nationalists.

The two men clearly agreed on the tribunal. As was Mr. Milosevic’s custom, Mr. Seselj berated the judges Thursday, called the court trying him illegal, illegitimate, created unlawfully by the United Nations and working according to the dictates of the United States. Its task, he said, was “to prosecute Serbs” and “to falsify modern Serb history.” Its judges, he said “are paid not to think.”

Mr. Seselj, who in the past would sometimes brandish a pistol at fellow politicians, also sent a verbal message from the courtroom. “Destiny, history, did not allow me to come to power on time,” he said. “If I had, everything would have been different.”

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