

DECLARATION OF SOLIDARITY



There is something rotten afoot in the state of France. The powerful Bordelais wine lobby is making use of a dubious tactic that is increasingly en vogue across Europe and indeed all around the world. Not interested in open debate about the impact of their growing practices on biodiversity and human health, the Conseil Interprofessionnel du Vin de Bordeaux (CIVB) is now trying to silence an activist who has spoken up against the dangerous poisons used in their vineyards by hitting her with a strategic lawsuit against public participation (SLAPP).

For daring to call out the toxic spraying that is routinely employed by wine-growing estates in the Bordeaux region, Valérie Murat is being dragged to court by the CIVB and 26 other complainants, who appear to have forgotten that freedom to express criticism openly is a fundamental component of every functioning democracy. Following the example of the rich and powerful across the world, the CIVB is attempting to bully the activist into silence by means of an unwarranted lawsuit that is intended above all to consume her time and resources as well as intimidate other potential critics. Even in the case of acquittal, Valérie may be left with considerable legal expenses, and in the worst case of conviction she risks financial ruin due to the enormous burden of compensatory damages.

Valérie Murat's "crime" is to have drawn attention to the health risks associated with the use of poisons in viticulture in the Bordeaux region. The daughter of a wine-grower herself, Murat took up the fight against pesticides after her father died of lung cancer, an illness that is recognised as an occupational disease by the French agricultural social security system. Following her father's death, Murat created the citizens' initiative "Alerte aux Toxiques!", which has proven that residents and workers living in the vicinity of the vineyards are subjected continuously to the dangerous poisons sprayed on the vine plants. Murat and her fellow activists were also able to detect residues of toxic substances from the vineyards from a distance of 60km away in the city of Bordeaux. Valérie Murat must now defend herself in court for calling out the blatant greenwashing of several Bordelais vineyards, which sell wines bearing a label for particularly environmentally friendly cultivation (Haute Valeur Environnementale), despite being contaminated with more than 28 different pesticides.

It is now time to defend health and freedom of speech – not the use of toxins. Last year, civil society kept a close eye on the intimidation of activists that spoke out against the heavy use of pesticides in apple plantations in South Tyrol /Alto Adige. In the same manner, we will not turn a blind eye to the persecution of Valérie Murat by an extremely powerful wine industry. Moreover, we will ensure that more people than ever before are informed that in the Bordeaux region it is not only biodiversity and health that are being poisoned by pesticides, but also freedom of speech, which is falling victim to the intimidation tactics of the CIVB. We will not accept this wine stain on European free speech, and like Valérie Murat, we will not be silenced.

MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT:

Marie Toussaint Martin Häusling Mounir Satouri Thomas Waitz Benoit Biteau

