

ENVIRONMENT

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36 in dock in France's second massive carbon tax trial

By RFI ([auteur/rfi/](/auteur/rfi/))

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The port at Marseille

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The trial of 36 people accused of a massive carbon tax fraud dubbed "the crime of the century" began on Monday. The defendants, including the former maths teacher who is their alleged leader, are part of a gang who swindled the French government out of an estimated 1.6 billion euros.

Christiane Melgrani, a 59-year-old woman of Corsican origin, is accused of being one of the "principal organizers" of the profitable scam.

She gave up teaching to open a piano-bar near Marseille's Old Port, later working for a building company with Corsican connections to build a life in organised crime.

She has already been convicted on several occasions for drug dealing and fraud.

Another of the accused, Gérard Chettier, 48, has confessed to playing the role of "trader", while Grégory Zaccaro, 42, in an earlier trial relating to the Paris end of the swindle (<http://en.rfi.fr/environnement/20170913-12-jailed-trading-fraud>), is said to have been one of its inventors and to have trained Melgrani in operating it.

A warrant is out for Zaoui's arrest.

Also in the dock was Melgrani's partner, Angelina Porcaro, a restaurant owner originally from the Italian city of Naples, believed to have recruited individuals to help launder the funds using her connections with the Neapolitan underworld.

Other defendants include Marseille gangster Jean-René Benedetti, an accountant, and alleged front men including a sculptor, an estate agent and unemployed people.

Billions lost to EU

The fraud, which is seen as a speciality of Franco-Israeli criminals, involved buying carbon credits abroad in France with VAT added, while omitting to pay the VAT to the French taxman.

It is believed to have cost the European Union as a whole five to six billion euros, 1.6 billion in France with the government pocketing an estimated 385 million euros.

Those proceeds not invested into buying more credits, were laundered via a network of companies or used to buy goods.

The scam led the French government to scrap VAT on carbon credits, a measure introduced as part of efforts to combat global warming, in June 2009.

The trial is expected to last eight weeks.

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