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French winemaker faces prison for large-scale Champagne fraud using fake ingredients

Trial exposes scheme involving counterfeit sparkling wine as industry and regulators monitor impact on Champagne’s global reputation

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Didier Chopin, a winemaker from the Aisne region in northern France, has been on trial since Tuesday for producing and selling counterfeit champagne between 2022 and 2023. According to the prosecution, Chopin used wines sourced from Spain and

Ardèche, to which he added flavorings and carbon dioxide to create sparkling wine that he then sold as authentic champagne. The total financial damage from this operation is estimated at several million euros.

The case was brought to light in the summer of 2023 after one of Chopin's former employees revealed details about the fraudulent activity. Following these revelations, Chopin fled to Morocco, where he attempted to start a new business in vegetable farming. However, he was soon arrested and imprisoned there for unrelated charges involving bad checks. Chopin spent seven months in Moroccan prison before returning to face charges in France.

During the trial, the prosecutor described the scheme as a "cynical and premeditated pursuit of profit." The prosecution has requested a one-year prison sentence for Didier Chopin. For his wife, who is accused of participating in the same offenses of fraud and misuse of protected designation of origin, the prosecutor has asked for a two-year suspended sentence and a fine of 100,000 euros. The couple could also face a permanent ban from managing any business or engaging in any commercial activity related to champagne. Authorities have also called for the confiscation of all seized assets and the destruction of all bottles involved in the case.

The couple's holding company, SAS Chopin, is facing a proposed fine of 300,000 euros for misappropriation and abuse of company assets. The court is expected to deliver its verdict on September 2.

Speaking briefly to reporters after the hearing, Didier Chopin said, "It's a sad conclusion. I made a mistake, I am ruined and I have nothing more to add." His lawyer argued for a suspended sentence, emphasizing that Chopin had already endured harsh conditions during his incarceration in Morocco.

In addition to this criminal case, Didier Chopin faces further legal troubles. Customs authorities have postponed proceedings related to the export of counterfeit champagne until February 3, 2026. Separately, Chopin is under investigation following complaints from five former employees who accuse him of sexual assault.

The case has drawn attention within France’s wine industry and among regulators concerned with protecting the reputation and integrity of Champagne as a protected designation of origin. The outcome is being closely watched by both producers and consumers as it highlights ongoing challenges in combating wine fraud and maintaining trust in one of France’s most iconic products.