



## Interview

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A project to set up a private Immunology Research Center in Ordino BSL3, which will be managed by the multinational pharmaceutical company Grifols, is generating more and more resonance. There is already a strong opposition among Andorran politicians, and there are questions to this project from the point of view of protecting human rights. We spoke with Elisa Muxella Molins, President of the Institute for Human Rights (IDHA, *L'Institut de Drets Humans d'Andorra*). She explained to us how dangerous this project is for all Andorrans and residents, regardless of their social or economic status.

Elisa Muxella Molins is an Andorran biologist graduated from the Autonomous University of Barcelona, specializing in Cytogenetics. She did internships at the Institute of Fundamental Biology (IBF) *Farmacèutica UCB* specializing in the pharmaceutical industry and at the Ghent University (Belgium) specializing in the toxicology.

Elisa also has a diploma in Optics and Optometry (the University of Granada).

She worked in the Laboratory of toxicology, the Pharmaceutical faculty, the Ghent University (3 years).

She created the Laboratory of Water, Air and Food of the Government of Andorra (*Laboratori d'aigües, aire i aliments del Govern d'Andorra*) and led this project for 8 years.

She worked as a pharmacist for 20 years.

Elisa is a forensic expert for the analysis of drugs and psychoactive substances in *Batllia d'Andorra* (the Andorran jurisdiction of first instance, which consists of departments for civil, criminal, administrative and special investigations).

Dealing with human rights from a young age, she contributed to the creation of the Andorran Human Rights Institute.

**-In Ordino, the only parish of Andorra declared a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO, it is planned to build an Immunology Research Center... How is it possible?**

-First of all, what is a biosphere reserve? A biosphere reserve is a territory created for the purpose of harmonization and conservation



## Elisa Muxella Molins

President of the Human Rights Institute

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of biological and cultural diversity, as well as economic and social development through the connection of human being with nature. And in this particular case, we are talking about the creation of the first laboratory of the P3 level in the biosphere reserve.

**-And this is the final decision of the Andorran government, isn't it?**

-I don't know if this is the final solution because there are a lot of people who are against it. Making a P3 laboratory in Ordino is unthinkable for a country that positions itself as a tourist destination!

**-I wonder who specifically gave the green light to this project?**

-I don't know, but the fact is that the partnership agreement was signed by Xavier Espot, Prime Minister of Andorra, and Jordi Gallardo,



«Before implementing such a project, it is necessary to establish control rules and see what costs we will have to pay, and whether we can pay them»

Minister for Presidency, Economy and Enterprise for the Government of Andorra, on the one hand, and David Bell, Victor Grifols and Raymond Grifols, on the other. But there are politicians in opposition: Carina Moline, General Council, Enric Dolsa, Comu d'Ordino, and Joan Miquel Armengol, Movem Ordino Advisor.

**-Currently, biolaboratories have an extremely «toxic» reputation. It is worth recalling the laboratory in Wuhan, the Chinese city where the coronavirus pandemic is believed to have originated. It is still unknown whether this was a virus leak or deliberate distribution. In this sense, there is a fear that the same thing could happen in Andorra... Do you share this fear?**

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«The project did not participate in an open international tender, this tender simply did not take place, so the possibility of participation of other companies was excluded»

–Indeed, biolaboratories have more than a «toxic» reputation, I'd say it's dangerous and we should look at it with extremely high attention.

As I said before, the laboratory they want to build in Andorra is the P3 level and therefore this project is associated with a significant risk to public health, given that it can work with pathogenic microorganisms such as the AIDS virus, the hepatitis B virus, etc.

This means strict control that must be carried out by the Andorran administration, but we still have no rules in this regard.

Today we do not even have criteria for the control and processing of these wastes.

It is very important that this control should not be established by Grifols, but by the government of Andorra.

Before implementing such a project, it is necessary to establish control rules and see what costs we will have to pay, and whether we can pay them.

**–Do you share the opinion that Andorra can become a place for the development of a new type of virus and a hotbed for new viral and bacteriological wars?**

–I have no idea. But what I am sure of is that scientists must prevent all this. Laboratory in Wuhan had P4 level security regulations and take look what happened! Someone made a mistake, or maybe not, but the result is known to everyone - the whole planet suffered!

**–Is it really so bad in Andorra with attracting foreign investment that its government allows such projects for money, which are dangerous for the health of the entire population of the country?**

–I think that Andorra could attract many projects with foreign participation that would not be so dangerous. It could, but it doesn't attract them for some reason...

The economic feasibility of the project is also highly doubtful. If you look at the economic indicators of Grifols, you will see that they are, slightly to say, very questionable. The project did not participate in an open international tender, this tender simply did not take place, so the

## Characteristics of a BSL-3 laboratory

**BSL3**

- 1 self-closing, double-door access
- 2 controlled access
- 3 personal shower out
- 4 sharp hazards warning policy
- 5 hand washing sink
- 6 sealed penetrations
- 7 physical containment device
- 8 powered air purifying respirator
- 9 laboratory bench
- 10 autoclave
- 11 exhaust HEPA filter
- 12 effluent decontamination system

### Risks for public health

Criterion	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Pathogen in humans	No	Yes probably	Yes, serious illness	Yes, very serious illness
Dangerous for the operator	Not applicable	Yes moderately	Yes, high risk	Yes, very high risk
Spread	Not applicable	Unlikely	Possible	High risk
Existence of prophylaxis or treatment	Not applicable	Yes	Yes generally	No
Examples	<i>B. subtilis</i> <i>E. coli</i> Non-pathogenic	Measles virus <i>Clostridium tetani</i>	VIH, VHB <i>Mycobacterium tuberculosis</i>	Ebola virus, Smallpox virus

Risk groups: from lowest (1) to highest (4)

possibility of participation of other companies was excluded.

Moreover, the project is said to be of national interest. Yes, researches can certainly be of national interest, but not in a way where a lab sets the rules of the game.

From my point of view, it is necessary to demand a law on political responsibility, and this should be one of the most important political slogans for the next elections. We

must prevent it now, and we must always have a chance to prevent it.

**–Does Andorran legislation allow the implementation of projects of this type?**

–Before we have a specific law on health and biomedical research, we must have a law on research in general.

This fact could be seen as a response to politician rather than national

interests, as was taken by the General Council when it decided to amend one article of the Law on Territorial Organization (*Llei de l'Ordenament Territorial*) and two articles of the Administrative Code - the General Law on Territorial Planning and Urban Planning (*Codi de l'administració la Llei general d'ordenació del territori i urbanisme, LOGTU*).

Remarkably, the modifications were approved by the majority, the

P.S group abstained and only Carine Montaner (independent) was against.

**–How can the Human Rights Institute resist this project?**

–We have to create a great resonance. Human rights are welfare! We have the right to a healthy environment! The laboratory will affect the well-being of each of us.

Together we must stop this project! ≡