



REPORT ON AREPO'S VIRTUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY October 20th 2021

AREPO General Assembly was held on October 20th from 10h00 to 12h30 via videoconference. The meeting took place on Zoom platform combined with Interactio to guarantee translation into French, German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish.

A total of 65 participants has been recorded, among which multiple representatives from the same member region, several producers' representatives and members of AREPO Scientific Council.

STATUTORY PART

The Secretary General, **Mr Laurent Gomez**, introduced the meeting presenting the agenda. He thanked the AREPO team for the hard work of the past months, then he explained the first item on the agenda subject to the vote of the General Assembly.

Report of the outgoing President on realized activities and memorandum for the next mandate

The outgoing President, **Ms Eirini Choudetsanaki**, thanked the Assembly for the trust and the support expressed throughout the mandate of the Region of Crete, reminding that the results achieved by AREPO have been possible thanks to the cooperation of its member Regions. Furthermore, she thanked the whole AREPO team and her collaborator, Mr Piteris Charalampos Nikolaos, for their work and support.

She presented **the main results achieved by AREPO during the mandate of the Region of Crete** (October 2017 – October 2021), focusing on the following issues ([see the activity report for more details](#)):

- **Membership:** AREPO increased the number of its member regions and, through the Region of Crete, it developed contacts and relations to expand AREPO's membership to Cyprus.
- **Common Agricultural Policy:** CAP has been one of AREPO priorities, focusing on strengthening the position of GIs in rural development and on the role of regional authorities in the governance of future CAP. AREPO developed a common strategy with oriGIn EU for presenting amendment proposals. The combination of OriGIn expertise on intellectual property rights with AREPO experience on rural development has been really effective and the majority of the objectives achieved through AREPO-oriGIn common strategy hold inside the final text agreed during interinstitutional negotiations.
- **From farm to fork:** AREPO's approach insisted on remarking that GIs already contribute to the sustainability of the agri-food system. AREPO has worked on:
 - **Nutrition labelling**, holding several moments of exchange and consultation with its members in order to consolidate its position;
 - **The revision of EU Promotion Policy**, urging for a sizeable budget dedicated to promotion of EU quality schemes and for the maintaining of the current list of eligible products;
 - **Organic Farming.**

In the next years, AREPO will also work on the **sustainable food labelling framework**, that should be covering the nutritional, climate, environmental and social aspects of food products.

- **Quality policy:** AREPO worked closely with its regions and producers to develop a common position concerning the revision of the EU Regulation 1151/2012 on EU quality schemes. We focused on how to strengthen EU GIs system, how to empower producer groups, but also on sustainability. The revision of EU quality schemes will be the priority for the months ahead since a legislative proposal will be published by the end of this year.

- **Trade policy:** AREPO monitored **EU trade agreements with third countries** and contributed also to the **revision of EU trade and investment policy**. Moreover, we followed with particular interest **Brexit** and its consequences for EU GIs, but also the **trade tension between EU and U.S.A**, taking a position against the U.S. tariffs affecting several EU Geographical Indications and proposing actions to offset the effect of duties.
- **Non-agricultural GIs:** Since the EC opened to the possibility of creating an EU-wide protection system for non-agricultural GIs, AREPO started cooperating with the French Association of Industrial and Artisanal Geographical Indications (AFIGIA), helping in the setting of a lobbying strategy at EU level, in order to put forward the demands of the sector calling for a recognition at EU level. AREPO presented its contribution to the public consultation.

Ms Choudetsanaki reminded as well the working method adopted by AREPO to elaborate its positions (the internal consultation of its members and the Scientific Council, the technical meetings and the drafting of working documents), that has allowed AREPO to effectively contribute to a large number of public consultations opened by the European Commission.

She also recalled the importance of fostering the relationship with the AREPO Scientific Council, by consolidating its new structure and enlarging its geographical coverage, and with other partners and friend organisations that support and defend quality production.

Welcoming the motivation of the candidate region for the next Presidency, she then presented some proposals of actions and political priorities to be taken into consideration by the future Presidency:

- **To increase AREPO membership and the involvement of member regions** through the organisation of meetings dedicated to specific EU policies and technical meetings;
- To continue to work closely with the **European institutions**;
- **The revision of EU Quality policy** to guarantee an actual **strengthening of EU GIs system**;
- To monitor the last step of the procedure leading to the **new CAP post 2023**, as well as every new development within the **Farm to Fork strategy**;
- To keep working on **Front-of pack nutrition labelling**, to guarantee the **exemption of EU PDOs/PGIs**;
- To monitor the **revision of EU Promotion Policy** and also to support the **creation of an EU-wide protection for non-agricultural GIs**;
- To keep exploring new topics of research on GIs for **AREPO Studies**;
- To focus on **research and innovation**, by expanding AREPO participation in **Horizon Europe projects**.
- To strengthen the cooperation with **AREPO Scientific Council**, **increasing the occasion of exchange** between the Scientific Council and the rest of AREPO members and exploring **how to involve the Scientific Council in the activity related to nutrition labelling** and GIs;
- **To keep strengthening the involvement of Representatives of producers in AREPO activities and the cooperation between the college of regions and the college of Producers.**

The report has been approved unanimously with 34 votes in favour.

Presentation of the state of the financial accounts for 2021 and revised provisional budget for 2021

The Secretary General presented the state of the accounts as at 20 October 2021 and the provisional budget for 2021 refined accordingly. AREPO's financial situation is good since the majority of the activities has been held on-line. This means that the Association sharply reduced expenses for travels or the organization of meetings. The main voices of expenditure in 2021 have been **interpretation** (nearly € 24 000) and **personnel costs** (€ 74 000).

Concerning the expenditures related to the AREPO staff, Mr Gomez announced to the General Assembly the proposal to keep the Policy Officer Francesca Alampi on a permanent contract.

The Secretary General also reminded the agreement with the Emilia-Romagna region for the AREPO office in



Brussels. In fact, Emilia-Romagna region provides the Brussels premises with an occupancy agreement free of charge. In addition, the agreement with Nouvelle-Aquitaine region makes the Secretary General's time available free of charge.

In 2021 AREPO received 29 membership fees and the thirtieth pending at the date of the General Assembly, meaning that for the second time in a row AREPO received a record of membership fees since its creation in 2004.

Other voices of income are EU projects. From the European Moving project, started in September 2020, we received a first payment of € 41 400 in 2020, that has been allocated to the 2021 financial year.

The 2021 financial year will therefore show a positive result despite a very likely imbalance between actual income (148 700) and actual expenditure (163 200). However, this will be compensated by the MOVING payment received in 2020.

Finally, the available capital of the Association will certainly be higher than 250 000 euros.

The Treasurer, **Mr Joan Godia Tresanchez**, confirmed the positive situation of AREPO financial accounts.

Vote on the maintenance of the contribution at 4.500€

As a result, in accordance with the possibility offered by the statutes, it has been proposed to vote to **maintain the membership fee at € 4 500**.

The accounts have been approved with 34 votes in favour and 1 abstention.

The members received a summary on the state of AREPO accounts prepared by the Secretary General. [Click here to read the document on AREPO's accounts.](#)

Renewal of AREPO Executive Board

The Secretary General reminded that the General Assembly was asked to express its vote on the candidates presented, one for each of the three seats available in the Executive Board:

- **Presidency:** Begoña García Bernal, Regional Minister for Agriculture, Rural Development, Population and Territory of Extremadura.
- **Vice-Presidency:** Nicola Bertinelli, President of the Consorzio del Formaggio Parmigiano Reggiano
- **Treasurer:** Patricia Picard, Regional Councillor of Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes

Before the vote of the General Assembly, candidates introduced themselves and their priorities.

Presidency

Ms Begoña García Bernal firstly introduced to the General Assembly Mr Antonio Cabezas García, Director General for Agriculture and Livestock, and Ms Julia Martin Cerrato, Head of the Agricultural and Food Quality Service and she also acknowledged the work carried out by the Delegation to the EU of the Extremadura Region in Brussels. The candidate for the Presidency presented herself and her background, also reminding that Extremadura has been member of AREPO since 2014 and that it accounts for 13 EU PDOs and PGIs, with three other PDOs/PGIs currently under evaluation for registration by the European Commission.

The General Assembly approved the candidacy of Ms Begoña García Bernal as new President of AREPO with 33 votes in favour and 2 abstentions.

Following the election, the Secretary General congratulated the newly elected President and invited the incoming and the outgoing President to Brussels in order to organise a meeting for assuring a transition of the Executive Board in presence and not only virtual.

In her inaugural speech she thanked all the AREPO members for the trust in Extremadura region and the support to the election as new AREPO President. She stressed that PDOs and PGIs are key tools to face demographic

challenges, as they are often developed in rural areas and municipalities threatened by the risk of depopulation, helping to offer young people and women a future based on economic and social development. Furthermore, she presented the political priorities for her mandate of Presidency:

- the revision of the EU GIs system;
- the challenges ahead linked to the Farm to Fork Strategy, particularly how to further unlock the potential of EU GIs to contribute to sustainability and the issue of front-of pack nutrition labelling;
- the revision of EU Promotion Policy;
- the protection of PDO and PGI products under EU trade agreements;
- the support to the creation of an EU-wide protection for non-agricultural GIs.

Vice-Presidency

Mr Nicola Bertinelli, President of the Consorzio del Formaggio Parmigiano Reggiano and current Vice-President of AREPO was the candidate subjected to the vote of the General Assembly. On this occasion he has been represented by Mr Guglielmo Garagnani, Vice-President of the Consorzio del Formaggio Parmigiano Reggiano.

Mr Garagnani expressed the honour of the Consorzio to have the possibility to present its candidacy as Vice-President of the Association for the second time. He also reminded that the pandemic placed limits on the exercise of their mandate but that a second mandate could be the opportunity to better perform with much higher experience within AREPO and an improved coordination among consortia.

The General Assembly approved the candidacy of Mr Nicola Bertinelli as Vice-president of AREPO with 31 votes in favour, 1 against and 2 abstentions.

Treasurer

Ms Patricia Picard, introduced herself as candidate representing the French region of Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes as new treasurer of AREPO. Ms Picard has been participating in AREPO's work for a long time, firstly representing producers within the Chambre régionale d'Agriculture and she will now take up the role of Treasurer after being elected as Regional Councillor of Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes in July.

She expressed her willingness and commitment to work within AREPO on several topical issues, like nutrition labelling, the revision of Promotion Policy and a proper communication on the contribution of GIs to rural development and sustainability.

The General Assembly approved the candidacy of Ms Patricia Picard as Treasurer of AREPO with 35 votes in favour and 2 abstentions.

THEMATIC PART

Update on AREPO main policy priorities and activities realised in 2021

AREPO Policy Officer, **Ms Francesca Alampi**, presented an update on two of the main policy priorities followed by the Association: an update on the result of the trilogues on next CAP and an overview of the upcoming reform of the EU GI system. ([Read the PowerPoint Presentation for more details](#)).

In the following debate focused on the revision of the EU GI system, **Prof. Giovanni Belletti**, Coordinator of the AREPO Scientific Committee, raised his concerns on the possible outsourcing of competences on GI application, amendments and cancellation from DG Agri to EUIPO. In EU countries where the national phase is already managed mainly by bodies more focused on IPR, the benefits of GIs are less evident because GIs are disconnected from the rural development strategies of these countries.

Update and presentation on the state of play of the Scientific Council's work and its composition, Prof. Giovanni Belletti, Coordinator of the AREPO Scientific Committee



He congratulated the new members of the Board and brought the greetings of the historical members of AREPO's Scientific Committee: Claire Cerdan, CIRAD (FR); Denis Sautier, CIRAD (FR); Francois Casabianca, INRA Corse (FR); Philippe Mongondry, ESA d'Anger / Master Food Identity (FR); Olivier Beucherie, ESA d'Anger / Master Food Identity (FR); Filippo Arfini, University of Parma (IT).

He stressed the importance of including the world of research and education within AREPO, given the great complexity of the scenario we are facing, with new challenges ahead such as nutrition and sustainability, which inevitably will require new skills and knowledge.

These reasons are at the basis of the setting up of the AREPO Scientific Council. Members of Scientific Council met online for the first time in mid-March 2021. It includes 26 professors and researchers from 6 countries and 24 different institutions (universities but also research centres).

The Scientific Committee acts as a coordinating and steering body inside the Scientific Council and it maintains relations with the AREPO Presidency and Secretariat.

Prof. Belletti, discussed the main aims of the activity of the Scientific Council:

- To research and develop common actions in the field of education and training;
- To help AREPO to develop common positions through scientific analysis;
- To define together research issues and needs, also to report them to the EU Institutions;
- To strengthen EU research and innovation policies to improve the support to GIs but also to local food systems;
- To work towards increased EU funding allocated for training initiatives on GI issues.

Furthermore, he presented the working method agreed:

- periodic meetings between the Scientific Council and AREPO members;
- dissemination of the studies and researches published by members of the Scientific Council within AREPO members;
- Frequent consultation between Scientific Council and AREPO to support the position of the network on priority topics.

To conclude his presentation, he outlined activities for next months:

- Meetings on the revision of the EU Quality policy;
- Seminars to present to and exchange with AREPO regions and producers the outcome of Scientific Council member's researches on specific topics (e.g. nutritional labelling);
- On the occasion of the FAO-CIRAD International Conference on Geographical Indications "Worldwide Perspectives on Geographical Indications", the organisation of a session on GIs and the role of regions;
- To continue to expand the Scientific Council to include researchers from other AREPO member regions not yet covered.

[Click here to read the presentation.](#)

In the following debate it was asked whether AREPO was envisaging to or had already worked on the issue of GIs counterfeiting and GIs protection. The Scientific Council has not worked on the topic yet. However, AREPO has been dealing the issue within the EU project AGROSMARTglobal. AREPO is working together with 3 lawyers from France, Spain and Portugal on GIs protection on the internet to produce a practical guide for agri-food operators of the Sudoe area against usurpation and abuse of reputation.

Conclusions

The Secretary General thanked all the interpreters and those who have worked for a smooth running of the



Assembly, especially the AREPO Brussels office, before passing the floor to the newly elected President for conclusions.

The President thanked all AREPO members for the trust in the Region of Extremadura, showed with her election as President of AREPO.

She also acknowledged the importance of the work envisaged with the Scientific Council and stated her intention to further deepen the relationship between AREPO regions and producers and the Scientific Council.

Considering the challenges ahead, she promised serious commitment to complete all the activities foreseen for the next years, giving priority to the revision of EU Quality policy and the monitoring of the Farm to Fork strategy and the issue of front-of-pack nutrition labelling. On the latter, the President reminded and invited all to the public online conference on GIs and nutrition labelling organised on October 27th, 2021.