



REPORT

AREPO GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN CACERES

1-3 March 2023

AREPO's first General Assembly of 2023 was held in Caceres (Extremadura, Spain) **from the 1st to the 3rd of March 2023**. This plenary meeting was co-organised and hosted by Extremadura Region which holds the Presidency of AREPO.

On 1st March, AREPO members arrived in Caceres and gathered together for a guided tour of the old town, followed by the **welcome dinner at the Restaurant Torre de Sande**.

On 2nd March, the **General Assembly took place in the Complejo cultural San Francisco**. The interpretation was provided online in **DE-EL-ES-FR-IT**.

The afternoon was devoted to a **meeting of the Board of Producers**, followed by a **technical visit to a cheese factory "Quesos del Casar" (PDO Torta del Casar)**.

On 3rd March, **technical visits** were held with a focus on Pimentón de la Vera PDO. The visit to La Dalia, a company producing Pimentón de la Vera PDO, was followed by a guided tour of the museum dedicated to the Pimentón.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY, 2 March 2023

STATUTORY PART

The General Assembly was introduced by AREPO Secretary General, Mr Laurent Gomez, welcoming the participant and presenting the agenda. The statutory part developed as follows:

- Welcome by AREPO President
- Intermediate report of the Presidency
- Intervention by AREPO Vice-Presidency, Mr Guglielmo Garagnani
- Presentation on the state of the accounts 2022 and reminder on the contribution for 2023

AREPO President, **Ms Begoña García Bernal**, Regional Minister for Agriculture, Rural Development, Population and Territory of Extremadura, welcomed the participants in her home town.

The President thanked AREPO member Regions for their trust in the Association. Their collaboration and support are essential for the recognition of the Association by the European Institutions and its legitimacy at the EU level. In this sense, she expressed her gratitude for the presence of Mr. Berutti, a member of the cabinet of the Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development.

The President recalled as well the importance of the contribution of GI producers to the activities of the association. In this respect, she expressed her satisfaction for the meeting of the Board of Producers organised in the afternoon.

Finally, the President concluded her welcome speech pointing out that, as a proof of satisfaction on the part of member Regions for the work done by the AREPO team, in 2022 all membership fees were paid.

Intermediate report of the President of AREPO

In the intermediate report, the President presented AREPO's activities from October 2022 to February 2023 ([for more detailed information, please see the activity report](#)).

The **Reform of the EU Geographical Indications System** continued to be the main priority in the activities of AREPO team. AREPO's point of view, focused on GIs as tools for rural and territorial development, was shared with various Institutional actors and stakeholders representing the GI sector. Furthermore, a set of 50 amendments was drafted as a result of the work done by AREPO technical working group, made up of experts from its member regions and members of its Scientific Committee.

The President expressed her satisfaction for the first results of this work of advocacy, **since the content of the amendments proposed by AREPO is clearly recognisable among the proposals tabled by MEPs** in the AGRI Committee of the Parliament. Moreover, the opinion issued by the Committee of the Regions, for which AREPO worked as expert, was adopted unanimously by the Committee of the Regions' plenary session.

She recalled as well that this reform goes hand in hand with other important initiatives that AREPO kept monitoring: the proposal for a harmonised and mandatory front of pack nutrition labelling; the revision of the promotion policy for agricultural products; and the creation of a framework for a sustainable food system. AREPO followed as well the creation of a system for geographical indications for industrial and artisanal products.

The President stressed that AREPO is formally recognised as a reference actor at the EU level in relation to EU quality policy. AREPO has strong connections with several MEPs who are sensitive to the needs and demands of GI sector and participates in the **Intergroup on Wines, Spirits and Quality Products of the European Parliament**. Furthermore, AREPO has great relations with the **Committee of the Regions**, often contributing to the work of the NAT Committee as expert.

Concerning the **Civil Dialogue Groups (CDGs) of DG AGRI**, the selection procedure following the recent reform of the groups confirmed AREPO as member of the CDG on Quality and Promotion and of the CDG on CAP Strategic Plans. While the selection process for the CDG on Organic Farming was still pending.

Ms Begoña García Bernal also reminded that, as a result of our recognition as an EU stakeholder, AREPO often received requests to participate in **European projects** in line with our topics of interest.

To conclude, Ms García Bernal thanked AREPO team and her technical team for the organisation of the General Assembly, and reiterated **AREPO's future actions and activities for the coming months**:

1. The revision of the EU GI system will remain the top priority, as the legislative process should be completed under the Spanish Presidency of the Council by the end of 2023. The position of the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture is in line with AREPO's proposals.
2. The revision of the promotion policy is also a priority: a legislative proposal from the Commission is quickly needed to assure a context of legislative certainty to GI producers.
3. AREPO European promotional event will be held in Brussels on March 30th, as part of the Agrosmartglobal project, with the participation of the Commissioner for Agriculture!

The report was unanimously approved.

Intervention by AREPO Vice-Presidency, Mr Guglielmo Garagnani

Mr Garagnani greeted the participants to the GA on behalf of the President of the Parmigiano Reggiano Consortium, Mr Bertinelli, and the Director, Mr Deserti. He stated that the consortium considers the experience in AREPO as extremely positive and important for the advocacy work made by the Regions on behalf of GI sector.

The last years have represented a different historical phase: war, pandemic, climate crisis and other dramatic events have disrupted the economy and completely changed living habits. In this new phase, Geographical Indications unite and represent a hope for the future. They are no longer just a way of preserving traditions and culture of specific territories, but a real pillar of the European economy. Producers strongly believes that AREPO represents a necessary and useful platform for sharing good practices and help the EU, the Member States and Regions to make the right choices about GIs future.

Mr Garagnani anticipated that in occasion of the meeting of the Board of Producer, scheduled for the afternoon, the discussion will address two main topics:

1. The definition of the **principle of sustainability**: all the three dimensions of sustainability should be taken into account (economic, social and environmental), elaborating an approach specific to GIs.
2. **GIs and tourism**: GIs have positive spill over effects on tourism. For this reason, they should be included in tourism policies, recognising their important role. At the moment, in Italy there are no specific laws recognising GIs as crucial elements of the tourism sector.

Presentation on the state of the accounts 2022

The Secretary General presented AREPO accounts for 2022 and the provisional budget for 2023, without submitting it to a vote. As the independent accountant "Gadras associés" did not have the material time to close the accounts within the statutory deadline of 30 days before the GA, the Secretary General **exceptionally proposed a vote by email**.

The financial year 2022 shows a **negative result of -48.544 €**, nevertheless the **association funds** remain at an appreciable level of **181.000 €**.

In 2022, all member regions (30) paid the membership fee. The **main expenditures** were staff costs and consulting expenses for European projects, organisation of two General Assemblies and interpretation services.

The provisional budget for 2023 will be proposed in balance. In addition to the first GA in Caceres, AREPO will hold its tri-annual event in Brussels to mark the end of the Agrosmart Global project. The event has a cost of 34.000 €. The project will co-finance 75% of the cost, up to a maximum of 20.115 €. Furthermore, the project will be the subject of the last two financial reporting periods. A financial reporting will also be made for the MOVING project.

The consulting budget will decrease (from 3000 €/month to 2500 €/month) to save money.

Finally, two regions have already announced their wish to join AREPO: Grand-Est (France) and Castilla y Leon (Spain).

Further developing European project and recruiting new members are the priorities for 2023, although AREPO already represents more than 60% of the EU geographical indications. For this reason, for 2024 an increase in the membership fee will be discussed.

*As discussed during the GA, all the documents relating to the accounts where shared via email with AREPO members on March 16th. A deadline for comment was set on April 17th and it was given up until 2 May 2023 to express the vote on the accounts. **The financial accounts for 2022 and the provisional budget for 2023 were unanimously approved by email.***

Click here to consult all documents related to AREPO accounts for 2022 ([report of independent accountant, summary and excel table](#)).

Reminder on the contribution for 2023

The General Assembly held in October 2022 voted unanimously in favour of keeping the annual contribution at €4.500 for 2023. As a reminder, after being at €5.000 from 2004 to 2013, the AREPO membership fee was set at €4.500 in 2014 and has remained stable since. This corresponds in constant euros to a contribution of €3.500 compared to 2004.

THEMATIC PART I

Overview of the ongoing and upcoming EC initiatives relevant to GI regions and GI producers

Mr Roberto Berutti, Member of the Cabinet of Commissioner for Agriculture, Mr Janusz Wojciechowski, participated in the GA giving an overview of the current state of EC initiatives relevant to GIs.

Mr. Berutti stressed that not everyone in the EC today sees the GIs as the major milestones they are.

He particularly focused on the awaited legislative proposal on the revision of EU Promotion policy, stressing that a proposal was submitted internally last year and that it is at a standstill, not even having reached yet the interservice consultation of the EC.

On AGRI's side, the proposal did not exclude any product except tobacco, although other EC DGs wanted to further limit the list of products by excluding alcoholic beverages, wine and red meat. AGRI wants to keep the same list of products as in previous frameworks.

The aim is to produce a proposal able to balance sustainability and the maintaining of the full list of products.

Regarding the annual budget for promotion programmes, he pointed out that the current Annual Work Programme identifies a specific budget line earmarked for quality products. His wish is to maintain this budget or even increase it, as several funds allocated to other priority topics have not been spent and have later on been allocated to fund programmes dedicated to quality schemes.

To conclude, he emphasised the role of trade agreements and the importance to protect GIs within economic relations with third countries, especially to promote the consumption of “true” GI products and not copies.

Update on EU Policies

AREPO Policy Officer, **Ms Francesca Alampi**, presented an update on the main policy priorities followed by the Association. For more information, please see the detailed [PowerPoint presentation](#) and the [activity report](#).

Update on the Revision of EU GI system: AREPO position and actions

Ms Alampi reminded the main actions and initiatives carried out on the Revision of the EU GI system, from the contributions to the EC public consultations to the tabling of proposals for amendments to MEPs.

In particular, she presented the content of the MEP De Castro report as well as a comparison with the points put forward by AREPO, as the rapporteur took up a large part of AREPO amendments. She presented as well some issues still open to the discussion of MEPs. Further information in the [PowerPoint presentation](#).

Update on the revision of EU Promotion Policy

Ms Alampi informed the members that the legislative proposal on the revision of EU Promotion Policy was supposed to be published in June 2022. However, as previously mentioned by Mr Berutti, it is still blocked

due to internal divergences between Commissioner Wojciechowski (AGRI) and Commissioner Timmermans (EC Executive Vice-President in charge of the European Green Deal).

She also presented the priorities for the Annual Work Programme 2023 for Promotion Policy.

Further information in the [PowerPoint presentation](#).

Update on the state of play of an EU-wide protection system for industrial and craft GIs (ICGI)

AREPO Policy Officer presented the main developments on the creation of a European system for the protection of industrial and artisanal GIs.

She reminded that AREPO cooperates on this topic with the “Association Française des IG Industrielles et Artisanales – AFIGIA”.

The EC presented its legislative proposal on 13 April 2022. This proposal addressed the lack of a common EU legal framework concerning IC GIs, resulted in the heterogeneity of national specific protection systems. The EC proposals has some similarities with the agricultural GIs system but adapted to CI products.

Compared to AGRI GIs, clarifications are needed concerning controls.

Further information in the [PowerPoint presentation](#).

THEMATIC PART II

Update on EU Projects

- **MOVING- MOUNTAIN Valorisation through INterconnectedness and Green growth** is a four-year project (2020-2024) that is part of the Horizon 2020 programme and brings together 23 partners and is coordinated by the University of Córdoba, Spain. The project's main objective is to jointly develop relevant policy frameworks across Europe to create value chains that contribute to the resilience and sustainability of mountain areas against climate change.

AREPO's role is to evaluate the project's policy recommendations and disseminate the project results.

The project involves several GIs value chains and it has allowed to generate an inventory of 400 mountain value chains.

Furthermore, AREPO Policy Officer recalled the [EU MAP Webinar on EU Quality schemes](#), coorganised by AREPO in November 2022.

In 2023, AREPO will be involved in the updating of the Euromontana study on the implementation of the optional quality term (OQT) "mountain product", which is included in regulation 1151/12. In fact, since 2016, Euromontana produce a regular report on this topic, lastly updated in 2020.

AREPO has prepared a questionnaire to be sent to its network and to EUROMONTANA partners in order to gather information to better understand the impact of the current OQT mountain product and its implementation across EU. The survey will target both local and regional authorities and producers. In addition, a series of case studies will be carried out in France, Italy and Romania in the framework of this project, which are expected to provide a better understanding of how the OQT is being used, perceived by producers as well as by consumers, its impact and how it has interacted with other quality schemes.

For more information, please see the [PowerPoint](#) and the [projects page on AREPO's website](#).

- **Update on the organisation of the "European Event on Quality Products and Origin" in the framework of the Interreg Sudoe Project [AGROSMARTglobal](#)**

AGROSMARTglobal is a 3.5-year project (2019 - 2023) that is part of the Interreg Sudoe 2014-2020 programme and involves ten partners. The project is coordinated by the Union of Agri-food

Cooperatives of Galicia (AGACA), Spain. The project's objective is to consolidate the promotion, inter-cooperation and competitiveness space of agrifood cooperatives by developing advanced support tools to strengthen their positioning and internationalisation through the implementation of digital marketing strategies. AREPO's role in this project is to promote and protect agricultural and agrifood products benefiting from EU quality schemes on the Internet and disseminating the project results.

To carry out this activity, AREPO is working on the elaboration of a "best practice" guide aiming to improve knowledge on how to promote products that benefit from EU quality schemes on the Internet and to provide with operational tools to protect GIs on the Internet.

The survey diffused among AREPO members to collect data for the guide received almost 80 responses.

To disseminate the AGROSMARTglobal results, **AREPO will organise its major European event for the promotion of quality and origin products in Brussels, on March 30th 2023.**

This event will be divided into:

- **A conference in the afternoon** dedicated to the Revision of the EU GIs systems, with a focus on the protection of GIs on the Internet and other AGROSMARTglobal results, that will see the participation of the EU Commissioner for Agriculture for the conclusion;
- **A tasting in the evening** of quality and origin products from our regions and AGROSMARTglobal cooperatives.

Thanks to the funds of this project, AREPO will benefit from 26.820€ that will allow to finance this event.

- **New call in the framework of Horizon Europe on GI and sustainability**

AREPO is working to submit by April a project proposal to this Horizon Europe call. It will aim to identify a number of sustainability indicators for GI schemes. The main objectives are: to foster a better understanding of the contribution of GI schemes to sustainable development and in particular to the achievement of the objectives of the Farm to Fork strategy; to ensure that the sustainability attributes of GI schemes are widely applied by producers and recognised and correctly interpreted and understood by consumers; and to better design and implement GI policy in order to promote GIs contribution to sustainable agriculture and fisheries, healthy and sustainable diets and sustainable food systems.

The project call is still being drafted. It has a budget of EUR 3 million, 100% financed.

The consortium has INRAE as coordinator; some members of the AREPO Scientific Council as well as some of the Strength2Food project partners are also part of this consortium.

AREPO's role will be dissemination, communication and coordination of the different partners. It is also expected to contribute to the dissemination of policy issues related to these topics.

DISCUSSION

The discussion that followed the thematic part focused on all the issues raised during the presentations delivered.

Ms Angela Crescenzi, representing Tuscany Region, expressed some concerns about the lack of a definition of sustainability and its criteria at EU level, stressing the risk that sustainability might have a bigger impact only on one part of the supply chain.

In addition, she mentioned an issue of great concern to the region of Tuscany concerning Cinta Senese PDO, a GI that was registered under the name of a breed. As a matter of fact, Ms Crescenzi pointed out that the current proposal on the GI revision doesn't provide adequate tools to protect an appellation of origin which has the same name of a breed, risking to bring to the loss of a name that had the merit of ensuring the survival of a breed that was disappearing.

Mr Berutti took the floor to address the question on sustainability. He stated that GIs are sustainable by definition and that he prefers to talk about sustainability starting from the French translation “durabilité”, because something sustainable is also “durable” (long-lasting).

Piteris Charalampos-Nikolaos, representing the Region of Crete, asked a question about the role that AREPO can play with respect to non-agricultural GIs. AREPO Secretary General replied reminding that AREPO represents the agricultural part of regions and producers, therefore at the moment we don't have proper competences to deal with this issue. However, AREPO has always monitored the topic and contributed to discussion because all GIs are tools of rural development for our territories and to keep protecting agricultural GIs as well, from situation of parasitism of names.

Mr Giorgio Trentin, representing Veneto Region, took the floor to support the participation of AREPO in EU projects. The Veneto region participates in various EU projects, also including producers and consortia, e.g. in innovation projects. As a consequence, he proposed to organise events related to the presentation of specific results achieved in the projects in which regions are partners, to further disseminate the results as well as award producers for their commitments within those projects, also asking members of the AREPO Scientific Council to evaluate the projects.

Last, the Region of Thessaly announced its request to organise the next AREPO General Assembly in 2024 in their region.

CONCLUSIONS

The General Assembly ended with the Secretary General thanking all the interpreters and those who had worked for the smooth running of the Assembly before handing it over to the President.

The President thanked all AREPO members for the trust placed in the Association and for coming to Cáceres.

Ms Begoña García Bernal thanked Mr Berutti for the participation in the Assembly and for the first-hand information he shared with AREPO regions and producers.

She was concerned about the EU approach to sustainability, encouraging to rethink the debate around this topic in order to give a proper place to the social and economic aspects as well. Sustainability needs to contribute to fight against depopulation of rural territories as well.

As a consequence, the project proposals submitted on GIs and sustainability is pivotal to further explore and assess GIs contribution to sustainability and might help to develop new arguments in support of the sustainability of GIs.

With regard to non-agricultural GIs, she agreed with AREPO Secretary General, saying that even though AREPO has agricultural competences, it must continue to follow the debates and contribute to it, especially to protect agricultural GIs.

In addition, she touched upon AREPO work within AGROSMARTglobal and the elaboration on the guide on the protection of GIs on the internet. This is crucial as online sales have exploded, and this guide might be helpful to small producers.

To conclude, Ms García Bernal asked regions to contact the AREPO Secretariat with ideas or issues that they would like to see addressed in the future, stressing the role AREPO can play in acting as a platform of exchange of good practices between regions and producers.