



## AREPO EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

**31 October 2023**

### List of participants:

Members of the Executive Committee

- **Mercedes Morán Álvarez**, Minister of Agriculture, Livestock and Sustainable Development of Extremadura;
- **Nicola Bertinelli and Guglielmo Garagnani**, President and Vice-President of the Parmigiano Reggiano Cheese Consortium;
- **Patricia Picard**, AREPO Treasurer and Regional Councillor for Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes.

Other participants

- **Laurent Gomez**, Secretary General of AREPO;
- **Riccardo Deserti**, Director of the Parmigiano Reggiano Cheese Consortium;
- **José Manuel Benítez Medina**, Director General for Agriculture and Livestock, Extremadura;
- **Julia Martín Cerrato**, Head of the Agri-Food Quality Service, Extremadura;
- **Victor Corvera Descalzo**, Extremadura Delegation in Brussels;
- **Giulia Scaglioni**, AREPO Policy officer;
- **Francesca Alampi**, AREPO Policy officer.

The AREPO Executive Board meeting was held on Microsoft Teams on the morning of 31 October 2023, in order to introduce the members of the Board to the new President of AREPO and to discuss the activities of the association.

The meeting was held in Spanish and Italian. AREPO's technical team provided interpretation through the Teams platform.

The Secretary General, Mr. Laurent Gomez, introduced the meeting by welcoming all participants and presenting the agenda of the meeting, which was composed as follows:

- Brief presentation of the members of the Executive Board;
- Updated information on AREPO's activities and actions;
- Update on the status of the 2023 accounts and proposed increase of the association fee;
- Election of the new Executive Board (October 2024);
- Information on the schedule of the next General Assemblies in 2024.

Ms Patricia Picard, Treasurer and Regional Councillor for Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, after introducing herself and welcoming the President, excused herself so that she could not attend the rest of the meeting due to a commitment at the Regional Council.

## UPDATE ON AREPO'S ACTIVITIES AND ACTIONS

### EU POLICIES OF INTEREST TO AREPO

#### 1. Review of the EU geographical indications scheme

In October the Parliament and the Council reached a political agreement on the text, with the support of the Commission, concluding the trilogues. Once the technical work to bring the final text into line with the provisional agreement reached has been completed, the regulation will be formally adopted by the Parliament and the Council around the beginning of 2024, entering into force in the same year.

The main provisions agreed are:

- **The creation of a single regulation** covering agri-food products, wines and spirits, while maintaining some specific provisions on wine in the CMO regulation, notably on labelling and controls;
- **Faster procedures for registration and amendments (reduced to 6 months);**
- **Strengthen the role of producer groups by introducing increased powers and responsibilities for recognised producer groups.** The agreement maintains the provisions on recognised producer groups that already exist in some Member States, while making it optional for other Member States to set up a recognition system;
- **Improving the protection of GIs, especially online and in domain names, through geo-blocking;**
- **Extension of protection to GIs used as ingredients.** To use the name of a GI as an ingredient in other products, processors must inform the producer group concerned in advance and indicate on the label the percentage of the GI product used. Member States who so wish may also require written authorisation from the producer group;
- **Recognition of GIs' commitment to sustainability:** GI producers can **agree on voluntary sustainability practices** in a sustainability report or **include mandatory practices in the product specification**. In addition, the text agreed by the co-legislators **introduces a non-exhaustive list of sustainability practices, as requested by AREPO;**
- **The central role of DG AGRI in the management of the GI system, with the support of EUIPO** for administrative matters. In this respect, the Council and the Parliament added **a joint declaration** to the Regulation stating **that the Commission may be assisted by external bodies**. The Commission will therefore continue to rely on EUIPO as it has done in recent years following the 2018 Memorandum of Understanding. However, what the co-legislators sought to safeguard is that the Commission assumes full political responsibility for approved files.

As AREPO, we issued a press release after the agreement, congratulating the negotiators for the agreement reached and pointing out that we are waiting to see how this provisional agreement translates into the final text of the regulation.



## **2. European system for the protection of industrial and artisanal geographical indications (IGIA)**

At the beginning of October, the regulation on the creation of a European system for the protection of industrial and artisanal GIs was officially approved. This is an issue that AREPO has been following in order to monitor the impact that this system could also have on agricultural GIs. Unlike agricultural GIs, this system will be entirely in the hands of the EUIPO.

## **3. Promotion policy**

AREPO has worked on the annual work programme to define the 2024 priorities of the promotion programmes. It has also collaborated with several organisations in the agri-food sector to avoid the exclusion of meat products and wine. The 2024 work programme will be approved shortly and, as usual, as soon as the calls for programmes are published at the beginning of 2024, we will send an information document to all partners.

The publication of a proposed revision of the Promotion Policy is still pending and will probably not be published before the end of this legislature.

## **4. Farm-to-Fork strategy**

Among the other Farm to Fork initiatives that will remain pending is the revision of the consumer information regulation, which foresaw the introduction of a front-of-line labelling system. The same applies to the revision of the EU animal welfare regulation, which should have been published this autumn.

The Commission has also put on hold the publication of a framework for sustainable food systems. The Commission President spoke during her State of the Union address about launching a series of strategic dialogues in 2024 on the future of EU agriculture.

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### **NATIONAL MEETINGS (NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2023)**

This year's General Assembly was held in March in Cáceres, Extremadura, and was followed by the promotional event in Brussels that AREPO organises every three years.

In view of the significant costs incurred in organising these two events, it was decided not to organise a second General Assembly in 2023 for budgetary reasons. In order to involve all partners as much as possible in the activities and to maintain active contacts, meetings will be organised this autumn by groups of regions from the same Member State, which will avoid interpretation costs.

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### **TECHNICAL GROUPS (REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS AND ANIMAL WELFARE)**

We received direct requests from some members to work on specific topics, in particular on regional quality systems and animal welfare. After careful reflection on how to organise the work, we decided to make our expertise available to organise meetings and explore the issues from a European perspective (e.g. analysis of current legislative initiatives). However, we have proposed to the regions concerned to animate and moderate the group, so that the agenda of the work is in line with the interests and practical needs of our members.



We are currently awaiting responses from the regions concerned so that we can proceed to organise work on these issues in the coming months.

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#### HORIZON EUROPE GI SMART PROJECT

The project proposal that we actively helped to develop for the GI smart project has been approved by the European Commission and will be funded. It is a 4-year Horizon Europe research and innovation project (2024-2027), which will deepen the topic of sustainability of geographical indications. The final steps are currently being taken to prepare the grant agreement, which will be signed by the end of the year.

GI SMART will carry out research and demonstration activities (innovative pilot actions) and provide recommendations based on the research results to improve the contribution of the GI system to sustainable development and the farm-to-table strategy.

**Project budget:** approximately **3 million euros**, 100% financed (i.e. there are no costs foreseen by AREPO, as all the activities carried out will be 100% financed).

**As for the consortium:** it consists of 17 partners (15 beneficiaries and 2 associated partners), with a geographical coverage of 10 countries. The partners bring together leading universities, NGOs and stakeholder organisations from the GI sector in order to provide a multi-stakeholder approach to ensure that the project objectives are achieved with maximum impact. The consortium is coordinated by INRAE, the French Agricultural Research Institute.

Several members of AREPO's scientific committee are involved in the project, including: Prof. Belletti and Prof. Marescotti from the University of Florence; Prof. Filippo Arfini from the University of Parma. Finally, AREPO has succeeded in involving several partner organisations: Euromontana, Origin International and EFOW.

**AREPO's role:** we will lead the communication and dissemination and stakeholder coordination work. Among other things, we will be responsible for the creation of a European network of stakeholders including producers, certification bodies, consumers and public administrations (at national and regional level). The aim of the network will be to monitor and contribute to the project activities. Furthermore, we will contribute to the analysis of GI policies at regional level and to the elaboration of policy recommendations based on the project results.

As responsible for stakeholder involvement and coordination, our intention is to involve our partner regions and producers as much as possible, so that they can contribute to and benefit from the project activities as much as possible.

To carry out these activities, **AREPO will have a budget of 220,000 euros spread over four years.**

The members of the Council congratulated the AREPO team for this result.

The General Director of the Parmigiano Reggiano Consortium, Riccardo Deserti, intervened to propose new working tracks for the association:

1. First of all the issue of recognised producer groups: AREPO could work as a platform to facilitate the adoption of laws for the creation of recognised producer groups in Member



States that do not yet have legislation on this issue. The lack of a regulatory and administrative framework in some countries represents the main obstacle to the creation of strong producer associations. AREPO, with its regions, could play a fundamental role in this process.

2. Secondly, the issue of Geographical Indications and Tourism: the new regulation that will come into force in 2024 establishes that tourism promotion activities are among the competences of the producer groups. It would therefore be interesting for AREPO to work to develop project proposals and coordinate the measures of its partner regions in the strategic plans.

#### UPDATE ON THE STATUS OF THE 2023 ACCOUNTS AND PROPOSED MEMBERSHIP FEE INCREASE

At the Extremadura Assembly in March 2023, the accounts for 2022 were presented and closed with a negative result of -48,544 euros, financed by the association's funds, which remain at an appreciable level of 181,000 euros.

In 2022, all partner regions (30) paid their membership fees. The main expenses were staff and consultancy for European projects, the organisation of two General Assemblies and interpretation services.

As far as 2023 is concerned, we have so far received 30 membership dues. Only 3 dues are still outstanding and the regions concerned have indicated that this is due to the deadlines of the administration to approve the payment. The main expenses relate to the organisation of the General Assembly in Extremadura and the promotional event in Brussels.

Developing participation in European projects and recruiting new members are the priorities for 2023. The AREPO team has been working towards this goal with great results, in particular by securing funding for a European research and innovation project on GIs.

We have also contacted several regions interested in AREPO's activities. It should be noted, however, that the possibilities of increasing membership are becoming limited, as AREPO already represents more than 60% of the EU's geographical indications. Consequently, the main producing regions are already partners.

In 2014, the membership fee was reduced from €5,000 (the amount set when the network was created in 2004) to €4,500, in order to meet the needs of our member regions in a period of severe crisis and economic hardship. Thanks to the development and expansion of membership and the containment of costs, it has never increased since then, despite the health crisis caused by COVID-19, the unfavourable international economic environment and the high level of inflation, which have led to a significant increase in the costs of services (catering, interpreters) and AREPO staff.

In the light of all these elements, the AREPO Secretariat intends to propose an increase of the AREPO membership fee (between 5,500 and 6,000€) at the first general assembly in 2024.



The President was in favour of submitting an increase in the membership fee to the vote of the General Assembly, especially considering that since has not been changed since 2014, it is more a question of an update in line with inflation.

The producers will not be directly concerned by the increase in the membership fee, as it is the member regions that pay the fee. However, the Vice-Presidency has expressed its support for the proposal, as it will be the Emilia-Romagna Region that will vote on the matter at the General Assembly.

#### ELECTION OF THE NEW EXECUTIVE BOARD (OCTOBER 2024)

The term of office of the executive board will end in October 2024 and a general assembly will be held to elect a new executive board.

We would like to remind you that we try as far as possible to have Executive Board members representing regions from different Member States to ensure a wider geographical coverage.

Moreover, as far as the presidency in particular is concerned, an informal custom has been established (not codified in the statutes) which favours a rotation of the regions holding the presidency, so that the State of origin changes each time. Until now, AREPO has been chaired by Aquitaine (FR), Catalonia (ES), Emilia-Romagna (IT), Midi-Pyrénées - Occitanie (FR), Crete (EL), Extremadura (ES).

This could be followed by an Italian or German region. In the coming months we will start informal consultations to check the interest of the different regions.

We would like to underline that this system does not undermine the transparency of the process, as members will be informed of the elections and will be able to submit nominations if they are interested. In fact, we have already received the candidature of the region of Andalusia, which would be interested in the presidency. This is another Spanish region, so Italian or German regions would have priority, following the custom described above. However, as this is an informal custom, we are not statutorily obliged to respect it, and in the absence of willingness or interest on the part of the above-mentioned regions, it will be possible for Andalusia to hold the presidency.

The role of the AREPO team in this process will be to find a negotiated and common solution, which will finally allow to present only one strong candidature for each position, in order to guarantee a unanimous election and to avoid divisions among the members.

#### INFORMATION ON THE PROGRAMMING OF THE NEXT GA :

In 2024 we would like to hold two General Assemblies: one in the first semester in Brussels and the second in the second semester in one of our regions, probably in Greece. A small ceremony could be organised to celebrate AREPO's 20th anniversary, preferably on the occasion of the first General Assembly.

- **March-April 2024 - Brussels (possible dates: week of 18-22 March 2024 / 2-12 April 2024)**



As for the first General Assembly in 2024, we will be obliged to organise it between the end of March and the beginning of April in order to have the accounts for 2023 closed and to be able to vote on the new membership fee and, consequently, to send the payment requests in time.

For these reasons, the AREPO team has identified the week of 18-22 March or the week of 2-12 April as possible dates. The dates were also chosen according to the calendar of the European Parliament, in order to guarantee the presence of the main MEPs we work with, during our GA. For the same reason, we note that events in Brussels are usually organised in the middle of the week (Tuesday or Wednesday), because MEPs usually arrive on Monday afternoon.

On the same occasion, we would like to organise a conference on GI reform to close the journey we started in 2019. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank and say goodbye to the MEPs we have worked with, ahead of the European elections in 2024.

#### **GA in Thessaly, October 2024 (tbc)**

As for the second Assembly in 2024, Thessaly has submitted its bid to host it. However, we do not yet have much information to share because our colleagues have been struggling with the floods in September, followed in October by regional elections that led to a change of governor. Given that the new governor will take office in January 2024, we will have to wait until the beginning of the year to receive confirmation and more information about the organisation.