

# AREPO report on the 1<sup>st</sup> General Assembly of 2024

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10 April 2024 | Brussels



**The Association of European Regions for Products of Origin**

The European network of regions and producer associations  
that deals with products of quality and origin

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## Part 1 | Introduction

**AREPO's first General Assembly of 2024** was held in **Brussels** on **10 April 2024**. This plenary meeting was organised in the premises of the **Representation office of Toscana Region in Brussels**.

Interpretation was provided online, through Zoom platform, in DE, EL, EN, ES, FR, IT.



Members who couldn't attend the meeting in person had the possibility to follow the GA on during the meeting).



From left to right: **Ms Giulia SCAGLIONI** | AREPO policy officer  
**Ms Mercedes MORÁN ÁLVAREZ** | AREPO President  
**Mr Laurent GOMEZ** | AREPO general secretary



**Participants at the 1<sup>st</sup> AREPO General Assembly of 2024**

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## Part 2 | Statutory part

AREPO Secretary General, **Mr Laurent Gomez**, introduced the meeting giving the floor to **Mr Roberto Scalacci**, Director of Agriculture and Rural Development, Tuscany Region, for a short welcome.



**Ms Mercedes MORÁN ÁLVAREZ**  
President of AREPO  
Minister for Agriculture of Extremadura

Then, he gave the floor to the new AREPO President, **Ms Mercedes Morán Álvarez**, Regional Minister for Agriculture, Livestock and Sustainable Development of Extremadura, who welcomed participants and introduced herself in her first AREPO General Assembly as she took on the role of President of the association over summer.

She began by thanking all AREPO member Regions for their trust in the Association, their collaboration and support to its activities. By doing so she recalled the **20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of AREPO** and congratulated on the results achieved throughout these years.



Following the welcome speech, the Secretary General presented the agenda of the meeting and give the floor back to the President for the Annual report of the Presidency.

### I. Annual report of the President of AREPO

In the annual report, the President presented **AREPO's activities from January to December 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. By the time speaking the final text was approved and many of the requests presented by AREPO were included in the approved final regulation. Ms Morán Álvarez also reminded that the conference that was going to be held in the afternoon at the Committee of the Regions would have given the opportunity to go deeper into this issue and to start reflecting on how to ensure an effective implementation to make the most of the possibilities offered by the new regulation.

She also reminded the complex framework of initiatives on which AREPO has continued working over the past year but that have not been completed by the European Commission. For example:

- The **framework for sustainable food systems**. AREPO elaborated some recommendations to the Commission proposing a list of basic principles on which this framework should be based;
- The topic of **harmonised and compulsory front of pack nutrition labelling**;
- The **revision of the EU Promotion policy and the publication of the Annual Work Programme**. AREPO continued to recommend an inclusive approach that does not discriminate any type of EU agricultural product or sector and that includes red and processed meats and wines in the list of products eligible for funding.

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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. In particular, it was crucial to have contributed to the drafting of the CoR's opinion on the Regulation on GIs, on which we worked as experts for **rapporteur Ms Karine Gloanec Maurin**. Evidence of the consolidation of this relationship was the possibility of organising a conference at the Committee of the Regions the same afternoon.

Ms Morán Álvarez also reminded that, as a result of the recognition as an EU stakeholder, **AREPO often received requests to participate in European projects** in line with the topics of interest for the association.

She mentioned the MOVING project on sustainability and resilience of mountain areas and the most recent works carried out within this project, especially the analysis of certain value chains focusing on PDO/PGI products and the state of implementation of the optional quality term (OQT) "mountain product".

In addition, in 2023 AREPO has worked on the submission of a project proposal focusing on the topic of GI sustainability. The project, titled GI Smart, will start soon and will run for 4 years.

While concluding the presentation of the annual report to the plenary, the President recalled that the second General Assembly will be held in autumn 2024 in Thessaly (Greece).



The report was **unanimously approved**

## II. Accounts 2023 and provisional accounts 2024

[Click here](#) to consult all documents related to AREPO accounts for 2023 and provisional budget for 2024.

The Secretary General presented AREPO accounts for 2023 and the provisional budget for 2024, submitting it to the vote of the General Assembly.



After a financial year 2022 which showed a negative result of € -48,544, **the objective of controlling operating costs was achieved in 2023**. Despite a €30,000 increase in payroll costs, total expenses remained unchanged from 2022 (€225,900; +0.74%).

In **2023**, all member regions (30) paid the membership fee and thanks to European projects, income was stable at €218,661 (+24%). This resulted in a very slight loss of €7,239.

As usual, **the provisional budget for 2024 has been proposed in balance**. In addition to the first General Assembly in Brussels, followed by a conference at the Committee of the Regions, AREPO will hold a second General Assembly in Thessaly (Greece) in October 2024.

The personnel costs and consulting budgets are stabilised for 2024. Based on the costs declared for MOVING project under the second financial reporting period, we are going to receive a reimbursement of 28.000€.

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An advance on the GI Smart project is expected. However, the project has not yet started. It is therefore uncertain whether this will happen in 2024.



The accounts were **unanimously** approved

### III. Vote on the contribution 2024

The Secretary General then proposed, as discussed and approved by the AREPO Executive Board and previously communicated to all AREPO members, **the increase of the membership fee for 2024 from €4.500 to €6.000 to take into account the impact of the inflation on several costs borne by the Association**. He reminded that AREPO was created in 2004 with a membership fee of €5.000. In order not to stockpile too much public money, AREPO lowered the membership fee in 2014 to €4.500 and since then it has never been changed although the changings at global level (inflation, energy, services...) determining an increasing of prices.

An increase to €6.000 for 2024 was intended to give the treasury some breathing space while waiting for new financing under the GI Smart project to get underway.

In this respect, **AREPO's Treasurer, Ms Patricia Picard**, Regional Councillor for Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, in thanking the AREPO team for their work, stressed the willingness to maintain this proposed increase. In fact, she pointed out that it was more of a necessary catch-up given that the membership fee had never been changed since 2014, despite the fact that the costs incurred by the Association had constantly risen.

The President also commented this proposal, reminding that the amount of work carried out by the AREPO team, as just presented, together with the fact that a new CAP will have to be negotiated, made this proposal for a quota increase reasonable and appropriate.



The General Assembly voted in favour of **increasing the annual membership fee to €6.000 for 2024**. One abstention.

As the Crete region has already approved the previous membership fee for 2024, it cannot change it. It will be able to do so from next year.

The Secretary General replied that this is not an issue for the association and that AREPO team is available to look together at ways of solving this problem if it was also encountered by other regions.

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## IV. Candidature for the vice-presidency of AREPO

Presentation of the candidature of the Association of Andalusian PDOs and PGIs (CADO) for the vice-presidency of AREPO.

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

Elections to renew the AREPO Board will take place in October 2024. In the meantime, AREPO already received expression of interest in taking up some of these roles for the next three years. This is the case of the region of Andalusia, a region of Spain with more than 60 GIs, belonging to 11 different productive sectors, which expressed the interest of contributing more to AREPO activities through its producers.

In particular, **Mr César Saldaña**, **President of the Andalusian Conference of Designations of Origin (CADO)**, formally presented the candidature of the Association he represents to the vice-presidency of AREPO. Expressing the interest in participating more actively in AREPO' activities, he introduced the CADO and the priorities for Andalusian GIs.



On the left: **Mr César Saldaña** | President of CADO

CADO was created in 2012 gathering all the active Spanish “consejos reguladores”, with the aim to structure Andalusian agribusiness and involve the territories. They maintain a constant dialogue with the institutions, promoting GIs hand in hand with the Junta de Andalucía. They participate in fairs, professional meetings and other meetings related to GI products.

CADO will be able to continue the coordination between our Board of Producers and our partners of oriGIn.

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## Part 3 | Thematic part

### I. Activities of the new CAP network

**Mr Giorgio TRENTIN** (Veneto Region) and **Mr Malone ROLLAND** (Bretagne Region), representatives of AREPO in the thematic groups of the CAP network, provided an update on the state of the art of the topics and activities carried out by these thematic groups.



Mr Trentin represents AREPO in the Subgroup on Innovation and Knowledge Exchange (SolKE) dealing with issues of great relevance to the European Commission. The subgroup's events are held three times a year in person and virtually. He pointed out that the work developed is very interactive in the network and in collaboration with many associations that are known by AREPO, with which joint works have been carried out in the past.

In particular, he emphasised the interest of SolKE in **developing transnational and cross-border operational groups**, whose aim is to develop or apply innovations in permanent contact with universities or agricultural companies. In the Italian case, the creation is already planned and there is interest in the possibility of working with other AREPO member regions.



On the left: **Mr Giorgio TRENTIN** | Veneto Region  
On the right: **Mr Malone ROLLAND** | Bretagne Region

For further information, [consult the presentation](#).

Mr Rolland, representing AREPO in the CAP Strategic Plans subgroup, stressed the focus of the group on quality improvement to identify common issues and opportunities for collaboration.

The meetings held so far have been devoted to explaining the CAP National Strategic Plans and their implementation. Other topics have also been developed, such as the current agricultural crisis and ways to reduce its impact.

### II. EC-notified regional quality schemes and regional brands

On February 8th, 2024, the first virtual meeting of the working group of the Board of the Regions on public regional quality schemes took place. Chaired by Euskadi, which expressed its interest towards the topic, and moderated by AREPO Secretary General, around 25 AREPO members participated in this meeting. Its aim is to share experiences from regions, challenges as well as valorisation strategies in order to build upon some common elements a secure public legal framework around regional quality systems.

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During the General Assembly, the Secretary General of AREPO and **Mr Raul Perez Iratxeta**, Director of Quality and Food Industries, Euskadi, recalled the reasons behind the creation of this technical working group, its contents and objectives.

Mr Perez Iratxeta reminded that Euskadi proposed the topic to AREPO presidency during the 2023 General Assembly in Caceres (Extremadura). Their interest stems from a difficulty they are experiencing since a Basque operator filed a lawsuit against the regional government over the regional brand. As a matter of fact, regional brands or quality schemes do not have a European legal framework like the one existing for PDOs/PGIs, creating uncertainty.



On the left: **Mr Raul Perez Iratxeta** | Euskadi Region

He focused especially on a problem of compatibility between the Regulation (EU) No. 1151/2012 and regional quality brands (brands that combine origin and quality under public ownership) that do not fall under the scope of the EU Regulation. Several regional quality systems exist across EU regions and they are usually not being communicated to the European Commission (as required by Directive 2015/1535).

Usually, when a situation of incompatibility arises, the Commission argue that the territorial delimitation of products and foods, if they are not recognized as a PDO/PGI, is a measure with an effect equivalent to a quantitative restriction on the free circulation of goods (art 34 TFEU).

Colleagues representing the Basque country noted that this situation may vary depending on the circumstances, particularly for products with low production volume or those with territorially restricted marketing. In such cases, stakeholders may find regional quality systems more economically viable compared to registering as a PDO/PGI, given the associated costs and administrative burdens of maintaining such a quality scheme. For example, the “Eusko Label” brand has helped to save small farms and to fix the population in the territory.

All this considered, the Basque government believes that regional quality schemes should be able to be supported by a specific legal framework, creating a regulated subsystem parallel to the GIs, with no competition for them, and providing for specific criteria and limits to be recognised.

Mr Gomez added that AREPO is in the position to collect information on the state of play of regions and countries. The decentralisation of the different Member States is very different. In France regions do not have systems of certified regional public brands, and in the different EU countries there are different systems.

On the other hand, the Commission has a problem of means and human resources. As a consequence, they tend to react hesitantly to the demands made by stakeholders.



AREPO will continue with the working group involving the board of producers in the discussion. Then, on the basis of these exchanges AREPO will consider whether a common position, backed by all its members, can be presented to the European institutions.

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### III. Update on EU Policies

For time constraints, the update on EU Policies was not made during the GA. Please, [consult the PowerPoint presentation](#) and [the activity report](#) to know more.

### IV. Update on EU Projects

For time constraints, the update on EU Projects was limited to the forthcoming **Horizon Europe project “GI SMART”**.

Please, [consult the PowerPoint presentation](#) and [the activity report](#) to know more on EU projects.

GI SMART project will last 4 years with 100% funding of around 3 million euros. The main objective of the project is **to enhance the design and implementation of the GI system to support sustainable agriculture, healthy and sustainable food, and sustainable food systems**, in line with the objectives of the Farm to Fork strategy. It is expected to kick off in the coming months.

The project, coordinated by the Institut National de Recherche sur l'Agriculture, l'Alimentation et l'Environnement (INRAE, France), will involve 17 public and private partners from 8 European Member States. Among them, academic partners with expertise in GI and already members of AREPO Scientific Committee and international and EU networks representing stakeholders in food and wine GIs.

AREPO, with a total budget of **220 000 €**, will play a role in many of the research activities envisaged by the project and will assist other partners in their tasks. In particular, AREPO will be Work Package Leader for Communication, Dissemination, Exploitation, and Stakeholder Engagement, in collaboration with Euromontana, to ensure the uptake of the scientific research by GI producers as well as public administrations (regional, national and EU).

We intend to create **a multi-stakeholder platform at national and EU level**, including producers, consumers, control bodies, regional and national authorities. The idea is to create an exchange of good practices and knowledge between stakeholders and to receive feedback from the different partners on the project activities.



In order to prepare the first steps of AREPO work within GI Smart, all members will be asked to help in:

- **identifying relevant regional events** where AREPO can disseminate the project results;
- **identifying stakeholders** who may be interested in the project;
- **sharing any regional GI sustainability initiatives** with the aim of creating synergies with other initiatives.

To this end, AREPO will elaborate and send out a survey in the coming weeks.

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## Part 4 | Conclusions

The General Assembly ended with the Secretary General thanking the AREPO team for organising and guaranteeing the smooth running of the Assembly, together with all the interpreters who allowed everyone to take the floor and follow the meeting in their own mother tongues.

The President joined these acknowledgements reminding the important conference that would have followed in the afternoon, **thanking all AREPO members for the participation** and for being in Brussels for all these activities.

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