

AREPO report on the 2nd General Assembly of 2024

22 October 2024 | Thessalía



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 second General Assembly of 2024 was held in **Larissa, Thessaly (Greece)** on **22 October 2024**. This plenary meeting was organised in the premises of the **Regional Council of Thessaly Region**.

Interpretation was provided in **EL, ES, FR, IT**.



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Part 2 | Statutory part

AREPO Secretary General, **Mr Laurent Gomez**, introduced the meeting presenting the agenda and thanking the regions for coming to Greece as well as the regional offices in Brussels and the staff of the AREPO office in Brussels for their coordinated work with the producers and the Scientific Council.

Then, he gave the floor to **Mr Dimitris Kouretas**, governor of Thessaly, who welcomed the participants and thanked them for visiting his region. He then presented the main data on the agri-food sector in the Thessaly region: the region produces the 44% of the country's soft cheese production and the production of wines and spirits also stands out, accounting for one third of national production. It also stressed the production of industrial tomatoes, almonds (1% of global production), pears, walnuts and halva.

He explained that the region of Thessaly has many products with PDO/PGI and that the regional administration has helped producer associations to present 15 new dossiers to the Greek Ministry of Agriculture.

Then a video of the outgoing President, **Ms Mercedes Morán Álvarez**, Regional Minister for Agriculture, Livestock and Sustainable Development of Extremadura, was shown. She excused herself for not participating in person and she acknowledged the results achieved under the mandate of Presidency of Extremadura.

After that, she left the floor to **Mr José Manuel Benítez Medina**, Director of Agriculture of Extremadura Region, who was participating in the Assembly representing the Presidency.

I. Report of the outgoing Presidency and next mandate

Mr José Manuel Benítez Medina presented **AREPO's activities from October 2021 to October 2024** (for more detailed information, please see the [activity report](#)).



The **Reform of the EU Geographical Indications System** was the main priority in the activities of AREPO team. AREPO followed the review process from the beginning, from the first public consultations to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of EU quality systems, to the submission of concrete proposals for the drafting of the text of the regulation and the defence of these proposals.

He also reminded the complex framework of initiatives on which AREPO has continued working over the past years but that have not been completed by the European Commission. Additionally, with a new CAP just around the corner he insisted that GIs and quality products can respond to the sustainability demands of EU citizens and play a decisive role in the sustainable development of our rural and remote areas.

The work carried out contributed to AREPO's formal recognition as a reference actor at the EU level in relation to EU quality policy. AREPO created strong connections with several MEPs sensitive to the needs and demands of GI sector and participated in the **Intergroup on Wines, Spirits and Quality Products of the European Parliament**.

During the mandate of Presidency, the relationship with the European Commission was strong. **The Commissioner for Agriculture, Janusz Wojciechowski, attended the 5th European event on quality products and origin organised by AREPO in March 2023**. He appreciated the event organised and promoted the association and the work we do also through his social media.

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The relationship with the Commission is also strong thanks to AREPO constant presence and participation in the civil dialogue groups of DG AGRI: 'quality and promotion', 'organic farming' and 'strategic plans and horizontal issues'.

In addition, AREPO worked in synergy with the unit in DG AGRI dealing with GIs, as well as with the GI director, Diego Canga Fano, on several topics.

AREPO also boosted its 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 Action Plan for Organic Farming and the Regulation on GIs**. Evidence of the consolidation of this relationship was also the possibility of organising a conference at the Committee of the Regions in April 2024.

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. The MOVING project on sustainability and resilience of mountain areas went on for almost the whole mandate of Extremadura region. AREPO dealt with diverse tasks within this project, including the analysis of some value chains focusing on PDO/PGI products and the state of implementation of the optional quality term (OQT) "mountain product".

Always under this mandate of Presidency, AREPO has worked on the submission of a project proposal focusing on the topic of GI sustainability. The project, titled **GI SMART**, has been financed by the European Commission and it will run for 4 years.

The representative of Extremadura, in his final address for the outgoing presidency of AREPO, expressed gratitude for the opportunity to lead the association over the past years and acknowledged the crucial support that the Presidency received from the staff of the Delegation of Extremadura in Brussels.

As the association prepared to elect new leadership for the next three years, the outgoing presidency extended best wishes to the candidates and outlined several strategic proposals for AREPO's future. Particularly, Extremadura emphasised:

- The importance of expanding the membership;
- The role of the Association in maintaining a dialogue between regional governments and producers, leveraging the expertise of its Scientific Council and collaborating with partner organizations;
- The relevance of maximizing the benefits of the research conducted within GI SMART;
- The need to involve further in Horizon Europe projects;
- Some political priorities, such as working on an action plan for GIs; defending the EU's promotion policy; engaging with institutions at all levels to work on sustainability; advocating for the role of GIs as a cornerstone of rural development and their contribution to the long-term vision for rural areas, in the framework of the negotiations of the upcoming CAP.



The report was **unanimously** approved

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II. Intervention by AREPO outgoing Vice-Presidency & Treasurer

Mr Guglielmo Garagnani, outgoing Vice President representing Emilia-Romagna and the Parmigiano-Reggiano Consortium, thanked the Region of Thessaly for hosting the General Assembly and Extremadura for its presidency. He highlighted the challenges of COVID-19 and geopolitical shocks over the past three years, emphasizing the sector's progress during the GI reform. Mr Garagnani underlined the growing importance of GIs as an economic pillar and ambassador of EU agri-food products, referencing the Ortigia Declaration from the 2024 G7. He encouraged AREPO to include more associations and consortia in its network and thanked the Secretariat for their work.

Ms Patricia Picard, outgoing Treasurer from Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, acknowledged the importance of AREPO for her region's more than 200 GIs. She gave an overview of the Association's state of the accounts under her years in office, noting the pandemic's impact on finances, with reduced travel costs but higher interpretation expenses, and praising AREPO's policy officers for ensuring financial stability. Most members are current with their fees, and new members are expected to join soon. Hence, **she proposed maintaining the annual membership fee at € 6.000.**



From left to right:
Ms Patricia PICARD | outgoing AREPO Treasurer
Mr Guglielmo GARAGNANI | outgoing AREPO Vice-President
Mr José Manuel BENÍTEZ MEDINA | representing outgoing AREPO Presidency
Mr Laurent GOMEZ | AREPO Secretary General

III. Presentation on the state of the accounts 2024

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



AREPO Secretary General reminded that the presentation of the state of the accounts was for information purposes only, because accounts are usually voted during the first GA of the year.

He pointed out that the state of the accounts is good, with a tiny increase in the expenses related to the organisation of events.

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Regarding the revenues, they increased after the decision to fix the membership fee at € 6.000. Furthermore, **some regions have indicated a willingness to join AREPO** (Sardinia for example).

In addition, he stressed that AREPO can count on the resources coming from the European projects it is involved in, thing that improves the funding. **The year 2024 will be closed with a positive result** especially thanks to the GI SMART project.

So far, the financial situation is solid as the budget has been stabilized. The accounts will be approved at the next AREPO GA.

IV. Vote on the contribution 2025



The General Assembly voted unanimously in favour of keeping **the annual membership fee at the current amount of € 6.000 for 2025**.
The payment request will be sent in January.

V. Candidature and election of the new AREPO Executive Board

AREPO General Assembly elected the new Executive Board. Before the vote, candidates presented themselves to the members.

Mr Alessandro Beduschi, Regional Minister for Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forestry of the Lombardy Region, represented Lombardy Region as candidate for AREPO's presidency.

Firstly, he thanked Extremadura region for its previous presidency and the region of Thessaly for its hospitality.

He pointed out that the candidature of Lombardy to the presidency of AREPO is accompanied by a will to improve the role of AREPO. Lombardy has 20 PDOs and 14 PGIs in the food sector, together with more than ten PDOs in the wine sector. He stressed the importance of this sector in the Italian regional and national economy. He then introduced a video presenting the main regional characteristics.

Lombardy considers that AREPO's mission is strategic and in line with its regional strategy and vision. Mr Beduschi thanked AREPO for its role in shaping the latest legislation on GIs and as a mediator among all its member regions. He emphasised that GIs should be conceived as a tool for sustainability in all its three aspects (economic, environmental and social) reminding the importance of creating a virtuous circle that connects GIs with tourism and gastronomy, generating opportunities in rural areas.

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The General Assembly **unanimously** elected the new AREPO Presidency.

Mr César Saldaña, president of the Conferencia Andaluza de Denominaciones de Origen (CADO), was the candidate to the vice-presidency of AREPO, representing producers from Andalucía.

He presented in the previous GA in Brussels the main characteristics of Andalucía's productions and the CADO. Andalucía has more than 20 PDOs and more than 30 PGIs. CADO is the institution in charge of representing and protecting them in the same way as AREPO does at European level.

In his intervention he emphasised the cultural importance of these products as well as that defending GIs means protecting rural areas against depopulation and consumers.



The General Assembly **unanimously** elected the new AREPO Vice-presidency.

Ms Temanuata Girard, Vice-President for Agriculture and Food of the Centre-Val de Loire Region, represented Centre-Val de Loire Region as candidate for AREPO's Treasury.

She thanked the Thessaly Region for its hospitality and the other regions for their attendance. She indicated that her region is very rich in GI products and hence GI producers and pointed out that many of them are suffering right now due to various crises. She stressed the role that innovation must play in the future of GIs.



The General Assembly **unanimously** elected the new AREPO Treasurer.

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From left to right:

Ms Temanuata GIRARD | AREPO Treasurer;
Mr César SALDAÑA | AREPO Vice-President
Mr Alessandro BEDUSCHI | AREPO President

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Part 3 | Thematic part

I. AREPO policy priorities and activities realised in 2024

Ms Francesca Alampi, policy officer of AREPO, gave an overview of the main topics in the EU debate and the EU policies of interest for GIs, as well as the main results achieved in 2024.

Particularly, she focused on the following:

- ▶ The new European Parliament resulted from 2024 elections and the new European Commission, with a closer look at the Commissioner designated for Agriculture and the priorities contained in his mission letter;
- ▶ The main results of the Strategic Dialogue on the future of EU agriculture that will serve as guidelines for the future initiatives in EU Agriculture;
- ▶ A GI Action Plan: a document on which AREPO is working jointly with partner organisations oriGIn EU and EFOR, for creating a comprehensive set of non-legislative measures to keep boosting the GI sector and providing support, especially after the entry into force of the new GI regulation;
- ▶ The EU Promotion Policy and the 2025 annual work programme;
- ▶ Upcoming events planned for the end of 2024 and 2025.

Please, consult the [PowerPoint presentation](#) and the [Activity Report](#) to know more on these topics.

AREPO's newly elected president, **Mr Alessandro Beduschi**, commented on the presentation delivered, stating that the previous Commission focused on identifying the agricultural sector as a problem, due to its lack of transparency on sustainability. However, agri-food system can be at the forefront of innovation. We must take this into account as a fundamental objective, also in sustainability. It is essential to defend a sector that is often attacked by arguments and considerations that are not scientifically valid. GIs in particular are a sector that is not at all lacking in transparency and we have to defend quality as the first imperative.

II. Activities of the new CAP network

Mr Giorgio TRENTIN (Veneto Region) representative of AREPO in the SOIKE thematic group of the CAP network, provided an update on the state of the art of the topics and activities carried out by this thematic group.

During the 7th meeting of the SOIKE subgroup, Mr Trentin presented AREPO and explained what AREPO is and how the participation in this subgroup can be an opportunity for the regions. Another topic on the agenda was the soil mission (very sensitive for producers), and they have been informed about conferences.

Furthermore, members of the subgroups have been informed about a database of EIP-Agri projects, where interested people, operators, farmers, can be aware of innovative ideas from other territories.



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Mr Alessandro BEDUSCHI | AREPO President
Mr Laurent GOMEZ | AREPO Secretary General
Mr Giorgio TRENTIN | Veneto Region

The subgroup also serves to identify and indicate events, as well as a platform to set up interregional groups between different Member States. AREPO in this sense is an example of how this could be done. It is an option for the Commission to look favourably on this type of project, which brings together the political side and the producer side. In this sense, within the subgroup they are working on transnational operational groups.

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

III. Update on EU Projects

Before beginning with the update on EU projects, **Prof. Fotios Tekos**, [University of Thessaly](#), made a presentation entitled '*Confirming the Value of Our Agricultural Products: Strengthening the position of High Nutritional Value Products*'. He highlighted that at the university they had facilities and laboratories that had enabled them to carry out extensive analysis of a number of GI products produced in Greece.

All these products have very positive characteristics for human health, so their effects should also be taken into account when promoting them.

Then, **Ms Francesca Alampi**, [policy officer of AREPO](#), provided an update on the **Horizon 2020 project MOVING**, ended in August 2024. Specifically, she presented the main results of the projects and the tools created, insisting on: a comparative report analysing sustainability of value chains in mountain regions; a list of policy recommendations and a roadmap to address the sustainability and resilience of mountain value chains; a 'policy toolkit' to enable the implementation of measures to protect value chains in mountain regions. All documents are available on the [project website](#).

AREPO has participated in this project contributing to communication and dissemination activities and ensuring the participation of producers and regions. In addition, it has worked on several reports and policy recommendations dedicated to quality products and to a report on the implementation of the Optional Quality Term "Mountain Product".

This presentation was followed by a focus on the **Horizon Europe project "GI SMART"**, made by **Ms Giulia Scaglioni**, [policy officer of AREPO](#).

Began in June 2024, 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.

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

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AREPO, with a total budget of **220 000 €**, plays a role in many of the research activities envisaged by the project and assists other partners in their tasks. In particular, AREPO is 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).

Ms Scaglioni delved into presenting the **GI SMART Community Platform**. A **multi-stakeholder platform** at national and EU level will be set up, 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.



For the time being, AREPO has already identified multiple national and European actors that could be interested in participating in the national and European platforms. The national platforms will be organised on the basis of several online meetings that will seek to facilitate discussions on national specificities. The European platform, on the other hand, is more open than the national platforms. It is expected to be able to hold one online meeting per year, from which it is hoped to create a community that will be able to last for the duration of the project and beyond.

Finally, examples of project activities that are already underway include webinars for regional stakeholders, workshops for stakeholders and an online training workshop on communicating with policy makers and producers on GIs. It is expected that these meetings can start to be organised from spring onwards.

Please, consult the [PowerPoint presentation on GI SMART](#) to know more.

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

To conclude, **Mr Piteris CHARALAMPOS-NIKOLAOS (Crete Region)** presented the 'rEdESIGN' project (Promoting social entrepreneurship in rural areas for sustainable food systems), on which the Region has been working for two years. The project has more than 10 partners from Greece, Spain and Italy. The aim of the project is to analyse the issues of social economy and skilled employment in rural areas. They hope that the project will enable them to create added value in terms of cross-border collaboration, build networks that will last and allow for capacity building. The region of Crete plays an important role in coordinating the project and expects to present results in two years.

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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 new President, **Mr Alessandro Beduschi**, closed the General Assembly by pointing out the importance of enhancing the value of GI products, getting the Commission to be open to listen to the voice of the farming world in order to be convinced that they can support GIs in preventing depopulation. He undertook to work at the political level to defend the political values of the association and looked forward to the next commitments and events of AREPO in 2025.

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