

AREPO report on the 1st General Assembly of 2025

25 June 2025 | 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 2025 was held in **Brussels** in the morning of **25 June 2025**.



Mr Alessandro BEDUSCHI | President of AREPO

This plenary meeting was organised at the **Common House of Emilia-Romagna, Hessen, Nouvelle Aquitaine and Wielkopolska**.

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

The Assembly was followed in the afternoon by the two-days conference dedicated to Geographical Indications and titled "A Producers' Vision for the EU Action Plan on Geographical Indications & Launch of the GI SMART Community Platform", co-organised by AREPO, EFOW and oriGIn EU, in the framework of the GI SMART project.

Part 2 | Statutory part

AREPO Secretary General, **Mr Laurent Gomez**, opened the meeting inviting **Mr Alessandro Beduschi**, AREPO President, to deliver his welcome address and introduce the plenary session.

AREPO President warmly welcomed all participants, expressing his honour in opening the first General Assembly of 2025 and reaffirming his full commitment to the role, assumed following his election in October 2024. He underlined the relevance of AREPO's mission in promoting quality products and highlighted the shared priorities with the other members of the Board: **the Vice-president, Mr César Saldaña** and **the Treasurer, Ms Temanuata Girard**.

Mr Beduschi extended his sincere thanks to all member regions for their continuous support, and officially welcomed the Region of Sardinia as a new member, as well as Ecovalia, which joined AREPO as an associate member. He emphasized the importance of expanding the network, suggesting to focus particularly on Central and Eastern Europe.

He concluded by expressing his appreciation to the AREPO team for their daily work, their support in coordinating the Association's activities, and for the preparation of both the Assembly and the conference following in the afternoon. He also extended his thanks to the interpreters for their essential contribution throughout the two-day event.

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I. Annual activity report of the Presidency

After the presentation of the agenda by AREPO Secretary General, **Mr Beduschi** presented **AREPO's 2024 activity report** (for more detailed information, please see the activity report), presenting as well some of the initiatives undertaken under the first month of the new mandate of Presidency.

A key milestone of 2024 was the adoption and entry into force of the new EU Regulation on Geographical Indications (GIs), to which AREPO contributed significantly through consultations, amendments, and dialogue with EU institutions throughout the past legislature. To celebrate this achievement and to explore the implications of the new GI regulation, AREPO with Euromontana and oriGIn EU organised in Brussels on 10 April 2024 a **high-level conference titled “The new legal framework for EU Quality Products: opportunities & challenges for mountain and GI products”**, in the framework of Horizon 2020 MOVING project.

Looking ahead, in summer 2024 AREPO started working with partner organisations oriGIn EU and EFOW on a **GI Action Plan**: a set of non-legislative measures aimed at further supporting and strengthening the GI sector, particularly in light of the new regulatory framework.

The AREPO President recalled that the Association continued to strengthen its relations with EU institutions during the transition to the new legislature. AREPO maintained close engagement with outgoing Members of the European Parliament (MEP) in the AGRI Committee and began building new relationships with newly elected MEPs particularly attentive to agri-food quality issues.

Likewise, AREPO reinforced its cooperation with the European Commission. In the first part of 2024, AREPO maintained a constructive dialogue with **former Commissioner for Agriculture Janusz Wojciechowski**. Since the appointment of the **new Commissioner for Agriculture, Christophe Hansen, in December 2024**, AREPO has begun establishing a positive and collaborative relationship with him and his cabinet. Moreover, AREPO enjoys excellent relations with **Mr Diego Canga Fano, Director for Quality and Promotion at DG AGRI and acting Deputy Director General**.

Project-wise, 2024 saw the successful conclusion of the EU-funded MOVING project and the **launch of GI SMART**, a Horizon Europe project running through 2028. AREPO leads the work package on communication, dissemination, exploitation and stakeholder engagement.

A study on public regional quality schemes was also completed and is under review for internal use.

In 2024 AREPO organised two General Assemblies: one in Brussels and one Larissa, and participated in multiple EU and international events.

To conclude the presentation of the annual activity report, President Beduschi, recommended that AREPO look for broadening its membership, keep working on the possible EU GI Action Plan, contribute to the future CAP debate, and monitor key initiatives such as the EU's vision for agriculture and food. Full engagement with GI SMART and exploration of further Horizon Europe projects remain top priorities.

He also reminded future appointments: **the second 2025 General Assembly in Barcelona (21–23 October)** and the **AREPO promotion event for GIs in spring 2026**.



The report was **unanimously** approved

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II. Intervention by AREPO Vice-Presidency

Mr César Saldaña, Vice-President of AREPO, underlined the importance of the Association's dual structure, bringing together both regional authorities and producer organisations. This unique composition enhances AREPO's legitimacy and influence at EU level. He called for greater involvement of producers in AREPO's activities and **urged all regions to designate official producer representatives** to ensure two-way communication and effective participation.

He stressed the role of producers in shaping EU policy priorities and highlighted the need for active engagement in the forthcoming GI Action Plan announced by Commissioner Hansen. Mr Saldaña warned against GIs falling off the EU agenda and emphasised the opportunity offered by the recent publication of the EU's vision for agriculture and food.

The Vice-President proposed two additional topics for AREPO's agenda in the coming months.

First, he presented **agritourism** as a promising opportunity for alternative income generation for farmers, with wine tourism already thriving in many AREPO regions. He stressed that the GI system provides a favourable framework for such development. Citing remarks by Director Diego Canga Fano, he suggested that tourism could play a strategic role in improving the visibility and recognition of GI logos, especially by promoting the display of GI labels in restaurants chosen by tourists.

Second, he addressed **the growing debate on the coexistence between Geographical Indications and public regional quality schemes**. He emphasized that AREPO's dual structure, combining regional authorities and producers, offers a unique platform to foster balanced solutions. While defending the success of the GI model, he acknowledged the rise of public regional quality schemes and called for the identification of areas of complementarity and conflict, to support constructive coexistence and prevent competition between the two systems.



Mr César SALDAÑA | Vice-President of AREPO

III. Presentation and vote on the state of the AREPO accounts 2024 and provisional accounts 2025



AREPO Treasurer, **Ms Temanuata Girard**, took the floor to comment on the state of the accounts for 2024 and submitting them to the vote of the General Assembly for approval ([Click here](#) to consult all related documents). Following her introduction, **Mr Laurent Gomez**, AREPO Secretary General, presented in detail the 2024 financial report and the 2025 provisional budget.

Ms Girard opened by thanking the regions of Emilia-Romagna and Nouvelle Aquitaine hosting the General Assembly in their premises in Brussels and the AREPO team for its work, including **Ms Alexandra Duriez**, administrative assistant supporting the Secretary General in the financial management of the Association. She confirmed that the independent auditor successfully closed the 2024 accounts, which were shared with members within the 30 days ahead of the Assembly deadline, in accordance with the statutes.

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The Treasurer highlighted the **sound financial position of AREPO**, thanks to careful expenditure management by the team and the timely contributions of member regions.



Ms Temanuata GIRARD | Treasurer of AREPO

The team has reduced costs by 18% for the organisation of two annual General Assemblies. Additionally, the team actively seeks to participate in EU projects aligned with AREPO's mission to diversify resources. This is the case for the GI SMART which will contribute €48.000 annually for four years and support core activities.

The Treasurer also warmly thanked the 25 regions that have already paid their 2025 contributions and noted that reminders would be sent shortly to the remaining members.

She reaffirmed that the activities presented in the President's annual report clearly justify continued confidence in AREPO as a network serving producers and regions and she stated that AREPO has sufficient financial resources to carry out the tasks that the member regions expect from it.

The Secretary General provided more information on the

state of the accounts.

The financial year 2024 showed a positive result of €14,944, thanks to the increase of the amount of membership fees.

The main **expenses** for the year were:

- **€ 42.174 for two plenary meetings** (Brussels in April and Larissa in October), including interpretation, catering and public transport, a reduction of 18% compared to 2023.
- **€ 112.000 for personnel expenses** (1.5 persons in Brussels), a 4.82% salary increase and a 22% increase in expenses
- **€ 31.000 for consulting in European projects**, a significant reduction of 17% compared to the previous year.
- Travel and catering expenses were maintained at 2023 levels, after a significant reduction in the previous year.

All 30 member regions paid their membership fee, generating a total of €187.000. The Agrosmart Global and MOVING projects generated € 36,972. The GI SMART project started in 2024, and the first pre-financing tranche will be accounted for in 2025.

The budget for 2025 was proposed in balance, as usual. It includes the organisation of two General Assemblies (one in Brussels and the second GA that will be held in Barcelona in October 2025) and of the high-level conference of 25-26 June in Brussels to launch the community platform of the GI SMART project, co-organised with oriGIn EU and EFOW, and partially financed by the project.

The budget for personnel expenses will increase, due to a salary increase of €220 net for Francesca and €70 for Giulia, in addition to the automatic 2% indexation applied in Belgium as of March 2025. Consulting costs will also increase, but will remain lower than in 2023. Finally, the GI SMART project advance received in 2024 will be accounted for in the 2025 financial year.

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The General Assembly **unanimously** approved the accounts 2024 and the provisional accounts 2025.

IV. Reminder on the contribution 2025

The General Assembly held in October 2024 voted unanimously in favour of maintaining the annual contribution at € 6.000 for 2025. The Secretary General reminded the amount and informed that reminder will be sent to Regions whose payment is still pending.

Part 3 | Thematic part

I. Update on the 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.



SoIKe meetings are held three times per year, and all related documentation is available on the [CAP Network website](#). During the March 2025 meeting, the GI SMART project was presented, while the June 2025 session focused on potential collaboration opportunities with Circular Bio-Based Europe Joint Undertaking and explored future budget developments for innovation beyond 2027.

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

Mr Malone Rolland (Brittany Region) presented AREPO's engagement in the Subgroup on Strategic Plans. Since the last General Assembly, three in-person meetings have been held, coordinated by Ms Antonia Gámez Moreno (Unit D1, DG AGRI). The first meeting focused on the Commission's response to the agricultural crisis, particularly through simplification of the CAP. The second session continued to address simplification measures, the situation of farmers, and unfair trading practices. The third meeting, held in March 2025, focused on the new EU Vision for Agriculture and Food and its alignment with National Strategic Plans.

II. The role of Region of Epirus in the agrifood sector

Ms Vicky Igoumenidou (Region of Epirus) presented the agri-food sector of the Epirus region as a key pillar of its economy. In agriculture, the region is known for the production of fruits, vegetables, horticultural crops, and olive oil. In livestock farming, Epirus plays a leading role at the national level,

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supplying 45% of the lamb and 70% of the poultry meat to the Greek market. The region also has strong freshwater aquaculture, producing significant volumes of river fish, as well as high-quality honey.

Epirus is also known for a variety of high added-value processed products, including wines, cheeses, olive oil, and traditional pasta. Looking ahead, regional priorities include: identifying traditional local products and supporting the development of new and innovative ones; strengthening livestock farming; promoting agricultural products and expanding export capacity; enhancing documentation and revival of medicinal and aromatic plant cultivation; promoting the sustainable use of natural resources through improved infrastructure.

The region is actively collaborating with universities and regional stakeholders to improve access to information and support for SMEs in the agri-food sector.

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

III. Information on the planning of upcoming AREPO events: 2025 General Assembly in Catalonia and 2026 European promotion event

Ms Francesca Alampi, policy officer of AREPO, informed members about the organisation of the second General Assembly of 2025. **It will be organised in Barcelona (Catalunya, Spain) from 21 to 23 October 2025.**

Participants are expected to arrive individually on 21 October, while the General Assembly will be held throughout the day on 22 October, followed by an official dinner. On the morning of 23 October, technical visits will be organised in the Reus/Tarragona area, including a visit to a production site of Avellana de Reus PDO hazelnuts and a mill producing Siurana PDO olive oil. The programme will conclude with a tasting of Catalan products, featuring in particular the 'Pa de Pagès català' PGI bread.

The visits are scheduled to end at midday, and given the location, approximately 1 hour from the airport and 1 hour and 30 minutes from Barcelona, participants are encouraged to book their return flights in the afternoon of 23 October.

Ms Giulia Scaglioni, policy officer of AREPO, provided a preview of the 6th edition of AREPO's promotion event dedicated to Geographical Indications, **to be held in March or April 2026**. This event, traditionally held every 2-3 years, includes a conference followed by a tasting session. The exact location is still to be confirmed due to the complexity of the logistics. A call for expressions of interest will be launched in September-October 2025, followed by an info session for member regions in November and final confirmation of participation in December.

Regions wishing to take part will be asked to respond to the email for expression of interest, designate a contact person, send the selected products and manage the presentation at their tasting table. Participation is free of charge; AREPO will cover all the organisational costs related to the conference and the tasting. Each region may showcase up to three products (including a maximum of two wines) and should prepare no more than 200 portions. Cooking will not be permitted onsite, just simple preparations such as cutting and display on a tray. AREPO encourages the selection of simple, easy-to-serve products, and to include also fruits and vegetables. Full details will be provided in due course.

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

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IV. AREPO policy priorities and activities realised in 2024

Ms Francesca Alampì, policy officer of AREPO, gave an overview of the [Vision for Agriculture and Food](#), the priority initiative for the first 100 days of this European Commission's mandate. She presented its main objectives and structure, focusing especially on what the Vision foresees for Geographical Indications and discussing the possibility of having an Action Planned for EU GIs as announced by Commissioner Hansen during his hearing in the Agri Committee of the European Parliament.

This served as an opportunity to recall the key objectives that such an Action Plan could address and to share some initial insights from AREPO's preliminary exchanges with the European Commission on the topic.

AREPO Policy officer also drew attention to other initiatives included in the Vision which are either directly relevant to GIs or represent policy areas to which the GI sector could make a meaningful contribution, such as sustainability, generational renewal, and rural development.

Please, consult the [PowerPoint presentation](#) to know more on these topics and the [Activity Report](#) to see the main policy updates and results achieved in 2024.

V. Update on EU Projects

Ms Giulia Scaglioni, policy officer of AREPO presented an update on the **Horizon Europe project “GI SMART”**.

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.

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 gave an overview of the first developments within the four key research pillars on which the project is based.

Then, she delved into the presentation of the main activities carried out so far by AREPO within the project and on its role in coordinating stakeholder engagement.

AREPO, together with Euromontana, drafted the Communication Dissemination Exploitation and Stakeholder Engagement Plan (CDESE Plan, October 2024), the basis of the WP led by AREPO. Furthermore, **AREPO has led the development of the GI SMART Community Platform**, a multi-actor platform structured around 9 National multi-actor platforms (MAPs) and 1 platform at the EU level (EU MAP).



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AREPO identified and mapped the European relevant stakeholders to be engaged in the EU MAP and it also supported project partners in the identification and engagement of national and regional stakeholders for the national MAPs. **576 stakeholders** across eight countries and the EU level have been identified.

AREPO prepared the launch of the platforms setting-up the **GI SMART Team for Stakeholder Engagement**, including all MAP coordinators and the project's partners representing stakeholder at the EU-level. AREPO prepared as well a **Stakeholder Registration Form**, translated in 8 languages, submitted to partners for linguistic revision and officially launched in February 2025.

In order to prepare the first national MAP meetings, AREPO developed several tools and resources to be used by national MAP coordinators and organised several meetings with GI SMART partners for defining the participatory methods and aligning MAP content with ongoing GI SMART research.

Meanwhile, AREPO coordinated the organisation of the Conference *"A Producers' Vision for the EU Action Plan on Geographical Indications & Launch of the GI SMART Community Platform"* for the official launch of the GI SMART Community Platform in Brussels (June 25–26, 2025), in collaboration with EFOW and oriGIn EU.

Ms Scaglioni concluded her presentation with the upcoming activities for the EU-level MAP:

- an **online workshop on GI producer groups** in September–October 2025, focusing on national systems for recognising such groups;
- a **workshop with consumer organisations** in collaboration with SAFE in October 2025;
- and the **VI edition of the AREPO European Event on Quality and Origin Products**, to be held in Spring 2026, which will highlight the preliminary results of the GI SMART project.

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

VI. Discussion with members

After the update on EU projects, the Secretary General opened the floor to members for discussion. Participants engaged in a broad exchange about the challenges and future directions for GIs, reflecting diverse regional perspectives and concerns.

Mr Charalampos-Nicholaos Piteris (Region of Crete) raised the issue of the limited recognition of GI products and advocated for a stronger link between GIs and environmental sustainability. He emphasized the need to change the communication approach surrounding GIs, suggesting to place greater emphasis on the low environmental footprint of GI products and shifting the narrative from heritage to sustainability and productivity, especially in the context of animal-origin products.

Mr Raúl Muñiz Cimas (IGP Corderex, Region of Extremadura) warned that the current EU production model is under strain, particularly in the sheep and goat sectors, where low profitability threatens continuity. He expressed concern that GIs have limited visibility in the CAP framework, apart from promotion, and stressed the need to organize collectively beyond the national level to influence EU policy effectively.

Economic viability for producers emerged as a central theme. **Mr Battista Cualbu (Agnello di Sardegna PGI, Region of Sardegna)** acknowledging the work of AREPO and the importance of having become a member, highlighted the urgent need to support producers through fair pricing, value chain agreements,

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and targeted aid. The lack of generational renewal was seen as a systemic risk to the continuity of small GIs, with calls for differentiated and more directed support within EU frameworks.

Mr Flavio Innocenzi (Asiago PDO, Region of Veneto) noted that many GIs face internal challenges like localism and competing regional marks, which can undermine the credibility of the GI system.

Participants voiced concerns over recent regulatory developments. Mr Innocenzi expressed some concerns about the EU regulation on artisanal and industrial GIs, warning that its self-certification model lowers standards and blurs the distinction with agri-food GIs by using the same IGP logo. Furthermore, he stressed the difficult relationship with EUIPO over collective trademark registration. He also drew attention to external threats, such as ICANN's decision to auction second-level domain names matching GI names, potentially hindering GI visibility online.

While several speakers, like **Mr Gennaro Giliberti** (Region of Toscana) acknowledged the potential of GI-linked tourism, they agreed with Mr Muñiz Cimas that it should remain a complementary activity, not the focus. Mr Giliberti proposed innovative ideas, such as redirecting part of the tourist tax to support local producers and using GIs as a tool to counter overtourism. He advocated for landscape-based recognition and valorization, especially in olive oil production, stressing the need for higher product pricing in these contexts.

Ms Katerina Zografu (Region of Central Macedonia), speaking about the feta cheese sector, raised concerns about declining livestock numbers and proposed the creation of a scientific database to better address vaccination and animal health, with direct implications for certification and GI product integrity.

Ms Angela Crescenzi (Region of Toscana) and **Prof. Konstadinos Mattas** (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki – AUTH, Region of Central Macedonia) addressed the gap between GI stakeholders and the broader public. Ms Crescenzi questioned whether the multi-layered meanings attributed to GIs (historical, sustainable, cultural etc...) truly resonate with consumers, suggesting a need for clearer messaging. Prof. Mattas warned that GI actors have become isolated, and the general public remains unaware of their role and value. He called for a reconnection between GI producers and society.

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.

AREPO President, **Mr Alessandro Beduschi**, closed the General Assembly by thanking participants for their active contribution to the discussion, pointing out the importance of GIs and quality in response to crisis and issues affecting the agricultural sector. He reiterated his commitment to work at the political level to defend the political values of the association and looked forward to the next AREPO General Assembly in Barcelona in 2025.

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