

# AREPO

## Report on the Executive Board Meeting

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2 April 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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### AREPO

14 rue François de Sourdis  
33000 Bordeaux  
FRANCE

### Contacts

Brussels representation office  
Email: [info@arepoquality.eu](mailto:info@arepoquality.eu)  
Phone: +32 0498 73 22 03

### Networks and website

Facebook: @arepoquality  
LinkedIn: AREPO Quality  
[www.arepoquality.eu](http://www.arepoquality.eu)

# 1 | Summary of the meeting

## ► Highlight of the meeting:

Meeting with **Diego Canga Fano**, Director of DG AGRI, responsible for dissemination, research and geographical indications, and acting Deputy Director-General, to discuss the priorities of the European geographical indications (GI) policy and the future action plan.

## ► Political orientations discussed:

1. To strengthen the visibility of GIs among consumers through distribution channels, catering, tourism and education.
2. Need to support small and medium-sized GIs, in particular through a better articulation between regional and European instruments.
3. Discussions on the use of public food procurement to enhance GI.
4. Interest in the creation of a European award for the sustainability of GIs.
5. Raising awareness of Erasmus training and regional quality systems as complementary levers.

## ► Themes to follow (political level)

1. Publication of the GI Action Plan (after 2025)
2. Planned revision of the Public Procurement Directive (summer 2025)
3. Articulation between regional public quality systems and GIs: still a sensitive topic that needs to be further investigated.

## ► Upcoming events:

1. AREPO General Assembly: 25 June 2025 in Brussels + conference on GIs (25-26 June)
2. 2nd AG 2025: 21-23 October in Barcelona (Catalonia)
3. European event to promote GI products: March-April 2026
4. Launch of the GI SMART platform: June 2025

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33000 Bordeaux  
FRANCE

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Phone: +32 0498 73 22 03

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## 2 | Introduction

The **AREPO Executive Board** meeting was held in **Brussels on 2 April 2025**, at the seat of the **Emilia-Romagna Region Representation Office**.

The interpretation was provided online, through the Zoom platform, in ES, FR, IT.

### 1. Participants in the AREPO Executive Board meeting

#### Members of the Executive Board

**Alessandro Beduschi**, President of AREPO , Minister for Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forestry of Lombardy Region

**Cesar Saldaña**, Vice-President of AREPO and President of CADO (Conferencia Andaluza de DOP e IGP)

**Temanuata GIRARD**, AREPO Treasurer and Vice-President for Agriculture and Food of the Centre-Val de Loire Region

#### Other AREPO participants

**Laurent Gomez**, Secretary General of AREPO

**Lucia Silvestri**, Director UO Development, Innovation and Promotion of Production and Territory, Directorate General for Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forestry, Lombardy Region

**Ildebrando Bruno Volpi**, Secretary to the Assessore all'Agricoltura, Sovranità Alimentare e Foreste, Regione Lombardia

**Francesca Alampi**, Policy officer, AREPO

**Giulia Scaglioni**, Policy officer, AREPO

#### External participants

**Diego Canga Fano**, Deputy Director-General F, H, I (Acting), European Commission

**Natalia Brzezina**, Policy Assistant to the Deputy Director-General F, H, I (Acting), European Commission

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14 rue François de Sourdis  
33000 Bordeaux  
FRANCE

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

- Meeting with the European Commission to discuss GI-related priorities
- Update on the state of the accounts 2024 and forecast for 2025;
- Information on the planning of upcoming events (AG and June 2025 event, second AG of 2025 in Catalunya, AREPO European promotion event of 2026);
- Update on AREPO activities and actions.

### 3 | Meeting with the European Commission

AREPO's Executive Board met with **Diego Canga Fano**, Director of DG AGRI, in charge of Dissemination, Research and Geographical Indications, and acting Deputy Director General.

The objective of the meeting was to reflect together with the Commission on how AREPO can contribute to "Further promoting the uptake of geographical indications", an action foreseen in the framework of the EC's Vision for Agriculture and Food, and how it can further support the development of an Action Plan for Geographical Indications.

The Acting Director General informed the Executive Board members that the GI Unit is currently processing a large number of applications for recognition of Turkish GIs. More than half of the files received by the EC services concern Turkish GIs. As there are only 9 European GIs recognised by Turkey, Canga Fano wanted to emphasise the imbalance that exists at the moment.

The Director then recalled that the European Commissioner for Agriculture and Food, Christophe Hansen, said during the hearing in the European Parliament that the Commission will adopt an action plan for geographical indications.

The services of DG AGRI started brainstorming on possible areas to be included in the plan:

1. Data collected by Eurobarometer highlight a low level of consumer awareness of European GI logos: only 24% of consumers recognise PDO and PGI logos compared to 56% for the European organic farming logo. To address this situation, it is necessary to question how to improve the recognition of GIs. Among possible avenues of work Canga Fano mentioned the possibility of **working with supermarkets through voluntary agreements and with restaurants**.
2. Use the organic awards model to create a **European GI day with GI** awards to reward the most sustainable GIs (e.g. by creating categories for social, economic and environmental sustainability). Organising an award ceremony with a presentation by the European Commissioner could generate important publicity for the winners and the GI system in general.
3. Procurement for public canteens: for some time now, the Commission has been working on going beyond the criterion of the cheapest offer and including criteria related to product quality. **Procurement for public canteens could help to promote and support geographical indications**

At the moment there is no clear timeline for the publication of the action plan. It will certainly not be published in 2025 because the Commission is busy with other priority dossiers, first and foremost the CAP review. In any case, the Commission is open to receiving suggestions from stakeholders, who will be consulted during the process.

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**President Beduschi** then took the floor, thanking the Director for his willingness to meet AREPO's Executive Board. He emphasised the need for support for small and medium-sized GIs because at regional level they see the difficulties of smaller realities and fear the possibility of abandonment and the loss of PDO and PGI products that have failed to perform well after being registered at European level.

Furthermore, he highlighted the value of GIs for national and European exports, emphasising the hardly replaceable role of these products not only for agri-food exports per se but for the entire European economy.

The Acting Director General reiterated his desire to maintain a dedicated budget line for GIs within the promotion policy. However, he emphasised that several Northern European countries are opposed to increasing the budget exclusively for GIs, to the detriment of other funding lines, despite the obvious disproportion between the number of funding requests received and those actually approved.

To meet this challenge, he emphasised the need to promote GIs as a success story at European level, going beyond the perception of a phenomenon limited to a few countries. To this end, it is crucial to work with states where the GI system is less developed in order to strengthen it and broaden its scope.

In an international context characterised by instability and unpredictability, he also highlighted the importance of diversifying markets, emphasising how promotion policy is a key tool to support this strategy.

Finally, it asked for support in disseminating information on the promotion policy, with the aim of keeping the number of applications for funding and the value of the projects implemented high, which are essential elements to justify the allocation of dedicated resources.

He also mentioned that for every million euro of exports, 12,000 jobs are created and that agri-food exports have a significant impact on the entire economy.

**AREPO's treasurer, Temanuata Girard**, took the floor to reiterate the importance of the territorial dimension of GIs. She also asked whether the Commission was thinking of proposing at European level a regulation equivalent to the French EGALIM law.<sup>1</sup>

The Acting Director emphasised the importance of educating and training citizens on GIs, suggesting, for example, training supermarket employees. This type of training could have a cascading impact on consumers, as has happened in the past with organic farming.

Concerning the procurement of public canteens, Canga Fano informed the Executive Board about the upcoming revision of the European Directive on this issue. The European Commission is due to publish a proposal for amendment by the summer of 2025. He recommended immediately contacting DG GROW, which is competent on the topic, to make sure that quality criteria are included in the proposal, exploiting the added value of GIs. This approach could open up interesting opportunities for small GIs.

**AREPO Vice President César Saldaña** reiterated the importance of raising awareness in countries where the GI system is less developed and logos less recognised, proposing an approach that involves

<sup>1</sup> The EGALIM law (Evolution des Grâces de l'Alimentation) is a French law adopted in 2018 to improve the balance in the agrifood supply chain, promote food quality and sustainability, and strengthen transparency in contracts between producers and distributors. In terms of public canteens, the law aims to promote food quality and stipulates that public contracts for collective catering (such as schools and hospitals) encourage the use of fresh, local, organic products with a certified quality (including geographical indications).

both consumers and producers. He emphasised how greater awareness in these two groups can foster a wider dissemination of GIs

Furthermore, Saldaña thanked the European Commission for the 'Vision on the Future of Agriculture', recognising the value of including GIs within the strategy. He reiterated that it is crucial to consider the potential impact of GIs on various cross-cutting objectives and initiatives of the Vision, as GIs can contribute to many areas, from sustainability to economic diversification in rural areas. In particular, they can create the conditions for alternative forms of income for farmers, as in the case of agrotourism.

On the subject of tourism, **Director Canga Fano** pointed out that it is a tool that should also be exploited to respond to the problem of recognising PDO/PGI logos. Considering the amount of tourists that annually visit EU countries and try the typical dishes and products of each Member State, surely indicating the logos and names of PDO/PGI products in catering could allow reaching a very wide audience of consumers.

**AREPO treasurer Temanuata Girard** then asked if the Director thought it would be useful to also insist on a GI training aspect through the Erasmus programme, meeting Canga Fano's interest in the topic.

Having mentioned the possibility of an award for GIs at the beginning of the meeting, **AREPO's policy officer Giulia Scaglioni** presented the possibility of developing an award for sustainable GIs within the GI SMART project, as a tool to attract more actors within MAPs but also to be able to collect existing practices at European level.

**Canga Fano** replied that it may be useful to do a test within the project but without creating competition with a possible Commission prize. It will also be necessary to assess what interest producers will have in participating in a prize that does not have sponsorship from a European institution. He reiterated that the Commission cannot be involved in this circumstance and that a partnership with the European Parliament could possibly be tried.

**President Beduschi** returned to the topic of public procurement to ask whether it might be useful to include, in addition to quality criteria, mandatory percentage thresholds within the tender. In this regard, Canga Fano replied that the topic is delicate and varies greatly from country to country. It is fine to defend the principle that the supply of PDO/PGI products in public canteens should be increased, but setting percentages, even minimal ones, would not work.

With regard to tourism, **the President of AREPO** reaffirmed the importance of addressing the issue also in the framework of the future Action Plan. In particular, he stressed the need to strengthen the offer of a tourism linked to PDO and PGI products, through incentive mechanisms and investments in infrastructures, especially in rural and mountain territories.

In these areas, in fact, despite the existence of a strong demand and a growing interest in local products, the absence of adequate accommodation prevents the development of a complete tourist offer, favouring instead the concentration of tourism in large cities.

**The Vice-President** of AREPO intervened to ask Director Canga Fano what his position was on regional public quality systems. Saldaña pointed out that, as these instruments have been in operation for years in different regions, it would be worth reflecting on how they could coexist with Geographical Indications. He cited the case of Spain, where the Consejos Reguladores are campaigning hard against such systems. In his opinion, on the other hand, the latter can represent an additional tool for territorial valorisation and development, characterised by less stringent requirements than GIs. **Director Canga Fano** expressed some reservations in this regard, however, stating that this is an internal matter for the Member States. Finally, he emphasised the importance of avoiding a proliferation of logos, which could lead to consumer confusion.

#### AREPO

14 rue François de Sourdis  
33000 Bordeaux  
FRANCE

#### Contacts

Brussels representation office  
Email: [info@arepoquality.eu](mailto:info@arepoquality.eu)  
Phone: +32 0498 73 22 03

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**AREPO's Treasurer** also intervened on the issue, recalling that, according to several surveys conducted among consumers at local level, it is precisely territorial labels that have the greatest impact on perception and purchase choices. She also suggested considering regional public quality systems as possible tools for the transition towards Geographical Indications, particularly in smaller territories.

Finally, **Lucia Silvestri**, Head of UO Sviluppo, Innovazione e Promozione delle Produzioni e del Territorio, Direzione Generale Agricoltura, Sovranità Alimentare e Foreste, Regione Lombardia, highlighted the importance of being able to make use of rural development measures in order to carry out a preliminary assessment to understand whether a Geographical Indication is indeed the most suitable tool for a given supply chain. In some cases, in fact, there are difficulties following registration, which even lead to requests for cancellation.

Alongside this, ex-post accompaniment should also be envisaged in order to support producers who have registered a GI in a more targeted manner.

**Director Canga Fano** pointed out that this evaluation phase should take place at national level, before the GI is registered, emphasising that regional authorities have a key role in this process. The European Commission, in fact, is limited to a formal check and is not in a position to carry out a substantial filter on the validity or soundness of the registration proposal.

Finally, he mentioned that the path to obtaining a GI is challenging, but some GIs, although small, have the potential to reach international markets and therefore deserve proper support

## 4 | Executive Board Meeting

For further information on the content of the Executive Board meeting, please see [the Power Point presentation](#).

### 1. AREPO Members

The Secretary General introduced the Executive Board meeting with an update on the membership composition of the Association.

AREPO counts with a new member region, **Sardinia**, which has already paid its membership fee for 2025. However, the Greek region of Attica has announced its wish to leave the Association.

At the time of the Executive Board meeting, **twenty out of thirty regions are in good standing with the payment of their annual membership fees**.

Finally, AREPO also has a new associate member, **Ecovalia**, the Spanish professional association representing the organic sector.

### 2. Update on the State of the Accounts 2024 and Forecast for 2025

**Results 2024: The financial year 2024 shows a positive result of €14,944**, thanks to an increase in membership fees.

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FRANCE

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

- ▶ **€42,174 inc. VAT for the 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.
- ▶ **€30,600 inc. VAT (€25,500 excl. VAT) for consultancy costs** for European projects and communication activities.
- ▶ Travel and catering expenses were maintained at 2023 levels, after a significant reduction in the previous year.

On the revenue side, the 2024 General Assembly voted **to increase membership fees from €4,500 to €6,000** in response to inflation.

All 30 member regions paid their dues, generating a total of **€187,000**. The Agrosmart Global and MOVING projects generated EUR 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 will be balanced**, as usual. It will include the organisation of the first General Assembly in Brussels, followed by a high-level conference to launch the community platform of the GI SMART project, co-organised with oriGIn EU and EFOW, and partially financed by the project. A second General Assembly will be held in Barcelona in October 2025.

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.

### 3. Information on the programming of the next GA & event in June 2025

The meeting continued with the presentation of the programme for the General Assembly on 25 June.

The AG will start at 9.30 a.m. on 25 June, so it is suggested to arrive by the evening of 24 June, although no formal activities are planned for 24 June.

The Secretary General presented the items on the provisional agenda and then gave the floor to AREPO's policy officer, **Giulia Scaglioni**, to present the details of the Geographical Indications conference on 25 and 26 June.

The event will begin on the afternoon of 25 June and conclude on the afternoon of 26 June. The main points of the programme and the topics that will be covered were presented, as well as the logistical and organisational aspects and the budget commitments needed to finance this conference.

### 4. Information on the planning of the second GA of 2025 in Catalunya

AREPO's second General Assembly will be held in **Barcelona (Catalonia) from 21 to 23 October 2025**. Participants are scheduled to arrive on 21 October, with an official welcome dinner in the evening. On 22 October the AREPO General Assembly (full day) will be held at the Palau de Pedralbes in

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Barcelona. On 23 October, technical visits to Reus/Tarragona (1h30 from Barcelona and about 1h from the airport) are scheduled in the morning. Participants will be able to book their return flight in the afternoon of 23 October.

## 5. Information on AREPO's 2026 European promotion event

In 2026, between March and April, the **sixth edition of AREPO's European Event dedicated to the promotion of Quality and Origin Products from our member regions will be held**. The date will be defined by the autumn, depending on the timetable of the European institutions. The event will include a conference dedicated to the discussion of the first results of the GI SMART project and the priorities for the GI Action Plan. In the evening, there will be a presentation and tasting of GI products from our regions.

Starting in September 2025, we will begin contacting our member regions to collect memberships for the event and coordinate their participation.

Given the increase in the number of participants in recent editions, the space in the building that houses AREPO may not be sufficient. During the summer, we will start looking for other locations to have different options for organising the event

**President Beduschi** asked what is the target audience AREPO addresses with these events. Policy officer **Giulia Scaglioni** clarified that these events are made to reach out to European institutions and to allow networking between stakeholders of the GI sector, whether they are members of AREPO or of other organisations.

## 6. Update on AREPO activities and actions

### A. European policies

Having dealt with the main EU policy initiatives (Vision for Agriculture and Food, Action Plan for GIs, Promotion Policy, Food Public Procurement) in the meeting with **Diego Canga Fano**, **Director of DG AGRI in charge of Dissemination, Research and Geographical Indications**, the update on these points, made by AREPO's policy officer **Francesca Alampi**, was limited to a summary of the position supported by AREPO.

### B. Representation of the Association at European and international events

In the first quarter of 2025, the association actively participated in two major international conferences dedicated to Geographical Indications. In particular, AREPO was present at the International Conference on Geographical Indications "**Safeguarding Heritage, Cultivating Future**", held on 28-29 January 2025 at the EUIPO headquarters in Alicante, and at the FAO Conference "**Worldwide Perspectives on Geographical Indications: Innovations and Traditions for Sustainability**", held from 18 to 21 February 2025 at the FAO headquarters in Rome

These occasions were an important showcase for the work of the association and its members, as well as an opportunity for international comparison and exchange

During the FAO conference in Rome, several AREPO member regions actively contributed to the conference proceedings, in particular by participating in a session dedicated to **the role of regional and**

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FRANCE

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**local public actors in the GI protection and valorisation process**, sharing good practices and experiences with experts from all over the world.

#### C. Technical groups (regional public quality systems)

In the course of 2024, AREPO launched a new **technical working group on regional public quality systems**, set up at the end of 2023 **on the initiative of the Euskadi region**, which took over its animation, with moderation by the AREPO Secretariat. The first meeting of the group was held on 8 February 2024.

To support this work, an **in-depth study of existing regional public quality systems in AREPO's member regions** was carried out **in collaboration with a group of students from the Master Food Identity course**. The study was completed in November 2024 and is currently being reviewed by AREPO services. Letters also been received from oriGIn Italia and Origen España urging AREPO to treat the issue with care, as the issue raises a lot of criticism in the world of producers who fear that the creation of these systems will compete with GIs and create further confusion for consumers. However, work is currently on hold and no further meetings have yet been scheduled, although Euskadi has expressed its willingness to continue on this issue.

The President of AREPO, **Alessandro Beduschi**, intervened, pointing out that in recent months he had collected the critical points of producers on the issue and sharing the reflection made by Director Canga Fano that this topic should be resolved at the national level so as not to create tension with the GI valorisation system.

Vice-President **César Saldaña**, on the other hand, believes that AREPO could be the right forum in which to address the issue, trying to create synergies between regional public quality systems and geographical indications. Of course, he called for caution and vigilance so that situations do not arise of regional brands usurping the name of a geographical indication, but it cannot be denied that these quality systems do exist and that they can often be interesting for products that do not have the requirements to be registered and in which territories are nevertheless ready to invest.

This is why Saldaña proposed to resume the reflection within AREPO and to work together, regions and producers.

AREPO's Treasurer, **Temanuata Girard**, also shared the Vice-President's vision because the objective must be to find a complementarity between two instruments that contribute to the development of territories. In the case of public quality systems, it will be important to identify any obstacles and impassable limits so that competition with GIs is not created.

Vice-President **Saldaña** added that joining a regional quality system is often an intermediate step for producer groups in order to be able to register a product as a GI in the future. He reiterated that AREPO can play a leading role at European level on this issue.

In addition, several **proposals were made for the activation of new technical working groups** focusing on topics relevant to the association's members. In particular, the following areas of interest were highlighted:

- ▶ Recognition of producer groups;
- ▶ Geographical Indications in Public Food Procurement;
- ▶ Measures available for GIs in the CAP Strategic Plans.

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The first topic is particularly topical because with the reform of the EU GI system coming into force in May 2024, some countries need to have a national law governing the **recognition of producer groups**. Germany does not have such a law and is working on developing one, taking successful existing models as a reference, e.g. the Italian laws on consortia. In order to help German colleagues and allow members from other regions to share their experience, a technical group on the subject is to be organised. Like Germany, the Greek regions will also have to develop such a system.

**Geographical Indications in public food procurement** has already been a topic of interest for AREPO in the past. In fact, the association had started to gather some information from some regions that was then collected in a study. Given the Commission's priority to work on a reform of the food public procurement system, it seems appropriate to take up and expand on this topic in a technical working group.

Finally, the third proposal once again deals with a subject that has been dealt with previously. AREPO had already worked with its regions on the mapping of rural development measures in support of GIs. With the new CAP system and in view of the forthcoming reform, **we want to study whether and which measures have been included in national strategic plans to support GIs**.

These proposals will be evaluated in the coming months in order to define the priorities and operational modalities for starting the work.

#### D. Horizon Europe GI smart project

Finally, AREPO's policy officer, **Giulia Scaglioni**, gave an update on the **Horizon Europe "GI SMART" project**. She recalled that the total budget of the project amounts to **€3,430,061**, of which AREPO will receive a maximum of **€224,187.50** over the four years. The funding follows a *lump sum* approach, which guarantees flexibility in the management of the budget. The first pre-financing tranche of **€54,174.91** arrived in October 2024, and the remaining half will arrive between June and July 2025.

AREPO is responsible for the work package (WP) dedicated to communication, dissemination, exploitation of results and stakeholder involvement. The main activities already implemented include:

1. Definition of the plan for communication, dissemination, exploitation of results and involvement of stakeholders (CDESE plan);
2. A first internal workshop on how to exploit the project results was held during the kick-off meeting in Paris (October 2024);
3. Launch of the GI SMART Community Platform, which will be officially launched in June.

Regarding the **GI SMART Community Platform**, preparatory work started between June and October 2024, with the drafting of the action plan, a questionnaire for AREPO members and one for GI SMART partners. From October 2024 to February 2025, work was carried out on the launch of the national and European MAPs (Multi-Actor Platforms), with the creation of a stakeholder database, the collection of first contacts and the preparation of registration forms in 7 languages.

Since the start of the stakeholder contact phase (February 2025), **114 stakeholders have signed up to the platform**, which involves national MAPs in France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain, Hungary, UK, Switzerland. The establishment of the Portuguese MAP, which will be coordinated by UEVORA, has recently been confirmed. The 9 national MAPs join the European MAP.

Preparatory meetings were held between February and March to structure the first national MAP meetings and develop a common methodology and participatory approach for all MAPs. Stakeholders were contacted and the first online meetings of the national MAPs will be held between April and June.

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The official launch of the European MAP will take place with an event organised in cooperation with oriGIn EU and EFOW **on 25 and 26 June 2025 in Brussels.**

## 5 | Conclusions

The Executive Board meeting ended with the Secretary General thanking the AREPO team for organising the meeting and the interpreters for allowing all participants to express themselves and follow the meeting in their mother tongue.

President Beduschi then concluded the meeting by joining in thanking the AREPO team for their work. He also thanked the Association for the opportunity to participate at important decision-making tables and made himself available to support the Association's priorities to raise awareness at the political level as well.

A report of the meeting will be shared in the weeks to follow.

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FRANCE

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