



## REPORT ON AREPO'S VIRTUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY September 28<sup>th</sup> 2020

Following the cancellation for sanitary reasons of the General Assembly that should have been held in Besançon from 28 to 30 April 2020, **AREPO 2020 plenary meeting was held on the online platform Interactio, on September 28<sup>th</sup> from 10h00 to 12h00. The meeting was entirely dedicated to the Statutory part.**

**26 Regions and 5 producer representatives** participated in the General Assembly.

### STATUTORY PART

The General Assembly began with the welcome by the President of AREPO, **Mrs Eirini Choudetsanaki**.

Then, the Secretary General, **Mr Laurent Gomez**, introduced the meeting giving the technical instructions for using the platform and voting. He thanked the AREPO team for the hard work of the past months. Furthermore, he explained that AREPO has the statutory obligation to organise each year the General Assembly before the end of June, in order to vote and close the financial account for the previous year. Nevertheless, due to COVID-19 crisis, the deadline has been exceptionally extended by three months, giving us the possibility to exceptionally organise the GA at the end of September.

### Report of the President

The President thanked the AREPO team and her collaborator, Mr Piteris Charalampos Nikolaos, for their work and support. She reminded that the results achieved by AREPO are possible thanks to the cooperation of its member Regions, which are the core of AREPO.

Mrs Choudetsanaki addressed the issue of the vote of the Assembly on the possibility to extend her mandate until next plenary meeting in spring 2021, hoping to be confirmed in her role in order to keep working together for the promotion and protection of the quality products of AREPO regions.

She presented **the main results achieved by AREPO during the last semester** (March 2020 – September 2020), focusing on the following issues ([see the activity report for more details](#)):

- **Common Agricultural Policy:** CAP revision remains one of AREPO priorities, in order to secure the best possible support for GIs and quality products in the next programming period. The objectives achieved through AREPO-oriGIIn common strategy hold inside the position of the Parliament. As a consequence, we are monitoring the legislative process and we will have to pay particular attention on the trilogues so that our requests still be included in the final legislation.
- **Quality policy:** Another priority is the ongoing evaluation of EU Quality Schemes. We replied to the related open public consultation elaborating a common position aimed at strengthening EU quality policy as well as assuring better coherence with other EU policies concerning the agri-food sector. At the beginning of 2020, our position has been presented to the European Commission in occasion of the Strength2food project engagement event with DG AGRI.
- **From farm to fork:** This is one of the top priorities for the Von der Leyen Commission. It represents an opportunity for AREPO to put forward its priorities and proposals towards a better valorisation and promotion of EU quality policy. We put forward these elements in our contribution to the Roadmap on the 'Farm to Fork' strategy and we discussed the opportunities and threats for GIs with the Head of Unit of GI, Mr Francis Fay.

- **COVID-19: Measures taken at EU and regional level to support agri-food and wine sectors:** Following the COVID-19 outbreak, AREPO edited on its website a series of articles dedicated to the measures taken by EU and national governments, as well as by AREPO member Regions to face the negative effects of COVID-19 on agri-food and wine sectors. The aim of this initiative was to support our members facilitating exchanges of good practices and cooperation in order to help farmers and GIs food and wine producers.
- **Promotion policy:** AREPO remains focused also on the promotion policy for agricultural products. AREPO constantly participates in the DG AGRI Civil Dialogue Group on promotion, as well as to the Infoday on promotion programme in order to update our members. Furthermore, this year we submitted a document providing our recommendations to the drafting of the Annual Work Programme 2021 and we contributed as well to the public consultation on EU Promotion Policy. Both documents focused on the importance of maintaining a considerable budget dedicated to EU quality systems and simplifying the selection process to facilitate the access also to smaller producers.
- **Trade policy:** Trade agreements are surely another hot topic in AREPO agenda. Over the past few months, our work has included monitoring the main EU trade agreements currently under negotiations, as well as some of those already entered into force. A special attention has been dedicated to monitoring Brexit and the future relationship with the United Kingdom. Finally, AREPO presented its position on the Commission public consultation on the review of EU Trade Policy.
- **Long-term vision for rural areas:** Another priority for EU Agriculture identified by the European Commission is the development of a long-term vision for rural areas. We started contributing to this debate replying to a Roadmap opened by the Commission and reminding the role of GIs in rural development and their added value to the territory.
- **Cooperation with EU Institutions:**
  - **European Parliament:** AREPO is formally recognised as a stakeholder at EU level concerning the quality policy. In the European Parliament, we have strengthened our already excellent relationship with the MEPs of the AGRI Committee more sensitive to the issue of quality. Several of our historical MEPs have been re-elected and, among the new ones, we already started to build strong basis of collaboration, especially in the framework of the Intergroup “Wine, spirits and foodstuffs”.
  - **European Commission:** Our relationship with the European Commission is solid, thanks to our constant presence and participation in the DG AGRI civil dialogue groups, namely: “quality and promotion” (with 2 seats), “organic agriculture” (with 2 seats), and “rural development” (with 1 seat). Moreover, we have a very good working relation with DG Agri Unit dealing with GIs, especially with its Head of Unit Mr Francis Fay, as well as with Ms Nathalie Sauze-Vandevyver, Director of Quality, Research & Innovation (DG AGRI).
- **Studies:** AREPO is carrying out two studies on the topics proposed by the Region of Catalunya during last General Assembly in Brussels and agreed by the rest of AREPO member regions, with the aim of elaborating new policy recommendations.
- **European Projects:** as a result of our recognition as a European stakeholder, we have received several requests to participate in projects in line with our themes of interest. AREPO is currently part of two EU projects: AGROSMARTglobal (Interreg Sudoe programme) and [MOVING](#) (Horizon 2020).
- **Cooperation with partner and friend organizations:** we intensified relationships and shared goals with other major European networks that, like us, support the quality products, such as Euromontana, oriGIn EU and AREFLH. The President welcomed Eurofoiegras as a new associated member.

The President ended her speech hoping this will be the only Assembly in AREPO’s history to be held online and looking forward to meeting everyone in presence.



## Speech of the Vice-Presidency

Mr Riccardo Deserti, Director of the Consorzio del Formaggio Parmigiano Reggiano, spoke on behalf of the Vice-Presidency of AREPO. He remarked **the need to improve the coordination of the Board of Producers within AREPO**, in order to strengthen the participation of producers within the Association as well as in the management of the strategies approved.

Concerning the future activities, he reminded the importance of the **study on GIs used as ingredients in processed products** and he urged to express a position on the **Farm to Fork strategy**, especially with regards to some sensitive topics for the sector we represent, namely **the issue of nutritional labelling**.

Finally, Mr Deserti shared the experience of some Italian PDOs. During the COVID-19 emergency, an interesting phenomenon has emerged: examining some figures, many primary products have had a higher consumption during the lock down. As a result, it has been seen that when forced to consume exclusively at home, consumers have rewarded more PDO and PGI products, preferred to the purchase of generic products or similar.

The Secretary General intervened immediately afterwards, **relaunching the role of the Board of Producers and reminding the member Regions to appoint the representatives of their producers**, if some of them have not done so yet.

Furthermore, AREPO Policy Officer, **Mrs Giulia Scaglioni**, recalled that a meeting of the Board of producers was supposed to take place in April 2020, in the days of the General Assembly in Besançon. Since it has been cancelled, representatives of producers have been invited to participate in the virtual meetings with smaller groups of member Regions from the same Member State.

The President stressed the will to reschedule the meeting of the Board of Producers to boost their engagement in the association.

## Vote to extend the term of the Presidency until Spring 2021

Thanks to the “Polls” feature of the Interactio web platform, **AREPO members had the possibility to express their vote to extend the term of the Presidency of Crete until Spring 2021**. If it will not be possible to held a physical meeting in spring 2021, AREPO Board will have to decide if either submitting to the vote of the General Assembly another extension of the mandate of Crete or to find another way to elect a new Presidency as well as the new members of AREPO Board (Vice-presidency and Treasurer).

With 26 votes in favour, **the extension of the term of the Presidency until Spring 2021 has been approved unanimously**.

Mrs Choudetsanaki, thanked the members for the trust, adding that she will put her best efforts to defend the products of our Regions.

## Vote on the Report of the Presidency

The Report of the Presidency that resumed all the activities carried out in the last semester (March 2020-September 2020), **has been approved with 25 votes in favour and 1 abstention**.

## Update and vote on the accounts 2019

The Secretary General reminded that the accounts 2019 have been approved by the Board and then sent to all the members via email following the cancellation of the General Assembly in Besançon because of the COVID-19 emergency. Particularly, the members received **a report on the state of AREPO accounts prepared by an independent chartered accountant (in French) and a summary prepared by the Secretary General**. Since no comments were received during the time period left available for this purpose, they have been considered approved. Nevertheless, it



has been decided to present the state of the accounts 2019 and **to express a formal vote on them** also on this occasion, considering that the virtual General Assembly has been the first plenary meeting in 2020.

2019 ended in **almost perfect balance**, with a positive result of +2 200 €. On December 31<sup>st</sup> 2019, AREPO's own funds amounted to 229 000€. The main element in terms of expenses is the **personnel costs**, which amounts to a total of 87 000 € (53 % of our expenses). **The main receipts are the membership fees**, for a total of 153 000 € (34 received in total in 2019, but 4 of them were in delay from the previous years. Therefore, **30 membership fees received concerning 2019**).

**Accounts for 2019 have been approved with 21 votes in favour and 3 abstentions.**

### **Presentation of the state of the accounts 2020 and provisional budget for 2021**

As concerns 2020, AREPO's financial situation is good since the majority of the activities has been held on-line. This means that the Association did not incur in any expenses for travels or the organization of meetings.

So far 18 membership fees have been received and around 10 more are expected.

In addition, AREPO is currently involved in two European projects (AGROSMARTglobal and MOVING), which allow to dedicate time on themes of interest (protection of GIs on the internet and valorisation of mountain products) while being subsidised by European programmes.

The current checking account amounts to about 100 000 € and almost half will be needed to finish the year. Hence, there will be some **extra balance**.

**Considering the extra balance, the Secretary General invited the Assembly to think about a way to use this money in 2021 at the service of the quality products of AREPO member Regions.** This will be discussed also during the virtual meetings with smaller groups of member Regions from the same Member State.

The members will receive a communication on how the money will be used.

To conclude, the Secretary General hasn't been able to present a provisional budget for 2021, due to the uncertainties of the current sanitary emergency.

### **Contribution for 2021**

Thanks to the positive result of the financial year, the Secretary General proposed to maintain the contribution for 2021 at 4 500 €. **The proposal has been approved with 21 votes in favour and 4 abstentions.**

### **Conclusions**

The President agreed on the efforts needed in 2021 for the promotion and protection of quality products, particularly considering the challenges ahead, namely the Farm to Fork strategy and the issue of nutrition labelling on the front of pack. After reminding the interest of some groups of farmers from Cyprus to join AREPO, she concluded thanking for the participation of the members and the work carried out so far.

The Secretary General ended the meeting thanking all the interpreters and those who have worked for a smooth running of the Assembly, especially the AREPO Brussels office, and hoping to be able to organize a physical General Assembly with a tasting of the products (wine and food) from AREPO member Regions.