

AREPO POSITION ON AN EU-WIDE PROTECTION OF GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATIONS FOR INDUSTRIAL AND ARTISANAL PRODUCTS

The [Association of European Regions for Products of Origin \(AREPO\)](#) is a network of Regions and producer associations that deals with products of origin and EU quality schemes. It represents 33 European regions and over 700 associations of producers for over 50% of European GIs.

AREPO is driven by a vision of **Geographical Indications (GIs) as tools for rural development and territorial planning**. We have a long experience in the protection and valorisation of agricultural and agri-food GIs. Likewise, we believe that **GIs for non-agricultural products could contribute to the growth and development of local territories**.

Particularly, most of these manufactures have place in rural areas, hence the introduction of an EU-wide scheme for protection could boost their positive impact on the territories of origin. For instance, it could improve rural livelihoods that rely on local resources; help retaining rural population, also allowing to create and maintain jobs and training opportunities in the territory; support rural economic diversification (e.g. tourism) and enhance the ability of local manufacturers to collectively organise. In addition, this protection scheme could positively impact consumers and producers' welfare, thanks to the reduction of information asymmetries. As a matter of fact, a scheme guaranteeing the correspondence of the origin and the reputation of a product to its quality and characteristics will reflect into consumers willing to pay more for them, rewarding the manufacturer.¹ Furthermore, so far GIs for industrial and artisanal products have been mainly protected at national level with no mutual recognition of national protection systems, resulting in a fragmentation that has diluted their potential. All this considered, **AREPO welcomes the European Commission openness to the creation of an efficient and transparent EU-wide GI protection system for industrial and artisanal products**. Especially, following EU adhesion to the Geneva Act of the Lisbon Agreement, which does not draw a distinction between agricultural and non-agricultural GIs, it is the right time for the European Union to establish such a scheme.

Plus, this would benefit as well EU's agricultural GIs in the framework of trade agreements with third countries, where artisanal GIs are of paramount importance, since most of them ask for their protection in return for the recognition of EU agri-food GIs.

THE TYPE OF PROTECTION

As concerns the type and the mechanism of protection to be granted to industrial and artisanal GIs, AREPO believes that **a regulation at EU level is needed**.

In details, **the system should be modelled on the existing EU rules for agricultural PDOs and PGIs**.²

As far as possible, a **harmonised approach** between the quality schemes for agricultural and non-agricultural goods is highly recommended:

- **Definitions:** the link between the product and the territory cannot be conceived in the same way as for agricultural products. Particularly, the concept of designation of origin (PDO) for artisanal products will be very limited since, for some of them, the raw material may not always come from the geographical area concerned due to the fact that it has disappeared or is no longer suitable (for quality reasons for example), requiring external supply. Although some natural factors (the soil, the climate, the origin of raw materials etc...) can characterize the quality of some artisanal products, **it can be said that in certain**

¹ [EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service](#), June 2019

² As an example, the French scheme is largely inspired by the PDO/PGI rules for agricultural products

cases the link between industrial and artisanal products and their territory is the human factor, i.e. the producers' know-how, skills, practices and the localised traditional methods of production.

- **Product specifications:** transparency is needed for consumers, in order to guarantee a correct information on the product and its origin, the stages of manufacture, their location and even the controls undertaken, thus preventing misleading practices.
- **Registration procedure:** it must avoid red tapes, which might discourage producers from the application. The **two-stage registration procedure** (national/regional depending on the internal organisation of the state, then European), already in place for agricultural products, should be applied. In addition, **the costs linked to the application and registration procedure should not be a deterrent to the participation of producers.**
- **Transitional period:** Member States which already put in place a system of protection, might be needing a transitional period allowing previously registered GIs to comply with the new requirements.
- **Producer groups:** they should have a strong role in terms of regulation of the GI sector, management and monitoring of their GIs, protection and promotion. They should possess the proper means to intervene on controls and enforcement too.
- **Protection:** the current systems are not sufficient to ensure a proper protection. Therefore, a strong set of rules, covering as well **protection on the internet**, inspired to the type of protection accorded to agricultural products, should be established. **Non-agricultural GIs should benefit from the same rules of protection as agricultural products, ex officio protection included**, so that the level of protection and intervention by public authorities is the same for all GIs.
- **Controls:** It is necessary to put in place reliable controls on the operators concerned in order to maintain compliance with the product specifications. Public controls or private systems of **certification** should be put in place, since it will guarantee external and independent control at an affordable cost.
- **Logo:** a common and mandatory logo should be established, in order for consumers to easily recognise it as expression of the quality and peculiarities of the good.
- **Trade Agreements:** the introduction of an EU regulation for artisanal GIs would allow to include them in the list of products covered by EU trade agreements with third countries.

To conclude, AREPO would like to raise the attention of the European Commission on possible **conflicts over the use of names**. If an agricultural GI and a non-agricultural GI have the same geographical name, caution is advised when considering the level of qualitative requirement of the latter, which must not damage or weaken the reputation of the geographical name of the former, avoiding situations of parasitism. As a consequence, **coordination between DG Agri and DG Growth** (in case it will be in charge of non-agricultural GIs) would be necessary at the stage of dossier examination, or at least the consultation by DG Growth of the e-Ambrosia database during its examination of non-agricultural GIs applications.