



EUROPEAN CLUSTER  
COLLABORATION PLATFORM

# Revising the EU Public Procurement Directives: A Strategic Tool for Europe's Competitiveness

## Summary



EU Clusters Talks  
11 February 2026, 8:30 – 9:45 CET

An initiative of the European Union





## Revising the EU Public Procurement Directives: A Strategic Tool for Europe's Competitiveness

The European Cluster Collaboration Platform, on behalf of the European Commission, hosted the EU Clusters Talk “**Revising the EU Public Procurement Directives: A Strategic Tool for Europe's Competitiveness**” on 11 February, from 8:30 – 9:45 CET. The session explored the key objectives and policy directions of the forthcoming revision of public procurement rules.

### Agenda of the meeting

Moderation: Jennifer Baker

1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform  
*Nina Hoppmann, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform*
2. Public Procurement Directives Revision  
*Henning Ehrenstein, Head of Unit Public Procurement, DG GROW, European Commission*
3. Panel debate  
*Ester Davanzo, Senior European Affairs Coordinator, France Digitale*  
*Jorge González, Director, Ticbiomed*  
*Montse Daban, Strategic Foresight and International Relations Director, Biocat*  
*Yannis Zormpas, Principal, Boston Consulting Group*
4. Funding opportunities  
*Nina Hoppmann, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform*

### Key messages

- Innovation procurement is hindered by bureaucracy, fragmentation, limited flexibility, skills gaps and risk-averse practices, especially for SMEs and startups.
- The gap between pilots and market uptake requires clearer rules and more predictable demand.
- Procurement should prioritise value, innovation and resilience over lowest price, using more agile instruments.
- Cross-border collaboration and practical capacity building are key to scaling innovation procurement.
- European preference should strengthen competitiveness through clear, resilience-based criteria without becoming protectionist.



## 1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

**Nina Hoppmann, team member, European Cluster Collaboration Platform**

The following news items were presented:

1. Clusters meet Regions: [Call for Expressions of Interest 2026](#)
2. Meet the Euroclusters: slides and recordings are available on the presentation of the Euroclusters in [Strand 1](#) and [Strand 2](#)
3. Clusters and Europe's Competitiveness: [ECCP Summary Report 2025](#)
4. [New guide](#): European Frameworks and Initiatives Supporting Clusters in the Green Transition

## 2. Public Procurement Directives Revision

**Henning Ehrenstein, Head of Unit Public Procurement, DG GROW, European Commission**

Henning Ehrenstein provided an overview of the European Commission's planned revision of the EU Public Procurement Directives, last amended in 2014 and applicable to contracts above EU thresholds. Public procurement represents around 15% of EU GDP (approximately €2.5 trillion), of which about €660 billion falls under EU legislation, involving some 44,000 public buyers and 160,000 companies. The reform is being prepared following a year-long evaluation and broad public consultations, which generated nearly 2,000 contributions, alongside a dedicated SME consultation. An impact assessment is underway, with the aim of presenting a legislative proposal before the summer.

A central pillar of the revision is simplification through digitalisation. The Commission is considering the development and interconnection of integrated online procurement marketplaces, allowing companies to register once, store documentation, submit bids electronically and reduce repetitive administrative checks. Greater interoperability between national systems would facilitate cross-border participation. By improving data transparency and digital monitoring, the reform could reduce ex ante administrative safeguards and paperwork, while maintaining control against irregularities. Simplifying procedures and increasing flexibility within existing frameworks are also under examination.

The revision further seeks to strengthen the strategic use of procurement to advance environmental, social and innovation objectives. Improvements to existing instruments, including the underused innovation partnership procedure, are being considered, as well as the possibility of making certain strategic criteria more systematic. In parallel, the politically sensitive discussion on introducing a "Made in Europe" dimension is ongoing. Key questions concern its geographical scope, compatibility with international trade commitments and whether it should be limited to security-relevant sectors or extended as a broader industrial policy tool. The final proposal is expected to reflect both technical findings from the evaluation and high-level political guidance.



### 3. Panel debate

The speakers highlighted that innovation procurement is still constrained by **structural and cultural barriers**, despite its recognised potential. Yannis Zormpas, based on his work in DG GROW's Innovation Procurement Hubs, explained that public authorities and suppliers broadly agree on the key obstacles: overly bureaucratic procedures, limited legal and procedural flexibility, insufficient skills among procurers, and rigid budgeting frameworks that do not match the exploratory nature of innovation procurement. He argued that these challenges are not only technical but deeply linked to mindset and culture, as many public buyers still misunderstand what innovation procurement is meant to achieve and remain reluctant to take measured risks. Montse Daban reinforced this from the perspective of the life sciences and health sector, stressing that innovative SMEs in areas such as digital health, AI, synthetic biology and advanced therapy medicinal products often struggle because their solutions do not fit the predefined categories of traditional tenders. She also noted that innovation in these sectors is highly interconnected, for example depending on data availability and quality, making it difficult to apply conventional procurement approaches. Ester Davanzo further emphasised that startups face disproportionate administrative and financial requirements, as well as restrictive eligibility conditions and track record criteria, which often prevent them from participating even when they are the most suitable innovators.

A recurring point was the **failure to translate successful pilots into actual market uptake**, which several speakers framed as a major weakness in current EU procurement dynamics. Jorge González described the “valley of death of pilots”, where public-funded innovation journeys prove that solutions work, but once the pilot ends, public buyers do not proceed to purchase and deployment, resulting in wasted resources and frustration. He argued that the main cause is the lack of clear and consistent rules for transitioning from research or co-development to procurement, leading to uncertainty and legal hesitation among authorities. He pointed out that even experienced stakeholders still question whether a company involved in an innovation project can later bid for procurement, and that uncertainty around disclosure requirements and IP protection discourages buyers. Ester Davanzo supported this argument by sharing an example of a startup that worked successfully with the European Commission for a year but was later excluded from the official tender because it could not meet formal requirements, despite proven performance. Both Jorge and Ester underlined that such situations demonstrate how rigid frameworks can undermine innovation outcomes.

The **role of the “first public customer”** was repeatedly highlighted as essential for startups and SMEs to scale. Jorge González stressed that an early public buyer provides not only revenue but credibility and visibility, acting as a reference case that helps attract additional procurers and investors. Ester Davanzo agreed, noting that procurement could create a virtuous circle by helping startups secure anchor clients and increase investor confidence. Montse Daban expanded on this by calling for more predictable demand signals, arguing that if Europe wants to attract more investment into strategic innovation, it must offer clearer pathways to adoption and deployment, rather than leaving innovators uncertain about whether solutions will ever be procured. She proposed that procurement should shift away from lowest price logic and instead assess solutions based on their value, impact and contribution to competitiveness, including through incentives linked to sustainability and resilience.



The speakers **proposed concrete improvements** to procurement instruments and implementation models. Jorge González argued that existing innovation procurement tools such as innovation partnerships, pre-commercial procurement (PCP) and Public Procurement of Innovative Solutions (PPI) are often too complex and burdensome, making them suitable mainly for large projects while excluding smaller, faster innovation needs, especially in digital sectors. He warned that this creates a perverse dynamic where projects are artificially scaled up to access EU funding, resulting in slow and inefficient consortia. Ester Davanzo echoed this, noting that consortium-building is sometimes driven by geographical distribution requirements rather than genuine synergies, which reduces efficiency. Montse Daban added that although PCP, PPI and partnership instruments exist, they are underused not because of lack of interest, but due to limited capacity, lack of templates and guidance, and insufficient confidence in managing risk. She argued that reform should make these tools easier to apply in practice and encourage more innovation-friendly contracting models.

The importance of **collaboration between public buyers** emerged as a key enabling factor. Yannis Zormpas argued that cross-border and cross-sector collaboration could help public authorities start small but scale up through shared procurement, increasing the size of procurement “tickets” and making tenders more attractive for suppliers. He explained that collaboration allows buyers to exchange practices, avoid duplication, identify whether similar needs already exist elsewhere, and align requirements across regions, thereby increasing market visibility and reducing fragmentation. Montse Daban supported this by advocating coordinated procurement where several regions procure together, as a way to increase predictability for SMEs and reduce the uncertainty that currently discourages investment. She also suggested that pilot schemes could be tested at regional level in strategic sectors and enabling technologies, demonstrating practical models for scaling innovation procurement across the EU.

**Capacity building** was another central point, but speakers stressed that training must be designed differently. Jorge González explained that theoretical training alone does not work because procurers are busy and often do not prioritise capacity-building activities. Based on his experience in the InnoSupport project, he argued that training must be hands-on and embedded in real procurement processes, allowing procurers to “learn by doing”, potentially supported through cascade funding mechanisms. Yannis Zormpas similarly stressed that legislation alone cannot deliver results: procurement reform must be supported by tools, processes, skills development and a mindset that encourages controlled experimentation. He also added that clearer criteria on when innovation procurement should be used would increase confidence among procurers and reduce fears of non-compliance.

Finally, the discussion addressed the politically sensitive concept of **European preference** and how it should be integrated into procurement without becoming protectionist. Ester Davanzo argued that procurement can be a major competitiveness lever if it supports European firms through a clear definition of what constitutes a European company, suggesting that the parent company’s location could be used as a simple and transparent criterion. However, she warned that strict local content requirements could harm innovation, particularly in digital value chains that remain globally integrated, and stressed that European preference should not penalise firms with non-European investors, given Europe’s limited growth capital. Montse Daban also supported European preference but emphasised it must be legally robust, targeted and evidence-based, focusing on strategic sectors and technologies selected through transparent criteria. She proposed that it should operate through resilience and EU added value requirements rather than exclusion, and should include reciprocity



considerations to avoid negative trade consequences. Yannis Zormpas strongly agreed that protectionism would fail, arguing instead that European preference should focus on lowering internal market barriers so that innovative SMEs in one Member State can realistically compete across Europe, overcoming language, legal and procedural fragmentation. He concluded that European preference should ultimately be achieved through competitiveness, scale and alignment of innovation with European needs, rather than through simplistic origin-based exclusion.

## 4. Funding opportunities

**Nina Hoppmann, team member, European Cluster Collaboration Platform**

Closing the EU Clusters Talk, Nina Hoppmann shared the following examples of funding opportunities:

1. [EU launches new call for Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs local partners](#); deadline 21 April 2026
2. [European Startup and Scaleup Hubs pilot](#); deadline 10 March 2026
3. [Interregional Innovation Investments Instrument \(I3\): CAPACITY BUILDING CAP2B](#); deadline 19 March 2026