



6th INTERDISCIPLINARY SYMPOSIUM ON PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

Lisbon, Instituto Universitário Militar (IUM)

September 18 – 19, 2025

Distinguished Participants, Dear Colleagues,

I am truly honoured to be here with you for the *6th Interdisciplinary Public Procurement Symposium*.

Lisbon, with its history, as a crossroads of cultures and ideas, is a fitting place for dialogue and exchange on a subject that increasingly defines the future of our societies.

Allow me first to warmly thank to the University of Rome 'Tor Vergata, led in particular by prof. Gustavo Piga, and to IMPIC, and in particular by pres. Fernando Batista, for their kind invitation and for creating this important occasion to debate some of the most strategic issues, in this difficult historical moment. And of course, for the fantastic hospitality they insured to all of us.

The themes chosen for this edition go straight to the heart of today's challenges in public procurement. Challenges, that are not only technical, but deeply political and strategic.

New EU Public Procurement Directive and Protectionism

We live in a moment where **protectionism** is resurging, and global trade stability is under pressure. Tariff provisions, restrictions on key sectors, and rising barriers attempt to undermine multilateralism and strain the WTO framework.

For the European Union, this environment raises serious questions about resilience, competitiveness, and policy sovereignty.

The Kolin ruling of 2024 by the *European Court of Justice* illustrates well and may be a symbol of this complexity.

In this context, the EU's **revision Public Procurement Directives** (someone also imagines a Regulation instead of a Directive) gains particular significance. It will be the place where the EU's geopolitical positioning will be decided as regards the *dilemma* between protectionism and free trade.

Indeed, this revision will be also an attempt to reposition procurement as a strategic policy tool, capable of addressing protectionist pressures. It will be no easy task to ensure that those global pressures do not completely damage competition, transparency and openness in procurement markets.

We understand the need to respond to protectionism and to the challenges that come from abroad. But we must be aware that public procurement creates development and real growth only in a competitive market.

This also because we know that, as has been said, “When goods don’t cross borders, soldiers do”.

In any case, an action is urgent and cannot be postponed: the **complete removal of internal barriers within Europe**, so that procurement markets can operate more openly and effectively across borders. Only in this way, procurement becomes both an engine of European integration and a safeguard of resilience in an uncertain global environment.

The current debate on Procurement Reform illustrates another tension: between those who see procurement as a tool for delivering **green, social, and innovative outcomes**, and those who fear these goals might reduce **efficiency or create new administrative burdens**.

We well know that there is a **strong need to simplify** the procedure and reduce administrative burdens. But we have to avoid that this shared objective attempts the achievement of environmental, technological and social goals.

The strategic use of the contract has to be maintained. That means ensuring cost-efficiency, but also creating public value by aligning tenders with those fundamental goals. Without this equilibrium, procurement risks to lose the values that justify its central role in shaping our societies.

On the contrary, by aligning expenditure with sustainability, digitalization, and social cohesion, procurement can strengthen Europe’s economic resilience and reinforce its model of open but fair markets.

Digital Transformation in Public Procurement

A key lever to preserve the correct balance between these elements is **digitalization**. This ensures speed without compromising social objectives, while also promoting market openness.

And this is the challenge that in Italy and in many other European Countries we are working in more intensively in this period.

Digital technologies have deeply reshaped procurement — moving from basic digital tools to fully integrated, data-driven systems. Digitalization not only simplifies procedures; it empowers procurement to become a source of trust, resilience, and innovation.

It guarantees not only transparency but also efficiency.

E-procurement platforms simplify procedures, apply the *Once Only Principle*, and provide real-time verified data. This is useful, not only for contracting authorities and economic operators, but also for oversight bodies fighting corruption.

However, digitalization is not an end goal in itself. Its true value lies in enabling us not only to achieve efficiency, but also to measure risks, identify red flags, and support preventive strategies. In this way, data becomes a driver of integrity.

Yet significant barriers remain: the absence of common EU standards for digitalization, the lack of cross-border interoperability, and fragmented qualification systems. These gaps limit the potential of the Single Market.

This is why we have to work promote

- interoperability of national platforms,

- an European framework for procurement data governance,
- and integration with other datasets.
- And, with that, strengthen of capacity-building for authorities, SMEs, and oversight bodies.

At this regard, allow me to share one important development: next week, we will meet again with our Portuguese colleagues and with institutions from all over Europe to advance a collaborative project aimed at connecting our national database with the **European Public Procurement Data Space (PPDS)**. This project embodies the spirit of integration we need: moving from fragmented national solutions to a truly European ecosystem, where data flows easily, transparency is enhanced, and procurement becomes a driver of competitiveness.

This is the path we must follow: to ensure that digital transformation in procurement does not remain a patchwork of national efforts, but becomes a shared European achievement — one that strengthens our Single Market and reinforces citizens' trust in public institutions.

Finally, we cannot ignore the role of **Artificial Intelligence** (*now a day it is not possible to not mention AI in a speech of public procurement...*).

If governed responsibly, AI can also today support procurement in low-risk areas: scanning tender documents for errors, detecting anomalies, helping to forecast future needs or measuring the efficiency of the system. Used in this way, AI reduces administrative burdens and free up human judgment for strategic decisions.

However, we know also the risks, included the one to delegate to private companies decisions that must remain in the public sphere.

Poorly designed algorithms can embed bias, compromise fairness, or erode accountability. Procurement decisions affect markets and citizens' trust; they cannot be left to black-box systems (*algorithms transparency issue*).

AI in procurement today can be a powerful assistant, not (almost yet) a real substitute: a fundamental ally of the public interest, only if guided at all times by transparency, human oversight, and clear ethical standards.

To sum up: we have to use it as much as we are able to govern it and not to be governed by it.

Professionalization in Public Procurement

Of course, none of these ambitious goals can be achieved, none of these challenges can be overcome, without people. Procurement depends first and foremost on professionals. The competence and the ability of those who work in this field is the keystone of the system.

It is now well established that the success of procurement requires high-level training and investment in capacity. Procurement managers must be able to use available instruments in a strategic, systemic, and future-oriented way — well exercising the discretion the law entrusts to them.

Enhancing professionalization within procurement bodies is essential to unlocking the full potential of procurement as a governance mechanism.

In this framework, in Italy, we have launched a qualification process for the contracting authorities and central purchasing bodies that put on the center the professionalism of people: this process not only reduce the number of contracting authorities, but also makes them more specialized, efficient and capable of supporting less organized entities. Qualification strengthens networks, establishes partnerships, generates economies of scale, and promotes good management. It is, in fact, a model of public administration reform that could be exported to other areas.

We all, in different ways, are working, at national level, on the training of all the people involved in public procurement (*for Italy it is a part of Recovery and resilience plan*). In the next future, we would have to promote a permanent *European digital platform* for training, collaboration, and sharing best practices — in line with the *Interoperable Europe Regulation*, that could create a common professional culture. Professional training, and knowledge exchange are no longer optional. They are necessary foundations for a stronger procurement community across Europe.

Conclusion

Looking ahead, procurement must continue to evolve to meet the challenges mentioned above, of resilience and openness, efficiency and sustainability.

The EU's upcoming revision of the Directives is not simply about procedures. It is about setting the tone for the next decade of procurement as a governance tool.

If we will succeed in this process, procurement will not only deliver *value for money*. It will deliver *value for society* — becoming really a bridge between public and private, between immediate needs and long-term values, and above all, a means of serving citizens and their future.

However, this will be possible only if

- we keep markets open,
- safeguard transparency,
- strengthen competition,
- do not forget sustainable objectives
- And, of course, if we really invest in People.

Today, more than in the past, procurement is not just about contracts, it is about the kind of Europe we want to build: resilient, fair, peaceful and united in the face of uncertainty.

Mr. Giuseppe Busia