

Dear guests (word of welcome by SG)

First and foremost, please allow me to bid you all a warm welcome to this 'European Workshop', which is all about 'innovative procurement' by the public administration, and the sectors of 'transport' and 'mobility' in particular.

This workshop was set up and organised in close cooperation between the European Commission and the Flemish public administration and is part of the 'European Assistance for Innovation Procurement Programme', with the intention of fostering 'innovative procurement' in Europe.

On a practical note, the idea for today is to swap best practices, uncover opportunities for the funding of innovative projects and, above all, to exchange views during discussions.

When I was invited to come and speak at today's event as representative of the Mobility and Public Works policy area, I asked myself how I defined 'innovative procurement'.

Saying that the concept of 'innovative procurement' covers many bases is stating the obvious. Within the Mobility and Public Works policy area, we are alive to both Pre-Commercial Procurement (new innovative solutions which are yet to be marketed and involve a high degree of research and development; in theory these are not covered by public procurement procedures) and to Public Procurement Innovative Solutions (innovative solutions which are available on the market and no longer require a research and development track, which means they can be put out to tender using the conventional public procurement procedures).

In light of the focus on 'innovative' procurement, the Flemish public administration, and Mobility and Public Works policy area in particular, is keen to optimise its own operations and public service delivery and to create economic spillovers. Which is why the senior civil servants, myself included, have signed the 'public procurement contracts for innovation' charter, committing to set aside at least 3% of the budget that is spent on public procurement assignments on acquiring innovative works, supplies and services.

Although what I just said about 'innovative procurement' theoretically entirely covers what I should understand to be 'innovative procurement', this is not the message I would like to deliver today. The idea behind this workshop is to swap practical experiences, 'lessons learned'.

To me, as a senior civil servant, more than anything else 'innovative procurement' is about 'being challenged'. Finding ourselves challenged to turn the dream into reality, in consideration of laws and regulations, and practical objections ...

1. One challenge in the first instance is the fact that pre-commercial tendering inherently carries the risk of 'failure' – meaning that we may be unable to land results in spite of the public resources that have been invested. The challenge for organisations is to be unafraid to fail, and to continue to pursue the ultimate aim of succeeding. In such situations, it is important that we sit together around the table and call a spade a spade in identifying what went wrong, but above all jointly reflect on ways to resolve matters in the future. The will to succeed should always outweigh the fear of failure.
2. Another challenge is to create support. Support on the shop floor (lawyers/engineers/etc.) for reflecting on innovation and not blindly sticking to the beaten path. Support among supervisory authorities, which often – however understandable – set additional requirements with regard to the price tag. And lastly, support in the private sector as tendering – even pre-commercial tendering – is not something that takes place in a legal vacuum. The sector needs to be prepared to lend its conceptual input to the contracting authority to some extent.
3. A third challenge was the multitude of initiatives that exist at the various levels in the area of innovative procurement. As organisations, we need to constantly ensure coordination and the creation of added value. The limited resources available for innovative procurement need to be

pooled, not scattered. For this reason, it has been decided within the Mobility and Public Works policy area to set up a procurement 2.0 steering committee for instance, which deals only with the aspect of contract innovation. Indeed, at Flemish public administration level, we already had the Innovative Public Procurement Programme, which - given its governance structure - already tends to a great many other types of innovation. Moreover, the entire policy area is represented on the steering committee, which allows for a high degree of concerted action in the area of innovation. The private sector is also well represented on the steering committee through their respective professional associations which ensure the necessary support and coordination of the sector.

4. Finally, there is the challenge to strike the right balance between innovation and continuity. In the field of mobility, existing infrastructure is in place, which needs to remain functional and in which radical innovation could prove counterproductive. The innovation should contribute to the continuity.

As a senior civil servant, the important thing is to assume your role in this narrative. Speaking for myself, this largely means making sure that the right environment is created which enables innovative procurement:

For instance, it was recently decided to cluster all the expertise on public procurement contracts, so-called second-line support on public procurement contracts, in a single division, thereby effectively putting in place a single point of contact for technical pricing know-how, legal know-how and know-how concerning the procurement instruments.

In addition, we have opted to innovate the procurement process as such:

For this, I refer to e-delta, a modern contract management system which is there to support the contracting authorities in compiling and administering public procurement contracts and helps them go through the procedure on a step-by-step basis. This enables us to administer public procurement contracts on a more uniform basis, to reuse data previously retrieved and to take serious flaws encountered with contractors on previous contracts, into consideration for new assignments.

In addition, we have a public procurement portal in the pipeline, which is linked to an e-counter, allowing for digital exchanges between contractors and contracting authorities during the course of contract performance.

Finally, in Mediaan we have an online platform on which all manner of instruments and information is made available with regard to the technical pricing aspects of public procurement contracts.

I must confess that I take pride in the fact that these initiatives aimed at innovating our procurement process by ourselves, have not gone unnoticed, as they were picked up by the Vlerick Business School and included in its 'Barometer of Innovative Public Procurement Belgium'

With this introduction, I hope I have been able to pass on some of my experience with 'innovative procurement'. Experience which consists of challenges, but above all is a tale of chances and opportunities which we need to be bold enough to seize upon as organisations, in which everybody assumes their role. Now, I shall leave you all to trade your own experiences.

Thank you.