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PROPOSALS

FOR EUROPEAN PROCUREMENT PROFESSIONALIZATION

A) Strategic Framework and Objectives of the Revision

Public procurement absorbs approximately 14% of the EU's GDP annually—over €1.9 trillion—and thus represents a decisive macroeconomic lever (European Parliament Resolution P10_TA(2025)0174, Recital A).

European Parliament's Resolution of 9 September 2025 emphasized this figure and outlined priorities for the upcoming revision of the framework. Meanwhile, the Commission has launched a strategic recalibration process focused on competitiveness and resilience ("Made in Europe", "Competitiveness Compass"), which directly affects procurement.

The 2016–2024 evaluation of the 2014 directives shows that the goals of simplification, effectiveness, and strategic orientation have only been partially achieved. The system suffers from low agility, fragmentation across legal systems, overlapping sectoral regulations (digital, energy, environment, economic security), uneven administrative capacities, and non-interoperable data.

In this context, ASSORUP notes a converging reform drive from EU institutions that must go beyond procedural tweaks. It must address professional governance of the contract lifecycle, refine roles and responsibilities, and integrate common digital tools (e.g., eForms) to make choices, timing, and outcomes measurable. Only then can the revision turn procurement into a coherent driver of European industrial priorities—from quality and innovation to sustainability and security—while reducing errors, litigation, and transaction costs for administrations and businesses.

B) Summary of Critical Issues (Commission Evaluation and EP Resolution)

According to ASSORUP's analysis, the Commission's conclusions and Parliament's concerns (Resolution P10_TA(2025)0174) converge on four main areas:

1. **Lack of Simplification (Effectiveness and Efficiency):**
    - Simplification goals unmet: over 54% of stakeholders find the rules complex.

- Procedures have become increasingly burdensome (para. 17); the 2014 reform faces efficiency challenges (Recital D).
- Overuse of "lowest price" criterion undermines Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT), limiting lifecycle cost application (para. 19), due to lack of financial/human resources and training.

2. **Regulatory Incoherence (Consistency):**
   - The Commission highlights fragmentation from overlapping sectoral procurement rules (energy, digital, environment).
   - Parliament confirms this and urges rationalization to reduce unnecessary burdens (paras. 43–44).
3. **Uneven Use of Strategic Procurement:**
   - Adoption of green, social, and innovation procurement remains low and inconsistent.
   - Parliament deplores limited use of strategic procurement (para. 16) and calls for broader MEAT application for qualitative, social, and environmental factors (para. 38).
4. **Weak Governance and Professionalization:**
   - The Commission identifies skill gaps and low attractiveness of the profession.
   - Parliament sees this as a key failure cause (Recital B), citing persistent shortages of qualified staff and technical expertise at local/regional levels.

ASSORUP concludes that EU procurement law lacks a central, standardized figure responsible for the entire contract lifecycle. This leads to fragmented responsibility, inconsistent application of qualitative/social/environmental criteria, and persistent skill gaps across administrations.

C) From Diagnosis to Solution: The Human Factor

The structural weakness lies in the organizational and professional setup of contracting authorities, which are ill-equipped for such complexity. As Parliament notes (Recital B), the skills gap prevents a shift from bureaucratic compliance to strategic investment management.

D) Proposals

Proposal 1: A European Framework for Qualification and Certification

ASSORUP proposes introducing a robust, harmonized professional qualification system to complete the contract lifecycle discipline outlined in the 2014 directives. This system should build on the ProcurCompEU 2020 competency framework, which maps the skills required for public procurement professionals. It allows for modular, progressive certification levels based on procedure complexity.

In line with Parliament's call (para. 89) to "develop and promote similar training programs at EU level," ASSORUP proposes a European qualification and certification framework to:

- Ensure minimum common standards.
- Enable cross-border portability of skills.
- Anchor professionalization to measurable outcomes (quality, timing, cost, sustainability).

Key elements:

- Mandatory training and continuous development beyond tender procedures.
- EU-wide certification ensuring homogeneous minimum standards.
- Continuous qualification mechanisms, including EU professional registers or a "points-based license" system linking complex procedure management to training credits.

Proposal 2: Establishment of the European Procurement Manager (EPM)

To address the identified issues and implement Parliament's recommendations, ASSORUP proposes a certified, unified figure—modeled on Italy's "Project Manager"—called the European Procurement Manager (EPM). Through certification, the EPM would improve coordination, management, and control across the procurement lifecycle, ensuring coherence and accountability.

This aligns with Parliament's calls to:

- "Further promote professionalization and training of procurement officials" (para. 37).
- Recognize professionalization as a lever to improve procurement methods (para.

89).

The EPM would integrate sectoral disciplines affecting public demand, resolving "external coherence" issues from regulatory fragmentation (paras. 43–44).

Beyond tender execution, the EPM would possess cross-cutting expertise in:

- Environmental sustainability (GPP, DNSH).
- Energy management.
- Cybersecurity and resilience (NIS 2, Cyber Resilience Act).
- Data protection and privacy by design/default (GDPR).
- Strategic risk and supply chain assessment ("Made in Europe").
- Social impact, inclusion, accessibility.
- Building information modeling.
- Anti-corruption.

The EPM is not a "one-man show" but a strategic manager. Appointed by the contracting authority, the EPM analyzes the project, defines objectives, identifies required skills, organizes resources, and boosts productivity. In specialized cases, the EPM orchestrates expert teams using project management tools in full collaboration with the authority.

To make the model effective, ASSORUP recommends that new directives require EPMs to demonstrate soft skills such as:

- Leading interdisciplinary project teams.
- Selecting and appointing specialists (technical, legal, energy, ESG, cybersecurity, data protection).
- Managing timing, risks, and quality.
- Ensuring accountability and decision traceability.

Only then can Parliament's professionalization goals translate into unified procurement governance and measurable results for administrations, economic operators, and citizens.

Proposal 3: Avoiding "Gold-Plating" Through a Common Culture

Success depends on overcoming national fragmentation and "gold-plating."

Parliament notes that national transposition is “sometimes ineffective, leading to inconsistencies, legal uncertainty, and obstacles” (Recital AK), and calls for “harmonized implementation” (Art. 1) and “greater legal coherence” (Art. 44).

ASSORUP’s proposal for a shared European procurement culture ensures:

- Training and certification (Proposal 2) based on common EU standards and materials defining best practices.
- Full interoperability of eProcurement systems (Arts. 30, 36) and professional competencies.
- Technical assistance to Member States to support similar qualification systems, while allowing autonomy in access criteria and certification mechanisms.

E) Insurance Coverage and EPM Incentives

To ensure the EPM operates effectively throughout the procurement lifecycle, ASSORUP proposes a uniform EU framework for insurance and economic incentives inspired by best national practices.

Each contracting authority should establish a dedicated fund—within the procedure’s budget—for technical and managerial procurement functions. This fund should transparently and predictably remunerate the EPM.

Maximum allocation would be capped at an EU threshold, adjustable by Member States within a narrow range (e.g., up to 2% of the contract base amount), ensuring proportionality and cost control.

A majority share (70–80%) would be awarded to involved personnel, based on verified activities and subject to reductions for unjustified delays or cost overruns, as reported by the EPM.

An individual cap may be set to avoid pay distortions—linked to the beneficiary’s gross annual salary—with bonus increments for administrations using advanced digital management tools and fully interoperable eProcurement platforms.

The remaining fund portion would support organizational/digital innovation, continuous training, and insurance coverage. It would finance technologies and databases for expenditure control, staff specialization programs (especially digital skills), and mandatory professional liability insurance premiums for EPMs, with coverage scaled by contract value, sector, and complexity.

Unallocated amounts would automatically revert to the training/digitalization/insurance

fund, creating a virtuous cycle of continuous qualification. Thus, the incentive becomes a tool for accountability and protection, rewarding measurable contract performance, supporting mandatory professional development, covering risk, and strengthening administrative capacity—without burdening economic operators or distorting competition.

Conclusion: From Bureaucratic Compliance to Strategic Investment

The Commission's evaluation and Parliament's Resolution P10_TA(2025)0174 are clear: the current framework is too complex, incoherent, and lacks strategic focus due to a critical professionalization gap.

ASSORUP's proposals (EU certification system, EPM establishment, sectoral competence integration) aim to resolve this fundamental issue.

By qualifying and empowering a central managerial figure, the EU can transform public procurement from a compliance exercise into a powerful, agile strategic investment tool for competitiveness, green/digital transition, and economic security.