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The Participation of Foreign Bidders in EU Public Procurement: Too Much or Too Little?

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Brussels, 19 February 2025 - A new [ECIPE Policy Brief](#) highlights the need for a clearer understanding of foreign participation in EU public procurement.

Despite the EU's public procurement market being among the most open globally, foreign participation remains relatively modest. Between 2016 and 2019, only 7 percent of EU procurement authorities received foreign bids. The low participation rate, rather than explicit discriminatory practices, is the primary factor behind the limited cross-border activity in EU public procurement.

"The data shows that foreign firms do not face systematic barriers when bidding for EU public contracts. Rather, the issue lies in the fact that too few foreign bidders participate in tenders. As the phrase goes: 'You cannot win if you do not compete,'" said Lucian Cernat, author of the policy brief.

The report also reveals the significant impact of Brexit on UK firms' access to EU public procurement. While the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement has preserved market access conditions, the share of EU public contracts awarded to UK firms fell from over 50 percent before Brexit to around 30 percent in 2023, suggesting that perception rather than policy may be driving reduced market engagement.

The Policy Brief also calls for better data to assess the actual level of openness in EU public procurement. It recommends building on information already available such as the ultimate ownership of successful bidders and the origin of procured goods and services to gain a better understanding of international foreign participation in the EU procurement market.

As protectionist policies rise globally, ensuring an accurate assessment of EU procurement openness is critical to maintaining fair and competitive markets.

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