

A new project to strengthen the integrity of public procurement through public monitoring was launched in Moldova

Within the context of a new project: “Increasing the Integrity in Public Procurement,” civil society representatives and investigative journalists from the Republic of Moldova will monitor public procurement in the country and provide recommendations for improving the process and strengthening the integrity of the sector. The project launch took place on September 30th, 2021, at an online conference. The project is implemented jointly by the Transparency for Partnership (PTF) and the Institute for Development and Social Initiatives (IDIS) “Viitorul”.

This project aims to support procurement reforms in Moldova that will increase the transparency and fairness of public procurement by empowering citizens—specifically civil society representatives and investigative journalists—to hold relevant institutions accountable. The launch event aimed not only to present the objectives and activities of the project, but also to create a discussion platform with the participation of all actors involved in the process to identify solutions to improve the public procurement system in Moldova.

The opening speech of the conference was given by **Dumitru Budianschi, Moldova’s Minister of Finance**, who said: *“Public procurement is one of the priorities of the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Moldova. And the project launched today will strengthen the Ministry’s efforts to have procurement in a way that there are no interests other than the public interest. There is a need for a closer dialogue between all actors involved in the public procurement process, and the role of civil society is very important. We will continue the process related to the transparency of procurement, in order to make public procurement information open to the authorities.”*

“Public procurement is important for the competitiveness of the Republic of Moldova. Efficient public procurement is essential for the country’s economic growth, modernization of public administration, fight against corruption, trust of citizens in the public authorities and in democracy. Modern public procurement should be based on the following elements: cost-benefit, transparency, equity and good governance,” stated **Liubomir Chiriac, Executive Director of IDIS “Viitorul.”**

Richard Stern, President of the Partnership for Transparency stated: *“The goal of the project is to contribute to increased integrity and efficiency in public procurement in the Republic of Moldova through enhancing the capacity of CSOs to serve as informed and unbiased monitors of public procurement processes and outcomes. And the fact that the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Moldova is championing and leading the process to make public procurement more open and fairer are core elements that will contribute to the success of this project.”* He also recognized the US State Department for its contribution to the funding of this project.

Also, **Laura Hruby, Chargé d’Affaires at the US Embassy in Moldova**, said: *“Government procurement covers every aspect of daily life. Whether you drive, walk, or surf the internet a*

government auction has provided these roads, sidewalks, and connections. Today's project will help improve the quality of these acquisitions and reduce the risk of corruption. It is a crucial step not only in identifying corruption, but also in implementing better practices. The US supports an independent Moldova that is accountable to its people, including the way the government spends its citizens' money. To the extent that Moldova strives to improve its procurement practices, transparent and fair processes will encourage trusted American companies to participate in Moldovan tenders and invest in Moldova."

Karin Millett, Director of the project: Increasing the Integrity of Public Procurement in Moldova, noted that the launch event was the culmination of the Inception Phase carried out over one year, consisting of baseline studies and consultations to lay the groundwork for the design of the training program and overall focus of the program. "We fully recognize that training by itself is not sufficient to enable CSOs to engage in effective and responsible monitoring, so we will also be supporting competitively selected CSOs through awarding sub-grants for a period of one year and providing them with mentoring and advice." She also noted that it had become clear during the Inception Phase that economic operators should be included in some aspects of the project, both in training and in a roundtable with key stakeholders to explore the use of Integrity Pacts as a tool for enhanced transparency.

"Effective monitoring of public procurement requires civil society's knowledge on operations of the public procurement system, the legal and institutional framework, and the entire procurement process. In this sense, the aim of our project is to increase the transparency, fairness, and effectiveness of public procurement by training and empowering civil society actors and journalists to engage in informed and responsible monitoring of public procurement," highlighted Carolina Ungureanu, Project Manager and Deputy Director of IDIS Viitorul, in the opening of the launch conference.

Discussion panels at the launch conference addressed the reform of the public procurement system in the Republic of Moldova and the experience of civil society in promoting transparent public procurement. The conference sessions were moderated by **Elena Corman, Procurement Specialist, World Bank Office of Moldova**, and **Viktor Nestulia, Head of the Eastern Europe and Central Asia Department, Open Contracting Partnership**.

"The scope of reforms in public procurements are to improve public financial management, promote efficiency, integrity and transparency in public administration, and raise the relevance and quality of the services provided to the citizens by public institutions. The level of transparency is critical when measures have to be taken, it ensures that possible breaches of the principles and regulations become investigated and, when applicable, duly sanctioned. Thus, in order to maximize economy, efficiency, and transparency, public procurement should be carried out by fully competent, professional staff, working with appropriate tools, systems, and administrative routines and resources," Corman reiterated.

Nestulia added: *"Public procurement should be open, fair, and efficient. It should respond to citizens' needs, expanding equity, sustainability, economic opportunities, and building trust. Transparency is the first and the easiest step to start this procurement transformation journey*

for the Republic of Moldova. At the same time, if authorities could engage citizens and cooperate with civil society, the integrity and efficiency of public procurement will be more easily achieved."

In their turn, the speakers discussed the National Program for the development of the public procurement system for the years 2021-2024, the electronic public procurement system, and the training program for public procurement specialists. Topics also included the efficient resolution of appeals in the field of public procurement and the experience of civil society organizations when monitoring public procurement.

Ruslan Malai, Director of the Public Procurement Agency in the Republic of Moldova, spoke about the certification of public procurement specialists. He explained: *"The certification regulation has been elaborated, and soon the Ministry of Finance will launch the promotion of the regulations on the certification of public procurement specialists and in maximum two months the decision will be approved. According to the Agency's business plan, by the end of the year we need to train 100 people. In Moldova we have many professions, such as lawyers, accountants, economists, but there are no procurement specialists, and the capacities of the contracting authorities are reduced."*

Irina Gutnic, Deputy General Director at the National Agency for Solving Complaints, pointed out the most significant problems generating irregularities in the public procurement procedure: *"Lack of integrity in public procurement is a widespread phenomenon. No contracting authority is immune from it. Issues that distort a fair public procurement process may therefore include exact technical specifications, requesting certificates restricting wide access to the procedure, narrow specifications that favor a particular bidder, difficult qualification criteria, lack of ethics, conflict of interest, and other irregularities. And this is also due to the poorly trained staff in the field of public procurement."*

Diana Enachi, Public Procurement Expert at IDIS Viitorul, stated: *"For us, transparency is not an end goal, but only a method to obtain efficiency, integrity, to obtain quality goods, services, and public works for citizens. It is important for the authorities to make efforts to procure quality goods and services in the public interest of the citizens."*

Maria Covalciuc, President of the Association for Efficient and Responsible Governance (AGER) said: *"Improving the public procurement system in the Republic of Moldova is only possible by strengthening our joint efforts of both government actors and civil society so that the public budget is used to meet the needs of all citizens and not just interest groups."*

The project "Increasing the Integrity in Public Procurement" will run until February 2023, and project implementation will focus on support for public procurement reforms. Project goals will be achieved through a comprehensive training program for civil society organizations and journalists on public procurement monitoring. A grant program will also be launched through which eligible organizations will receive support and expertise in the procurement monitoring process, both nationally and locally. Thus, civil society organizations, monitors, and journalists will be trained on legal requirements within the

public procurement process, as well as the tools for identifying and documenting the risks of corruption. Finally, the beneficiaries will be instructed on the changes through which they can report irregularities and abuses to the control and legal institutions, but also on the development of a strategy for communication and advocacy of the monitoring results.

The recommendations made by the representatives of civil society after the procurement monitoring process will be sent to the responsible entities and decision-makers in order to examine and take actions to address issues raised, thus making the involved authorities more accountable. The result will be a more efficient use of public money as well as a better provision of goods, works, and services to the citizens of the Republic of Moldova.

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The project ["Increasing the Integrity in Public Procurement"](#) is implemented by Institute for Development and Social Initiatives (IDIS) "Viitorul," in collaboration with Partnership for Transparency (PTF). It aims to support procurement reforms in Moldova that will increase transparency and fairness of public procurement through empowering citizens to hold relevant institutions accountable.

[IDIS „Viitorul”](#) is an independent think tank, founded in 1993 that combines social, political and economic research with solid advocacy components. The institution conducts applied monitoring research in several areas: economy, social policy, EU policies, regional development, but also security and foreign policy risks.

Based in Washington, DC, the [Partnership for Transparency's](#) (PTF) mission is to advance innovative civil society-led approaches to improve governance, increase transparency, promote the rule of law, and reduce corruption in developing and emerging countries