

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-001871/24
to the Commission
Jordan Bardella (PFE)
(30 September 2024)**

Subject: EU forking out EUR 123 million for a bridge to be built by a Chinese company in Tunisia

The fact that the contract to build the Bizerte bridge in Tunisia has been awarded to the Chinese company Sichuan Road and Bridge Group has raised concerns about the allocation of public funds to third countries. Costing EUR 200 million in total, the project is primarily financed by a loan of EUR 123 million from the European Investment Bank.

With the EU being one of the main donors, one has to question the transparency of the selection processes and the relevance of using EU funds to support non-EU companies, especially in a context where China is stepping up its efforts to establish itself in North Africa through the New Silk Routes Initiative.

1. What control mechanisms has the Commission put in place to ensure that priority is given to allocating EU funds to European companies in international projects?
2. How will it ensure greater transparency in the award of contracts financed by the EU abroad?
3. How will it strengthen Mediterranean cooperation while ensuring that European companies are better positioned in future EU-funded projects in third countries?

Submitted: 30.9.2024

**Answer given by Ms Šuica on behalf of the European Commission
(8 January 2025)**

The Commission is working on a more strategic approach to procurement, with stronger focus on quality and environmental, social, and technical standards.

It is also reinforcing its outreach to EU companies, so that EU support to partner countries is more often accompanied by attractive offers from the EU private sector.

Regarding the Bizerte bridge, Tunisia has borrowed EUR 123 million from the European Investment Bank (EIB) and a similar amount from the African Development Bank (AfDB), plus additional loans from the AfDB for adjacent roads.

The EU has provided a grant for the bridge's technical design (by a Spanish company) and a guarantee for the EIB loan. No guarantee claims have been made so far.

In accordance with applicable legislation, the procurement process was governed by the EIB's Guide to Procurement ⁽¹⁾; the Commission was not involved in it.

As is the case for other multilateral development banks, EIB procurement rules do not contain geographic restrictions on the eligibility of bidders.

Following the call for tenders by the Tunisian promoter eight bidders prequalified, including European firms; however, no European firms submitted full offers, only two Chinese bidders did.

The EIB reviewed the dossier independently and concluded that the evaluation was carried out in line with the tender documents and that the selected bid was not abnormally low. The EIB thus issued a non-objection to the outcome of the second tender ⁽²⁾.

All procurement notices for projects financed by the EIB are published on the EIB website ⁽³⁾. The EU Funding & Tenders Portal ⁽⁴⁾ is the main hub for consulting calls for proposals and calls for tenders of EU institutions and agencies.

⁽¹⁾ <https://www.eib.org/en/publications/20240132-guide-to-procurement-for-projects-financed-by-the-eib>

⁽²⁾ <https://ted.europa.eu/en/notice/-/detail/336321-2024>

⁽³⁾ <https://www.eib.org/en/about/procurement/index>

⁽⁴⁾ <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/home>