

Building Partnerships for a Stronger Europe: Meet EIPA's Programme Director

Martijn Pluim, EIPA's Programme Director, is a seasoned professional whose career trajectory reflects a commitment to dedication, growth, and strategic leadership. In this conversation, we delve into the professional motivations that shaped his remarkable journey. From overseeing faculty and strategic initiatives to fostering collaborations and partnerships, Martijn provides a candid glimpse into his multifaceted role at EIPA. Read more about one of the key persons who drives EIPA forward.

I truly hope that EIPA can further extend its mission to strengthen the EU and its Member States by developing the capacities of public officials in dealing with European Union affairs. I am a strong believer in a robust and expanded EU. "



What career path took you to the position of Programme Director at EIPA?

I began 25 years ago in an international organisation, the ICMDP, starting as an intern and climbing the ranks to become a Director. When I started, the organisation was very small with some 20 people. By the time I left, it had grown to 500 people and I lead a 350 person directorate with teams in 30 locations. I combined both management skills and, of course, expertise in migration. When the opportunity arose at EIPA, it was a personal and professional calling. My present position brings me back to my country and city of birth and,

I'm deeply aligned with EIPA's objective of strengthening the EU and its institutions."

And now that you're the Programme Director, what are your main responsibilities?

As the Programme Director, my role involves overseeing and guiding the faculty, the key experts within EIPA. This group is responsible for delivering and organising the majority of training, consultancy, and research activities. Additionally, I am tasked with supporting business development, fundraising, and maintaining relations with external partners. In this regard, I collaborate closely with the Director-General to ensure a whole-of-organisation approach.

Two aspects at EIPA fuel my passion: its strong reputation externally and working with a motivated and qualified internal team."



Can you tell us a bit more about the strategic initiatives that you think will be crucial in the future for EIPA to stay relevant?

Certainly. There are two key aspects. Internally, EIPA will focus on investing more in its faculty, enhancing its in-house knowledge capacities and strengthening our network of experts.

Externally, making our connections stronger. This involves building robust relationships with external partners, including our 'Member States' – the countries that support EIPA financially and institutionally- which are crucial counterparts along with the European Commission. It also extends to our relations with candidate countries, think tanks, and universities. The goal is to continually broaden and strengthen this cooperative network.

With regards to the Commission and the other Member States, how can we make stronger connections?

I believe, particularly with the Commission, it's essential to maintain a regular dialogue and ensuring that as many people as possible understand the scope and impact of what EIPA does. This extends beyond the training we provide. It involves listening carefully to the challenges faced by public administrations and determining how we can support them in

preparing their officials better for working with Brussels, implementing the legislation that comes from Brussels, engaging in negotiation processes, and navigating the complexities of dealing with 'Brussels' in the broadest sense. Additionally, we're looking into providing targeted services, such as specific training or research tailored to their needs. Public administrations are currently under tremendous pressure due to factors like demographic decline and increased scrutiny, especially with the influence of social media. They face new challenges in a rapidly changing and polarised political landscape.

As an institute, EIPA plays a crucial role in public administration and governance. What do you think are the key challenges or, on the more positive side, the opportunities that EIPA can explore?

As a key player in public administration and governance, EIPA faces both challenges and opportunities. Positively, the deepening of the European Union, despite external pressures, presents opportunities for enhanced cooperation among Member States. The resurgence in the European enlargement process offers EIPA a crucial role in aligning negotiation processes for candidate countries with EU legal requirements.

On the other side, challenges arise with the rise of extremist movements and ethical considerations in artificial intelligence (AI). The upcoming retirement of millions of public officials prompts exploration of AI for tasks, bringing significant opportunities but requiring careful handling of ethical and legal complexities. Striking the right balance is essential in navigating this transformative landscape.



We did say that collaboration and partnership are very important for EIPA, and they are key drivers for success. So, you mentioned that we will hopefully see some upcoming collaborations and partnerships. Do you have any specific examples in mind?

Collaboration is paramount. Of course, cooperation with EIPA's Member States, and the European Institutions is central to our work. But also partnerships with local entities like Studio Europa, UNU-MERIT and the University of Maastricht are essential. While EIPA focuses on adult learning and our main emphasis is on professional learning for individuals in mid-career or higher career positions who want to deepen their knowledge about Europe and its functioning; it is crucial from an academic and cultural perspective that we work closely with UM and other universities to stay up-to-date and provide practical, job-relevant knowledge. We need close collaboration with them to ensure we deliver state-of-the-art courses to our

professional counterparts. Further within Europe, we have cooperation with European schools of public administration, intense collaboration with institutions in Brussels, and partnerships with our 'sister institutions' such as the College of Europe (CoE) and the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence (just as EIPA, these organisations are supported by the EU via the Erasmus Plus Programme). Looking even further, we collaborate with countries in the Western Balkans, with ReSPA and with partners in Eastern Europe and North Africa.

Any personal vision for the future of EIPA and its impact? What can EIPA do to make public administration more efficient?

I see EIPA becoming again one of the key Centres of Excellence on Public Administration in Europe and that it can further extend its mission to strengthen Member States in their cooperation with EU institutions. As mentioned, I am a strong believer in a robust Europe and EU.

To achieve this, we need to invest in broader expertise, expand our capabilities, and delve deeper into consultancy beyond our regular teaching to maintain relevance and impact."

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