

Interview with Izabela Matusz Ambassador Delegation of the European Union to Panama

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DOI: 10.33412/pri.v14.1.3758



Izabela Matusz (Warsaw, 22 September 1974) is a Polish diplomat.

She serves as Ambassador of the European Union and Head of the Delegation to Panama since 1 September 2022.

She joined the Polish Foreign Service in 2002. Between 2013 and 2017, she served as Ambassador of Poland to Peru, concurrent for Bolivia and Ecuador. She also served at the Embassies of Poland in Argentina and Spain.

While at Headquarters in Warsaw, she worked in the Department of the Americas, Department of Economic Cooperation and the Cabinet of the Minister.

She holds a MA degree in Economics and International Relations from the SGH Warsaw School of Economics and a Postgraduate degree from the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Warsaw.

What are the general lines of the EU plan about relevant aspects of higher education, science, and technology for Panama? What are the principal themes about cooperation between the EU and Panama? What is your general impression about the Panama Cooper 2030 Program?

The Delegation of the European Union to Panama has been very active in promoting Erasmus+ the European Union's flagship education and training program in Panamanian universities, as well as in encouraging Panamanian graduates to apply to our Erasmus Mundus master programs. Erasmus Mundus offers full scholarships up to 60 international students in each master program.

Copernicus is the European Union's Earth observation programme, looking at our planet and its environment. The general objective is to provide accurate, reliable, free, continuous and easily accessible information, in order to improve the management and conservation of the environment,



Figure 1. Izabela Matusz. Ambassador of the European Union to Panama.

understand and mitigate the effects of climate change and ensure civil security.

In Panama Copernicus is the key project of the EU-LAC Digital Alliance and of the "Global Gateway"; which aims to support the green and digital transition by installing a Regional Data Center in Panama. This will support the supply and use of products of the Risk Management Service for Latin America and the Caribbean region.

The BELLA Programme provides for the long-term interconnectivity needs of European and Latin American research and education communities. It is the digital highway that connects both continents with a direct 34,000 km long optic fibre cable. BELLA reached Panama in February 2022. Red Clara with universities and SENACYT are working to create the national research network in Panama, which will be the main beneficiary from BELLA.

BELLA will ensure that the required connectivity is in place for the next 25 years to meet the ever-increasing needs of research and education in the bi-regional partnership. Approximately 12,000 institutions and 65 million people are estimated to benefit from it.

Horizon Europe is the most ambitious EU programme for research and innovation with a budget of EUR 95.5 billion. The EU cooperation with Panama centres on projects with European Universities on the field of biodiversity, and the use of digital instruments like Copernicus and Galileo.

Cooperation between EU and Panama is focused on two priority areas: climate and environmental action and digital transformation.

We see 'Panama Cooper 2030' as an inclusive and ambitious national plan for cooperation, in line with the SDGs, with the potential to generate a positive and tangible impact on the lives of Panamanian people. It is also noteworthy that through this plan Panama will formalize its status as a country offering cooperation, putting its strengths at the service of the international community.

The EU has a large list of international cooperation programs. For example, Erasmus+, Red Magallanes Smile, Horizonte Europa, EURO Clima+, EURO Social, Fondo Verde, Desarrollo Verde are known European cooperation programs. Please, share with us the progress of the Copernicus program. What will be the concret expected results about the Copernicus program in Panama?

The future regional Copernicus data centre will help address the most pressing environmental challenges. As one of the pillars of the EU-LAC Digital Alliance, it will help countries to better cope with natural hazards and disasters, mitigate climate change, protect biodiversity, and contribute to other environmental goals. This represents a huge opportunity to develop a knowledge hub on Earth Observation, and will provide opportunities in the digital economy.

Copernicus will allow Panama to increase the use of geospatial data in the formulation of policies that protect public health and the planet. Panama will assume a key role as an international partner with the European Union in the region, and will also benefit with respect to disaster prevention, preparedness and risk reduction. Activities are expected to begin during the first semester of 2023.

According to your biography you have extensive diplomatic-professional experience. Could you share with our readers some general strategies that we could perform as individuals, members of Panamanian universities and research centers to reinforce our activities of science diplomacy and scientific dissemination?

It is worth looking for partners for cooperation outside the traditional pool. The progress in science is very fast and it is worth maintaining contacts with leading research centers on different continents

Networking with researchers from European universities would strengthen a lot science diplomacy. This could be done through Horizon Europe and Euraxess webinars that either present research opportunities in Europe or bring together researchers from Europe and Latin America.

Could you share some experiences that have been especially memorable in your professional career?

Before starting the mission in Panama as an EU Ambassador, I worked in the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In Peru, where I was the Ambassador, Polish universities have a very active cooperation with local universities in the field of archeology. Archeology now uses very advanced technologies and has become a very interdisciplinary science. I had the opportunity to observe closely how the most modern and advanced methods allow us to discover the secrets of ancient civilizations. It was fascinating.



Figure 2. Delegation of the European Union to Panama.