



polaris

# POLARIS INSIGHT

## MEET MARK VAN HELVOORT

### Building the RF Ecosystem Together A conversation with Mark van Helvoort

POLARIS is not only about technology development. It is also about connecting people, companies and knowledge institutes to build a strong and lasting RF ecosystem in the Netherlands. One of the driving forces behind that ambition is Mark van Helvoort, Ecosystem Programme Lead within POLARIS and active at Philips, one of the founding partners of the consortium.

As a National Growth Fund programme, POLARIS brings together industry, universities and research institutes in a long-term collaboration focused on advanced RF technologies for applications such as MRI, radar and communication systems. An important part of that mission is growing the ecosystem around these technologies and connecting new organisations to it.

We spoke with Mark about the growing POLARIS ecosystem, the newly introduced **Associate Partner concept** and why now is the right time for companies to join.



### Mark, can you briefly introduce yourself?

Mark smiles when he talks about his role within POLARIS. Although the programme is strongly technology driven, his own focus is mainly on people and collaboration.

*"I work at Philips and within POLARIS I am responsible for the Ecosystem Programme Line," he explains. "My role is mainly about connecting people and organisations. POLARIS creates a unique opportunity to bring expertise together around RF technology."*

During his career at Philips, Mark has been involved in many collaborations between industry, universities and research institutes. Those experiences shaped his view on innovation.

*"What makes POLARIS special is that we are not only working on today's challenges, but also on the technologies and talent needed for the future."*

## What personally motivates you in this role?

For Mark, ecosystem building is more than an organisational task. It is something he genuinely believes in.

*"What motivates me most is bringing people together around technology that really matters," he says. "Again and again you see that the biggest breakthroughs happen when different disciplines start working together."*

According to him, RF technology is a perfect example of a field where collaboration is essential.

*"The challenges are simply too large and too complex for one organisation alone. POLARIS creates an environment where companies, researchers and young talent can learn from each other and accelerate innovation together."*

He also believes the Netherlands has a unique position internationally.

*"We have world class expertise in healthcare, semiconductors and radar systems. It would be a missed opportunity not to connect those strengths into one ecosystem."*

## POLARIS often talks about 'ecosystem building'. What does that actually mean?

Mark leans forward slightly when explaining the concept.

*"An ecosystem is much more than a group of companies working together," he says. "It is a network where knowledge, ideas, talent and innovation can move freely between partners."*

Within POLARIS, strong foundations already exist through partners such as Philips, Thales, NXP, TNO, several Dutch universities and smaller partners like Altum RF, Bronkhorst and Neways. But according to Mark, innovation often comes from unexpected places.

*"Sometimes a smaller specialised company has exactly the knowledge or technology that is needed." Mark says.*

He explains that an ecosystem only works when knowledge is actively shared and transferred between organisations, researchers and future generations of engineers.

*"That is why Human Capital is also such an important part of POLARIS," he explains. "We are not only building technology. We are also building future expertise. That means investing in courses, training material and collaboration between industry and academia."*

*"Innovation only works when knowledge can continue to move between people and organisations."*

## That connects directly to the new Associate Partner concept?

The introduction of the Associate Partner concept is one of the newest ecosystem initiatives within POLARIS.

*"Exactly," Mark says. "We are now opening the door wider for companies that want to become part of the POLARIS ecosystem without immediately becoming a full consortium member."*

The idea behind the model is deliberately practical and accessible.

*"The Associate Partner model is designed as a low threshold entry point. Companies can connect to the network, join ecosystem activities, meet researchers and industrial partners, and explore where they can contribute."*

### POLARIS IN ACTION



## What are the concrete benefits for Associate Partners?

According to Mark, the value goes much further than visibility alone.

*"Associate Partners become connected to a unique national RF network," he explains. "They gain access to events, workshops and networking opportunities, but they also get early insight into technological developments and emerging research directions."*

Especially for SMEs and specialised technology companies, that can create entirely new opportunities.

*"Sometimes one conversation or one introduction can become the start of a completely new collaboration," Mark says. "For smaller companies especially, it can open doors that are normally difficult to access independently."*

The goal, he explains, is to make innovation move faster through stronger connections.

*"What we really want is an environment where people know how to find each other."*

## POLARIS also speaks about 'white spots' in the research agenda. What are those?

Within POLARIS, researchers and industry experts continuously identify so called 'white spots' in the RF research landscape.

*"The white spots are identified gaps or opportunities where additional expertise is needed," Mark explains. "They are identified by researchers and industry experts themselves and reviewed by our Technical Advisory Board."*

That process makes the topics highly relevant for future innovation.

*"A company may discover that its own expertise fits perfectly into one of those areas," he says.*

## How does the Open Part mechanism fit into this?

The white spots connect directly to another important POLARIS initiative: the Open Part mechanism.

*"The Open Part is an important next step," Mark explains. "Within POLARIS, budget has been reserved specifically to involve organisations outside the current consortium."*

### YOUR JOURNEY INTO POLARIS

1. Connect with POLARIS
2. Become an Associate Partner
3. Share your expertise
4. Explore opportunities
5. Start collaboration

Future Open Part calls will allow external organisations to contribute directly to identified white spots within the RF research agenda.

*"The Associate Partner concept is closely connected to this," Mark says. "It gives organisations the chance to already become part of the ecosystem, understand the roadmap and explore where they can contribute before the Open Part calls officially open."*

For him, Associate Partnership is therefore much more than a symbolic status.

*"It is really an entry point into the future POLARIS ecosystem."*

## So this is not only meant for large companies?

Mark answers quickly.

*"Not at all," he says. "We welcome SMEs, scale ups and specialised technology companies as well."*

In fact, he believes smaller companies can sometimes often play a surprisingly important role.

*"Sometimes a niche company has exactly the expertise that is needed to move a technology forward."*

That openness is an essential part of the ecosystem philosophy.

*"POLARIS is about collaboration. We want to create opportunities that companies often cannot achieve alone."*

## Why is this important for the Netherlands?

At this point in the conversation, the broader ambition behind POLARIS becomes visible.

*"RF technology is becoming increasingly strategic," Mark explains. "It plays a key role in healthcare, defence, communication systems and many future applications we cannot even fully predict yet."*

According to him, maintaining a strong Dutch position requires more than separate innovations.

*"We need a strong ecosystem with cooperation, talent development and long-term investment in knowledge. That is exactly what POLARIS is trying to build."*

*"POLARIS is about collaboration. We want to create opportunities that companies often cannot achieve alone."*



## POLARIS will be present at the Benelux RF & IC Conference. Is that part of the ecosystem strategy?

The upcoming Benelux RF & IC Conference 2026 is one of the moments where POLARIS will actively present the ecosystem initiative to the outside world.

*"Yes, very much," Mark says. "The conference is an excellent place to meet companies, researchers and professionals active in RF and IC technology."*

POLARIS will use the event to introduce the Associate Partner concept and invite organisations to explore collaboration opportunities.

*"It is not only about presentations and technology," he says. "It is also about meeting people and creating new connections."*

## Finally, what would you say to companies considering joining POLARIS?

Mark pauses briefly before answering.

*"I would say: come and have the conversation."*

He smiles.

*"You do not need to know exactly where you fit from day one. The strength of an ecosystem is that opportunities often emerge once people start connecting with each other."*



*And perhaps that is exactly the kind of ecosystem POLARIS hopes to build.*

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Companies and organisations interested in becoming part of the growing POLARIS RF ecosystem are invited to explore the Associate Partner programme. More information about the Associate Partner concept, the application process and future Open Part opportunities can be found on the [POLARIS website](#).



**POLARIS welcomes companies, knowledge institutes and technology specialists who want to contribute to the future of RF innovation in the Netherlands.**

### Contact Information

For questions or suggestions regarding the POLARIS Insight, feel free to email us at [info@polaris-ngf.nl](mailto:info@polaris-ngf.nl)

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