



INTERVIEW

Europe, Middle East, Africa Region

Interview with Christos Verikoukis, Director of the Europe, Middle East, Africa Region

By Stefano Bregni, Global Communications Newsletter Editor in Chief, Vice-President for Conferences, and Christos Verikoukis, Director of the EMEA Region

This is the sixth article in the series of eight, started in December 2020 and published monthly in the IEEE ComSoc *Global Communications Newsletter*, which covers all areas of IEEE ComSoc Member and Global Activities.

In this series of articles, I introduce the Vice-President and six Directors on the Member and Global Activities Council (namely: Sister and Related Societies; Membership Services; AP, NA, LA, EMEA Regions) and the two Chairs of the Women in Communications Engineering (WICE) and Young Professionals (YP) Standing Committees. In each article, one by one they present their sector activities and plans.

In this issue, I interview Christos Verikoukis, Director of the Europe, Middle East, Africa (EMEA) Region.

Christos was born in Thessaloniki, Greece. He received his Master Degree from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and his Ph.D. from the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, Spain. Currently, he is a Research Director (R4) at the Telecommunications Technological Centre of Catalonia, Barcelona, Spain. He is a co-author of four books, 140 journal papers and more than 200 conference papers, as well as three patents in different areas of wireless communications. He is currently coordinating three research projects funded by the European Commission in the areas of 5G and 6G, while he is involved in five more projects. He is currently the founding Associate Editor-in-Chief of *IEEE Networking Letters*, a Member-at-Large of the Globecom/ICC Technical Content (GITC) Standing Committee, and a member of the IEEE ComSoc Board of Governors as EMEA Region Director. He was an officer of the Communications Systems Integration and Modeling (CSIM) Technical Committee and Vice-Chair of the IEEE ComSoc Technical Committees Board.

Personally, I have been working with Christos on various tasks in ComSoc for several years already. I have always admired his terrific working power and ability to manage many tasks in parallel without losing track or missing deadlines, coupled with his integrity and vision on how ComSoc should serve Members. Now, let us start the interview and discover what's going on in the EMEA Region, which is also my Region.

Stefano: Hello Christo! We might begin our interview by outlining the main characteristics of the EMEA Region.

Christos: It is a pleasure also for me to be interviewed by you. The EMEA Region covers a vast geographic area stretching from Cape Town, South Africa in the South, Lisbon, Portugal, in the West, through Hammerfest, Norway, in the North, to Vladivostok, Russia in the East. The Region includes 52 ComSoc Chap-

ters, which enroll about one quarter of the ComSoc members worldwide. Chapters provide a local connection for our society members. Their activities include talks organized within the virtual Distinguished Lecturer Tour (vDLT) frameworks, social events, workshops, seminars, special events, etc.

Stefano: Which are the main difficulties in the implementation of activities in the EMEA Region because of the pandemic and how you overcome them?

Christos: As you know very well, the main tool for connecting the local chapters with renowned experts on telecommunications and networking topics is the Distinguished Lecturer Program (DLP) and the Distinguished Speaker Program (DSP). Given the travel restrictions in 2020, in collaboration with the other Regional directors and the Member Services Board (MSB), we converted it to a virtual Distinguished Lecturer Tour (vDLT) framework.

The new vDLT is coordinated by Saud Althunibat from Jordan. We worked very hard to establish this new tool and we managed to organize 10 vDLTs talks in our Region, hosted by nine different

Chapters. The virtual nature of the talks provided an opportunity also to Chapters with a low number of members, such as those in the Middle East and Africa, to organize such events and all our members to attend the talks.

Stefano: The Distinguished Lecturer Program (DLP) and the Distinguished Speaker Program (DSP) are particularly appreciated by our Members. During my previous term as VP for Member Relations, we increased the budget

allocated to these programs, in order to allow more and better DLTs in all Regions. What is your perception of these Programs for ComSoc? Do you think they are important? How are they organized in the EMEA Region?

Christos: DL and DS Programs are useful elements to bring worldwide experts closer to our members. As I previously said, we successfully adapted the DL program to the COVID restrictions, and the EMEA region organized the highest number of vDLTs. Our experience from the organization of the vDLTs is that our members highly appreciate these talks and actively participate.

For the post-Covid time, we are planning to use the same methodology as in vDLTs and serve as the liaison between DLs and Chapters. Our DL coordinator will send emails to both DLs and Chapters to identify common interests and encourage DLs to also visit Chapters with low ComSoc membership.

Organizing physical talks gives the chance for networking and socializing among members and the opportunity for ComSoc to advertise its activities. It is an excellent event to hire new members. We are planning to use unspent budget and available surplus to organize as many DLs as we can.

Stefano: When you started your term of service on the Board of Governors as EMEA Director, did you know it was so time consuming as you have discovered later? What is the most difficult challenge that you have been coping with so far?

Christos: As you know, I have served ComSoc in different volunteer positions and for many years. So far, the devoted effort was relatively small. However, working as EMEA Director and offering services to 6,000 members requires a very serious

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Stefano Bregni



Christos Verikoukis

IEEE ComSoc Argentina Chapter: Winner of the 2020 Chapter Achievement Award

By J. Ignacio Alvarez-Hamelin, Argentina Chapter Chair

Argentina is a country with an extension of 2,780,400 km² and a population of 45 million people. Communications' activity is mostly developed and represented by a large community of operators, industries, and research institutions. The development is shown, for example, in its extensive mobile network, with several national fiber-optic networks, including the "Red Federal de Fibra Óptica," (Federal Fiber-Optic Network) covering 33,000 km. Also to be highlighted is the development of satellites for both communications and scientific research, radars for air traffic control, and the second Internet network in South-America, as shown in the photos.

Argentina has several universities and national organizations such as CONAE for space development, INTI for the industry, INTA for agriculture and livestock, and CITEDEF for defense. All of them use communications technologies, and some also develop these technologies. For instance, CONAE produces satellites that impact INTA activities, or INTA was one of the most developed fields of IoT technologies.

During 2019, Argentina's local chapter developed many activities toward improving ComSoc visibility within the local community. Consequently, we are very honored and proud to be the recipients of the ComSoc Chapter Activities Award for the ComSoc Latin America Region.

IEEE ComSoc Argentina Chapter's main activities were focused on establishing relations among the industry, academia, and governmental organizations. To accomplish this goal, many seminars were organized throughout the year focused on different topics, from new technologies to applications of existing technologies, and also education. All events were open and free of charge to attract a larger audience.

Throughout 2019, the following actions were organized:

- 2019 March (UTN, National Technical University–Argentina, three hours) "SDR Receptor's Anatomy" and "Satellite Communications." Introduction to Software Defined Radio and its relations with FPGAs and Microcontrollers (Nicolás Sidorchuk and Marcelo Doallo). Satellite Communications (Organizers of <https://zrput.org/>).
- 2019 September (UBA/FI, Universidad de Buenos Aires, School of Engineering, two hours) "Smart Grids: Learning, Processing, and Communications." Discussion Panel: Oscar Gonzalez (Argentinean Information and Communications

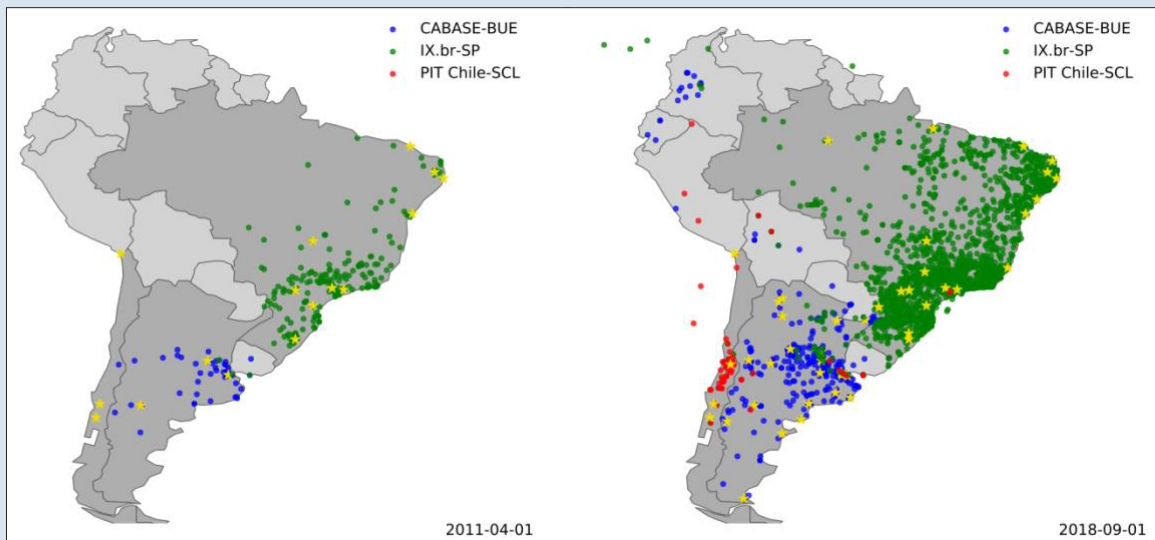


SAC-D mission was a collaboration between CONAE (Space Agency of Argentina) and INVAP, in cooperation with NASA, and space agencies of Brazil, Denmark, Italy and Germany. Photo by NASA - http://aquarius.umaine.edu/cgi/gal_images.htm?id=3 (image source), Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=7881792>

Undersecretary), Marco Zaroni (System and Communications Manager of Camuzzi Gas), Giuseppe Di Girolamo (Electric Network Operation of Edesur), Mariano Michelli (Applications and Development Manager of Tesacom), Emmanuel Jaffrot (Deputy COO - WND Group). Conference: Andrea M. Tonello (IEEE ComSoc DL, Universidad de Klagenfurt).

- 2019 September (CONICET, National Scientific and Technical Research Council–Argentina, two hours) "Power Line Communications and Applications." Andrea M. Tonello (IEEE ComSoc DL, Universidad de Klagenfurt).
- 2019 September (UNMAR, Universidad de Mar del Plata–Argentina, one hour) "Massive Communications on IoT." Andrea M. Tonello (IEEE ComSoc DL, Universidad de Klagenfurt).
- 2019 September (UNMAR, Universidad del Sur–Argentina, one hour) "Where PLC Meets Wireless: Communications for Massive IoT and Smart Grid." Andrea M. Tonello (IEEE ComSoc DL, Universidad de Klagenfurt).
- 2019 October (UBA/FI, Universidad de Buenos Aires, School of Engineering, two hours) "Evolution of Mobile Telecommunications: 5G." Discussion Panel: Hugo Miguel (Undersecretary of Informatics and Communications Planning), Lucas Gallito (Public Policy Director–GSMA), Celedonio von Wuthenau (Head of Government Relations LAT–Nokia), Daniel Martello (Network Evolution Manager for CU Latam South–Ericsson), Benjamin Silva (CDO Video, Strategy, Solutions, and Operations LATAM–Huawei), Miguel Ángel Pesado, (President of COPITEC, professional association). Conference: Ashutosh Dutta (IEEE ComSoc DL, Johns Hopkins University).

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Development of Internet providers connected to IXPs (Internet Exchange Points) in Latin America, 2011 and 2018. The green represent the IXP of Brazil, blue the Argentinean ones, and red the Chilean. Visualizations by CoNexDat (<https://cnet.fi.uba.ar/en/>).

IEEE Bangalore ComSoc Chapter

Winner of the 2020 Chapter Achievement Award, APAC Region

Who does not want to start a new year with hope and ambition? In this year's first meeting, someone asked me: as Chair for 2020, what has been my sense of the prior year? My response was: A sense of resilience, a sense of accomplishment, and a sense of gratitude.

I am very pleased to report that our Communications Society in the IEEE Bangalore Section has been quite eventful in 2020. When we realized that we would be in lockdown for awhile, we quickly transitioned to an online mode for all of our activities. Though Covid-19 disrupted some of our planned activities, we leveraged the virtual forums and video conferencing platforms to a large extent.

Worldwide, we see a growth in deployment of 5G networks and a proliferation of 5G devices. Therefore, it has been quite natural for the Communication Society to conduct a series of workshops on "Technologies in and Around 5G": New Radio (NR), Multiple-Access, IoT Machine Communication, Edge Computing *et al.* We also delved into the intricacies of "AI/ML in 5G Networks" through an intensive workshop. Our Society leaders also participated as keynote speakers and panelists in other IEEE forums and state Chapter events.

We were scheduled to have the IEEE 5G World Forum hosted in Bangalore in Sept. 2020. Though it turned out to be an online program for obvious reasons, our members played critical roles in steering the forum, from technical sessions to practical demos.

During this global as well as part of Chapter activities, we organized many deep-tech sessions pertaining to Cloud-Native Computing, Software-Defined Networking, Network Function Virtualization and Hyper-connected Networks.

Bangalore is a hub of multinational centers, Indian companies as well as enterprising startups. Samsung, Nokia, Cisco, Wipro, Reliance Jio and other industry leaders have come forward to contribute to a multitude of workshops. Their enthusiasm was matched by startups like Saankhya Labs, Radisys, and MRRFIC. Beyond 5G, another half-a-dozen webinars covered other facets of advanced communication, including Wifi 6.0 and beyond, Blockchain in Communication Systems, and Quantum Communication with Error-Correction Code, to name a few.

The Chapter has also been abuzz with student activities. Our student branches now have grown to nine, with two SBCs joining in the year, thanks to the Manipal Institute of Technology and Reva University. Among India's 20 Institutes of Eminence (IoE), three are associated with our Chapter: IISc, MIT and Amrita

University. Our student branches have organized week-long seminar ensembles, each evening hosted by a member college.

The GraTe-7 program had a seven-minute presentation for master and doctoral theses; this year we conducted jointly with the Kerala and Hyderabad sections. We also organized the second edition of our Ph.D. Ethically Driven Innovation and Technology for Society (EDITS) program. This has been a good success story with 20+ industry experts spending part of the weekend mentoring approximately 30 Ph.D. students.

For young professionals, our Research Methodology workshops toward Quality Publications have always been very sought after. But in 2020, I led two new initiatives on inhouse and open innovation. The first one was on 'How to Write Your First Patent', where Samsung patent engineers presented step-by-step training. The second workshop was built around 'What Does it Take to Participate in Open Source'. With a large attendance during the program and a few thousand subsequent youtube views, we received a mental boost to continue similar programs in 2021.

Execom members'/volunteers' valuable knowledge and indomitable spirit have helped us grow our membership base in 2020 by 35 percent over last year, now totalling 485 members. Internally, we have enhanced many processes and enriched our presence in social media through a website, LinkedIn and Youtube channels. The majority of our webinars are subsequently available in these social media.

Regular execom meetings and members' active participation have helped significantly in paving new avenues for continuous learning and knowledge dissemination. We are very thankful to the Bangalore Section for recognizing with the Best Chapter (large) award. It has been an honor for us to receive the Best ComSoc Chapter CAA award for the Asia-Pacific region two years in succession.

Our society is blessed to have a rich representation of Industry, Startup and Academia. Our members have been inducted in IEEE Standards Association Governing Council, Indian standard body TSDSI GC, OCF association Chair for IoT Interoperability and so on. Many of our leaders have received recognition and accolades for high-level of technical excellence.

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Chapter Chair Dr. Alok addressing the IEEE Bangalore Section Members on AGM Day in Jan. 2021.



IEEE Bangalore ComSoc Chapter Execom 2020 Members whose dedication and commitment have made it possible to win CAA 2020 (APAC Best Chapter) Award.

The 28th International Conference on Software, Telecommunications and Computer Networks: SoftCOM 2020

By Dinko Begusic, Nikola Rozic, Croatia; Pascal Lorenz, France; Joel J. P. C. Rodrigues, Brazil/Portugal

The 28th International Conference on Software, Telecommunications and Computer Networks (SoftCOM 2020) was held as a virtual conference, 17–19 September, 2020. The Conference was technically co-sponsored by the IEEE Communications Society (ComSoc) with the support of the Technical Committee on Communications Software (CommSoft) and the IEEE Croatian Section. The Conference was organized by the University of Split, Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Naval Architecture (FESB), and the Croatian Communications and Information Society (CCIS) under the auspices of the Croatian Academy of Engineering.

The technical conference program featured 20 conference sessions including 10 general conference sessions, one symposium, and eight special sessions. The symposium was dedicated to Robotic and ICT Assisted Wellbeing. The special sessions were dedicated to hot topics including: QoS in Wired and Wireless Networks, Ad Hoc and Sensor Networks, Green Networking and Computing, Service Quality, Reliability and Security, Security and Digital Forensics, Advances in Machine Learning for Business and Finance, Environmental Electromagnetic Compatibility, and Advanced Educational Technologies. The contributions were submitted by researchers and experts from research institutions and industry in 30 countries. Following the selection through a reviewing process, 100 papers were accepted for presentation within the scientific technical conference program.

A plenary keynote talk titled “5G: New Engine of Digital Economic Growth” was presented by Siniša Krajnović, Executive Vice President and Head of Digital Services in Market Area North East Asia, Ericsson. The conference program featured two invited talks dedicated to the area of artificial intelligence and machine learning applications as follows: “Machine Learning and Cryptocurrency Markets” by Nino Antulov-Fantulin, Ph.D., ETH Zurich, Switzerland; and “Advancing Optical Communication and Measurement Systems Using Machine Learning”, by Darko Zibar, Ph.D., DTU Fotonik, Technical University of Denmark, Denmark.

The SoftCOM 2020 Business Forum featured three workshops and a panel discussion with participation by managers, executives, experts, government and institution representatives. In addition, two half-day tutorials were held by worldwide recognized experts. A professional Workshop on ICT was dedicated to the wide spectra of topics in ICT. The 9th Workshop on Software Engineering in Practice, was organized by Darko Huljenić, Ph.D., Ericsson Nikola Tesla, Croatia. iWORKSHOP: 7 x iSkills Fundamental Innovation Skills was organized by Marko Bervanakis (Ericsson Global Innovation Facilitator), Ericsson Nikola Tesla, Croatia. The Panel discussion “Possibilities of Development of NGA Networks in Croatia: A Technical Perspective, organized in collaboration with Djoni Garmaz, B.Sc., Split, and Dalmatia County, Split, gathered representatives of the leading telecom operators in Croatia.

An Interdisciplinary Symposium on Information Security and Intellectual Property (ISIP) was organized by Prof. Marija Boban, Ph.D., University of Split, Faculty of Law, and Prof. Gordan Ježić, University of Zagreb, Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing, featuring two invited talks: Food Fraud: Criminal Protection in Croatia, Ivan Vukušić, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, University of Split Faculty of Law; and “Croatia and The Movement and Structure of Cybercrime in the Republic of Croatia: Some New Trends, Vlatka Ružić, PhD, Polytechnics Nikola Tesla, Gospić, Croatia.

The SoftCOM 2020 conference featured two events aimed at



Attending the SoftCOM conference online.

students: The SoftCOM 2020 Ph.D. Forum for doctoral students, and the Workshop on Software Development for master level students. The SoftCOM 2020 Ph.D. Forum for doctoral students in the area of ICT was organized as a poster session, preceded by a fast-paced introduction by each student. The forum was coordinated by Prof. Maja Matijasevic (University of Zagreb) and Prof. Dinko Begusic (University of Split), and moderated by Asst. Prof. Maja Skiljo (University of Split), Prof. Višnja Križanović (University of Osijek), and Mirko Sužnjević (University of Zagreb), Goran Mauša (University of Rijeka), and Andrej Grgurić, Ericsson Nikola Tesla. The presentations of the master level student projects were held at the University and Industry Collaboration; the Workshop on Software Development - Master Thesis Use Cases was co-organized by Toni Mastelić, Ph.D. (Ericsson Nikola Tesla, Split) and Linda Vicković, Ph.D. (University of Split, FESB).

More information about the SoftCOM 2020 conference may be found at <http://softcom2020.fesb.unist.hr/>

ARGENTINA CHAPTER/Continued from page 2

Throughout 2020, all activities were organized virtually due to the pandemic, so the local Argentine chapter promoted a series of regional webinars with experts in different technologies. They were presented in Spanish, the preponderant language in Latin America, so they were accessible for many other members and non-members in the region. All talks were recorded and distributed over a Youtube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSq4RfBmC657xcgAn5YYg2g>), providing wider access. On average, there were 50 participants per session and another 160 views of the recorded seminars. The activities were called IEEE ComSoc Argentina Open Webinar (titles are translated):

- 2020 July (UBA/FI, Universidad de Buenos Aires, School of Engineering, one hour), “Electromagnetic Wave Shielding in Unconventional Materials.” Silvina Boggi (UBA/FI).

- 2020 August (UNC, Universidad de Córdoba-Argentina, one hour), “Routing the Space Internet with Contact Graph Routing Algorithm.” Juan A. Fraire (IEEE Member, UNC-CONICET).

- 2020 September (UNC, Universidad de Córdoba-Argentina, one hour), “Congestion and Scalability in Space Networks.” Pablo Madoery (UNC-CONICET).

- 2020 October (UBA/FI, Universidad de Buenos Aires, School of Engineering, one hour), “What is New in the Networks of Things?” Cecilia Galarza (UBA-CONICET).

- 2020 November (UBA/FI, Universidad de Buenos Aires, School of Engineering, one hour), “From Information Providers to the User: How Does the Internet Work?” J. Ignacio Alvarez-Hamelin (Senior Member, UBA-CONICET).

We will continue to carry on with these open activities, pursuing the connection among the different sectors, like academia, industry, and government, also targeting regional integration.

INTERVIEW/Continued from page 1

commitment. The most challenging topic at the beginning of my term was to update the data bases and the emailing lists with the Chapter Chairs and the current members. We wanted to make them aware of all ComSoc activities, to increase the level of interaction and collaboration among the Chapters, and to growth the number of members in our area.

We want all our members to equally receive our services and open ComSoc to the society. After a year of hard work, we are able to interact with all Chapters and all our members in the Region receive our announcements. We are proud to see an increase in the number of members in the EMEA region. We are happy to see EMEA Chapters to co-organize vDLs and apply for ComSoc grants. Moreover, our members actively participate in our initiatives and send us useful feedback to improve our services.

Stefano: The EMEA Region Board assigns Awards to recognize outstanding contributions by its most active members. May you describe EMEA Awards in some detail?

Christos: Our Awards program is coordinated by Luca Foschini from Italy and includes the EMEA Young Researcher Award and the EMEA Region Distinguished Service Award.

In 2020, the winner of the Best Young Researcher Award was Weizhi Meng, TUD, Denmark, while the winners of the Outstanding Young Researcher Award were Yuanwei Liu, Queen Mary, UK and Madhusanka Liyanage, University College Dublin, Ireland. The EMEA Region Distinguished Service Award was granted to Mohsen Guizani, from Qatar University, Qatar. We opened the call very early, with clear criteria per award, in order to give enough time to the applicants. We also organize two selection committees, one per award, with worldwide qualified experts to evaluate the applications. Every year, we also deliver the Chapter Achievement Award to recognize the most active Chapter in the Region. In 2020 the Swedish Chapter received this Award.

Stefano: Which are the new initiatives you introduced during the first year of your term?

Christos: During 2020, we devoted significant effort to close the gap between industry and academia in our Region and to engage people from industry to actively participate in our activities. We introduced two new tools, the Industrial webinars/panels and the industry students' panels.

Our Industry-Academia cooperation coordinator Diomidis Michalopoulos from NOKIA Bell-Labs in Germany did an excellent job and we hosted webinars from experts from Telefonica I+D, NVIDIA, ORANGE and NEC. Moreover, an industrial panel

on verticals over 5G was organized by Telecom Italia with the participation of experts from companies like Telefonica, Enel-X, Neurogames and LiveU. Our members saw interest in these webinars and we had a big audience at each event.

In collaboration with our Membership Development coordinators Marwa K. Qaraqe from Qatar and Mustapha Benjillali from Morocco, we implemented the second activity, the industry-students panels. We organized diverse panels of industry professionals (telecom operators, manufacturers, app developers etc.) to provide valuable feedback on student research. Students presented their work to panelists remotely, and the panelists judged their work based on industry interest, real problems, existing standards etc. This opportunity provided students with "real feedback" from prominent industry members and enabled them to adapt their work to current and future needs of the market.

From the received applications we selected 28 projects from students from 15 Countries in the EMEA Region. We organized three panels with experts from NOKIA, NEC, EXFO, Samsung, ORANGE, CITRIX and NVIDIA. Both students and industrial experts were very enthusiastic and encouraged us to continue for this year as well. As a small award, all students were granted with a one year complimentary IEEE and ComSoc membership.

Stefano: Among the many activities that you are now running in the EMEA Region, what will be the highlight of 2021?

Christos: First, we will continue with the VDLs, the Industrial talks, and the industry-student panels. For next July, we are organizing the first IEEE International Mediterranean Conference on Communications and Networking (MeditCom 2021) in Athens, Greece, as a hybrid in-person/online conference (<https://www.ieee-meditcom.org>). MeditCom will be held annually in the countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. With MeditCom, ComSoc aims at engaging local IEEE Sections, ComSoc Chapters, and possibly Sister Societies, from all Mediterranean regions, including Spain, France, Monaco, Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, Greece, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Malta, and Cyprus.

In conjunction with MeditCom, we are also planning to organize a co-located Regional Chapters Chairs Congress. The aim of the Congress is to facilitate and encourage sharing, feedback, and networking among Chapter Chairs, staff, and ComSoc officers.

BANGALORE CHAPTER/Continued from page 3

Many factors have played critical roles in the Bangalore ComSoc chapter winning the CAA award in the APAC Region: guidance of the strong execom team, participation in events from industry and academia, the organization of deeper technical workshops, an infusion of energy in student branches, mentoring young professionals and researchers, leveraging social media for knowledge dissemination and continuous engagement at all levels.

The possibilities are endless, and our mindset is expansive. A glance at the macro-level India picture tells us that 5G deployments are being planned in 2021. Industries will be addressing unforeseen challenges. Top 100 solutions from start-ups/labs have been shortlisted from 1000+ entries in the 5G India hackathon. Academia is gearing up to pursue research for B5G and 6G.

I am privileged to continue leading this vibrant society in 2021 as well. We will strive to make this society stronger in terms of professional growth and community engagement — a force to reckon with!

We are looking forward to make 2021 a unique year!



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