

NEW YEAR ... NEW BEGINNINGS

People pause at the end of each year and look back in contemplation. The COVID-19 pandemic has hit our lives in 2020 and made it a hard to forget year. Today, we are still in the midst of a storm that started over a year ago and may not see beyond its gloom and melancholy. More than 90 million cases and 2 million deaths have been reported worldwide. A second wave of infections and a couple of coronavirus variants are making the situation worse than anticipated. We now know more about the pandemic, however, and there is progress in treatment. Preventive measures are also becoming available. Everybody is looking forward to 2021 to turn our hopes for a better tomorrow into a reality.

Throughout 2020, networks and telecommunication made additional inroads into our lives and enabled us to carry on. This happened in many areas, including governance, trade, business, healthcare, education, research, entertainment, and others. Some of what we do now on a daily basis at work and elsewhere was not among our norms before the pandemic. The crisis underscored the role of networks in modern life and shed light on how this role may evolve in the future. This suggests more work, innovation, and responsibility for researchers, developers, educators, and practitioners in our community.

Publishing faced difficulties in 2020 due to COVID-19 and its impact on people's lives. We had a fair share thereof in the *IEEE Communications Magazine*. As the pandemic took its toll on people's health and on their social lives, it became difficult for many to meet deadlines and to make timely deliverables. Authors, reviewers, and editors ran into inevitable delays, and this stressed us out as an editorial board and publication staff. We expect that some of these difficulties will carry over into 2021. Nevertheless, we have managed to keep our various processes running, to continue our plans for improvements, and are committed that this remains the case through this year.

We started a major restructuring project of *IEEE Communications Magazine* in 2018. This entailed several improvements including, but not limited to, the retirement of old Series, launching a set of new ones, revisiting of all our Feature Topics processes, and rewriting of all our policies for authors, reviewers and editors. This project is now complete and our community can fully pick its fruits in 2021. Now, *IEEE Communications Magazine* relies on the two pillars of the Series and the Open Call (OC). Both tracks are run by the magazine's term-based editors who are among the best in our field. The third track is structured by carefully select-



Tarek S. El-Bawab

ing Feature Topics (FTs) that foster the creativity and innovative initiatives of our guest editors. While observing the same policies applied on the other tracks, feature topics add a unique value and open up avenues to attract manuscripts in special and cutting-edge emerging areas.

Our editorial team has featured considerable professional diversity in 2020, with 58 percent of the editors coming from academia, 33 percent from industry, and 9 percent from government. The percentage of female editors in our squad has risen from 8 percent in 2019 to 14 percent today. Despite the difficult conditions throughout last year, we have seen a 10 percent increase in manuscript submissions (not including revisions, and resubmissions due to administra-

tive rejects). Compared to 2019, we have seen a 14 percent reduction in our submission-to-first-decision time, 25 percent reduction in the submission-to-final-decision time, and 37 percent reduction in the submission-to-publication time. These improvements are accomplished while maintaining our firm commitment to the highest possible papers' quality. We are retiring the magazine's five-year-old cover style and page format, and are hoping that readers of this January 2021 issue enjoy the new design.

I want to thank our authors for their priceless contributions, our reviewers for their thorough work, our editors for their pursuit of perfection, and our hard working staff of the IEEE Communications Society for their relentless dedication to publication quality. It is due to the contribution of all of these colleagues and professionals that we can stand today in joy and pride.

We had a successful surfing over the 2020 rough waves and are hopeful for a healthy and happy new year!

BIOGRAPHY

TAREK S. EL-BAWAB is the Editor in Chief of the *IEEE Communications Magazine*. He is a Board Member of the IEEE Communication Society's (ComSoc) Board of Governors and the ComSoc Director of Industry Communities. He served as the society's Director of Standards Development and Director of Conference Operations. He chaired the Transmission, Access, and Optical Systems (TAOS) Technical Committee for two terms, and served as chair/organizer in several ICC/Globecom capacities. His research interests include network architectures, optical networks, telecom standards, and engineering education. Tarek has more than 75 publications, and his book *Optical Switching* is one of the most comprehensive references in its subject. He led the Telecommunication-Engineering-Education (TEE) movement (2008–2014), which resulted in recognizing network/telecommunication engineering as distinct discipline by ABET. He is the first recipient of the ComSoc Education Award for this work in 2015. As of 2021, he is the Dean of Engineering with the American University of Nigeria. Before this, he was Dean of Engineering and Applied Science with Nile University, Professor with Jackson State University, and Project Manager and Senior Research Scientist with Alcatel-Lucent (now Nokia). His other affiliations include Colorado State University and the University of Essex.