

CC-WEBINAR.LIVE EXECUTIVE INTERVIEW WITH **PAOLO MAGRELLI**

The Latest Development of Sparkle Network: New Paths and Upgraded Assets

On the 28th of May, 2020 **Carrier Community (CC)** hosted **CC-Webinar.Live Executive Interview between Erik van Stokkom, CEO of VSC and Paolo Magrelli, Head of Sales Enterprise, and OTT Region Americas at Sparkle. Paolo has had an opportunity to reveal some information about the latest developments of the Sparkle network, give us a glimpse into a new project Curie and discuss the impact of Covid-19 on IP transit dynamics and its trend.**

Erik: Tell us a little bit about the latest developments and any new paths, or upgraded assets within *Sparkle*? What is new?

Paolo: Well, 2020 is pretty busy, as it is the end phase of a great investment that started in 2018, with the Seabras-1 cable from Brazil to the USA.

Erik: How big was the investment?

Paolo: Seabras was a pretty huge investment if you consider the 3 fiber pairs, equipment, backhaul upgrades, and other additional costs.

Then in 2019, we have planned some further developments, and in 2020 we have announced new routes such as BlueMed, a brand new subsea cable connecting Palermo to Genoa. BlueMed will cross the Mediterranean Sea, providing a new, diversified route for capacity and IP traffic. At the same time, we are launching a new landing station in Genoa - directly connected to Milan - that is set to become the alternative priority access for other upcoming submarine cables looking for

a diversified entryway to Europe. If you consider that Sicily today is hosting landing stations for eighteen different subsea cables, you can easily imagine the importance of this project.

BlueMed will be a 240 Tbps cable and 1000 km long. It will be a game-changer for the Med Basin infrastructure and will consolidate Sparkle's positioning as an innovative player in the wholesale industry.

However, BlueMed is part of a wider project aimed at making the journey from the Middle East to Europe shorter, more efficient, and more reliable.

On the IP side, we have recently launched an IP PoP in Aqaba, Jordan, a strategic IP backbone footprint development for Sparkle. Broadly speaking, we are trying to establish new routes to interconnect Asia and the Middle East with redundant paths. But this is something that you'll see going live during 2020.

Erik: Because *Sparkle* is a global player, any other new parts around the world?

Paolo: We publicly announced just a few weeks ago the investment we did on Curie, a Google-owned subsea cable that directly interconnects Santiago, Chile, to Los Angeles. The cable is ready for service and we are already receiving pretty warm feedbacks from the industry. Curie is a new generation cable, a game-changer for the Latin American market. As we did in 2017-2018 with Seabras-1, we are changing the point of interconnection from North America to South America; the Pacific route from Latin America is historically quite complex, while instead on the Atlantic side we have a plethora of

recent subsea cables.

The Pacific side was something that was a little bit neglected; with Curie, we are taking a big step ahead, and we are pretty confident that this cable is going to have an effect on the whole Latin American set up as well as on the telecom industry in general.

Erik: We are now living in these unusual Pandemic times. Paolo, tell me what impact Covid-19 had on let's say IP transit dynamics? And maybe you can elaborate a little bit on the trends?

Paolo: During these challenging times, many other industry businesses started to look at the internet and TLC industries, saying: 'Okay, now let's see what they can do'.

The situation ended up being a test for the telecom industry.

I am pretty proud of what the TIM Group and the whole telecom industry did. Because telecom operators, OTTs, service providers, as well as the main local and regional players have demonstrated that we are a solid industry that knows well our business.

In pretty challenging times, we have demonstrated our ability, the technology, on top of the great commitment of the people. People never lost their focus on the business, keeping the network healthy and running.



It was like a stress test for the Telecom industry as a whole and the test has been successfully passed. We have proved that we can face hard times.

As far as *Sparkle* is concerned, we have witnessed a significant increase in traffic. Traffic profile changed a bit with live applications contributing massively to the traffic peak. We also saw the popularity of webinars, newspapers, forums increasing. I believe that this will now become part of 'new normal', and I believe this is something that we will see only gaining more importance over time. I am sure that *Sparkle* is prepared to face this growth. We are ready, and we are not scared about what can happen. Our people, our network, our technology, and our investments are so far well prepared to face this famous 'new normal'.

It seems to me that the trend is to move from global to local: more and more applications like gaming or video conferencing are bringing traffic local. We are traveling less; we are keener on having an efficient conversation within the same country, a region with applications that require low latency and great performance. For *Sparkle*, which has focus on Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America, the effort is to strengthen the regional interconnections with more Points of Presence (PoPs) close to the main cities and countries. We are ready and this new challenge is a great opportunity to support customers.

Erik: You have referred to 'new normal' — but I also know *Sparkle* as a very efficient and also out-of-the-box thinker from the strategic point of view. Can you share with us a couple of examples of that out-of-the-box thinking in the near future projects that *Sparkle* has for us?

Paolo: In the last couple of years *Sparkle* tried very hard to re-elaborate its business paradigm and I guess that 2020 is showing the first effects of this change. New routes, new investments, alternative locations, and new markets demonstrate our approach and idea. In other words, we want to be disruptive, we want to be new, innovative. We want to provide the right combination of technology



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and bring our industry towards new paths. And I mean physical new paths — changing the rules a little bit, proposing something new. Because, again, the pandemic was a tragic example but this industry has to react immediately to changes. We believe that we can set the path to being innovative and thinking new things, new way, 'new normal'; this is going to be our ticket to a bright future.

Erik: Future, or the near future — what do you see in the IP and Data globally coming at us. Because again, *Sparkle* is a global player, and you are among the top ten players in the world on the data side. So can you reveal a little bit how do you, or how *Sparkle* sees that near future?

Paolo: We are going to integrate the latest technology to expand

our IT package towards new locations, regions, and countries because we need to keep closer to the customers. We are keeping our attention on new assets like we did with Seabras before and Curie now. And something big will come again soon. Most of all, this stays in developing new ideas and a new approach to supporting the growth — not just the 'new normal', but the growth that is still steady and promising.

The video interview is available on CC-Media portal: <https://carriercommunity.com/cc-webinar-live-gallery/>

Written by Laura Matiukaite



EXECUTIVE INTERVIEW

Paolo Magrelli

Head of Sales Eterprise and OTT
Region Americas at Sparkle

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