

# Interview with: **Elisabetta Romano**

Chief Executive Officer at Sparkle



by: Laura Matiukaite at Carrier Community

Sparkle is the first international service provider in Italy and among the top ten worldwide, with a backbone of about 600,000 km of fiber spanning from Europe to Africa, the Americas and Asia and a complete range of IP, Data, Cloud, Data Center, Mobile and Voice solutions. On 28th–29th September, the company hosted the *CC-Telco Infrastructure Summit (TIS) 2020* Rome virtual event with a welcome speech by Elisabetta Romano, Chief Executive Officer at Sparkle, who opened the conference whilst sharing her views on the market digital transformation trends.

Elisabetta stands out as one of the most influential and experienced women tech leaders. During her thirty-year career, she has developed unique and innovative solutions, holding several positions with increasing responsibilities up to her recent appointment as Sparkle's CEO. Her vision and contribution to the Telecommunications, IT and Media sectors have been acknowledged in different occasions and, more recently, at the European Tech Women Awards 2020 hosted by the UK Department for International Trade.

We interviewed Elisabetta Romano to discuss the new dynamics in the global telecommunication market and Sparkle's plans for the future.

## **How does the new market situation and fast digital transformation impact your business and what are the challenges and opportunities to meet?**

The international wholesale market has been affected by a big transformation in the last ten years at least. On the one side, the demand for Internet and data bandwidth has grown significantly, with volumes increasing by 40-50% on a yearly basis, requiring higher capacity to keep up pace with growth. Customers' demand is also evolving: today much of the traffic is driven by video streaming, gaming and live apps, for which latency is crucial. On the other side, the industry is facing a new era marked by the entry of OTTs such as Google, Facebook and Microsoft that handle a large part of international Inter-

net traffic and often build their own infrastructure disrupting the traditional carriers' business.

This transformation poses a big challenge to wholesale carriers like Sparkle who need to continue to invest on state of the art and sustainable infrastructure to provide secure and robust connectivity to support latency-sensitive applications and, at the same time, differentiate their offerings on top of pure connectivity and act as enablers for the digitalization process.

Consider for example the enterprise market: the development of digital and cloud offers by Hyperscale Cloud Providers and content providers, the evolution of overlay connectivity models such as SD-WAN and SASE and, more generally, of technologies that enable the market presence without physical local connectivity networks, are driving demand for high bandwidth, low latency and secure connectivity to the Cloud. I believe that international operators such as Sparkle can play an important role in this sector, leveraging on the capillarity of their global network.

### What is your company focus in the coming years and investment plans?

Of course we intend to consolidate our leading positioning in the wholesale business investing significantly on new infrastructure to provide secure connectivity at industry hi-end performance level. We are launching new cable projects in the Americas and in the Mediterranean and we will open new PoPs to expand footprint and capillary in our core markets – Europe, the Mediterranean basin and the Americas – and in other selected geographies. Sparkle is also leading the industry on the evolution of connectivity services, heavily investing on business process automation across multiple carriers: we're among the first eight service providers to have MEF LSO Sonata API fully integrated in our Digital BSS stack, and we are starting implementation projects with other partner carriers. This is a key area of development as we are now in the dawn of new business models being created by the rise of ecosystems of interconnected service providers working together in a coopetition context and automated flavour; and at Sparkle we want to lead the change.

Although mature, Voice is still an important part of our business; we are working to recover efficiency and

reduce risks through process automation and adoption of Anti-Fraud solutions both for internal use and for enriching our Voice product portfolio. Also in this area our contribution to the industry is notable: we recently associated with CBAN (Communication Business Automation Networks) and we are actively participating to working groups aimed at defining requirements, reference architecture and governance models to use blockchain technology for the automation of billing and settlement processes.

Another key area of growth is in the Mobile sector, where we plan to expand our messaging and roaming solutions to address new markets and customer segments.

Most importantly, we intend to grow along the value chain and expand our product portfolio to support the digital transformation of enterprises. We will develop innovative software solutions focusing on two key areas in particular – Cloud and Cybersecurity – which in fact represent the pillars of enterprises' digital transformation.

Migration to the Cloud is recording high growth rates: more and more companies are evaluating to move their application workloads to the public Cloud and they need a reliable partner to go along with them in this insidious journey; we can help the enterprise in all phases of the project: from the definition of the requirements and of the business plan, to the selection of which cloud is most suitable to specific workloads at any given time, to the provision and orchestration of the platforms and of dedicated secure connectivity. An end to end solution blended with top-notch operation management and associated professional services. Cybersecurity is an increasingly strategic topic and I have personally worked a lot on quantum communications, a very important frontier for increasing security levels. The game is also played on the "simplicity" of the solutions in order to guarantee innovation without impacting on operations.

### Elisabetta Romano – Chief Executive Officer

Elisabetta Romano has thirty years of experience in the Telecommunications, IT and Media sector, where she has held roles with increasing amounts of responsibility. She has dealt with corporate strategies using an approach focused on sector development and

transformation, in particularly challenging environments and contexts in Italy and abroad.

She began working as a Software Developer for Alcatel in 1987. In just a few years, she held various technical roles, first becoming System Engineer then Head of System Engineers; operating in Antwerp (Belgium) as well as Milan.

Following her technical experience at Alcatel, her career continued and developed at Ericsson, which she joined in 1998. In 2012, she was Head of Operations Support Systems based in Stockholm, where she developed strategies for telecommunication operators, introducing new business areas to the market. In 2015, she became Head of TV & Media, based in Santa Clara, California, where she was tasked with developing innovative solutions and services and cloud technology for TV operators and content providers in order to offer modern video experiences.

At Ericsson in 2017, she was also Head of Core Network, a department focused on the development of connectivity services, especially those related to 5G mobile broadband. She coordinated a global organisation of three thousand resources while pursuing the goal of enabling communication service providers to connect people and devices in new ways. She implemented and planned long-term strategies together with Ericsson's board of directors in order to grow and maintain the company's leadership position.

On 1 July 2018, she joined TIM Group as Chief Technology Officer, with the responsibility of ensuring – at Group level – technological innovation and the evolution of Networks and Information Technology to support the journey towards digital transformation.

She was subsequently appointed Head of Chief Innovation & Partnership in November 2019.





## Press Release

# Elisabetta Romano Receives the “Corporate Innovation” Prize at the European Tech Women Awards 2020

Hosted by the UK Department for International Trade, the European Tech Women Awards 2020 celebrate the brightest and best women in tech from across Europe

Rome, 3 September 2020

**E**lisabetta Romano, CEO of Sparkle, received the “Corporate Innovation Award” at the European Tech Women Awards 2020 ceremony hosted by the UK Department for International Trade (DIT) and held yesterday at the opening of London Tech Week.

At their first virtual edition, the European Tech Women Awards recognize the excellence of 24 women in delivering revolutionary projects in the UK and Europe, supporting women’s rights and enhancing young talent to become the next generation of Tech Women.

Elisabetta Romano stands out as one of the most influential and experienced women tech leaders. During her thirty-year career, she has developed unique and innovative solutions across the Telecommunications, IT and Media sectors, holding several positions with increasing responsibilities up to her recent appointment as Chief Executive Officer at Sparkle, the TIM Group’s fully owned international service provider, first in Italy and among the top ten global operators worldwide.

“I’m very proud of this award. Technological innovation and digitalization processes are key for the next generation telecommunications” commented Romano. “I hope that we can work all together to make valuable cutting-edge solutions for our customers”.

This and next week the awards cere-

mony will be followed by six panel discussions where the winners will talk about technology, future and opportunities. In particular, Elisabetta Romano will be speaking on 4th September on the panel titled “When will the world be ready for new female leaders?”, sharing her success story and managerial path.

Sparkle and TIM are strongly committed to developing female leadership and reducing gender disparity in a traditionally male-dominated technological sector. Recently, the TIM Group has launched its “Women project: an inclusion initiative for all”, a three-year plan aimed at fostering equal opportunities through the creation of an ethical and respectful working environment and the enhancement of women’s professional development. Within the Group, the NoID women’s association has been set up to value TIM’s female staff and promote an inclusive and merit-oriented management style.

### Elisabetta Romano

Seasoned technology executive in fast-paced telecommunications, IT and Media industry in the U.S. and Europe. Business leader with proven ability to build and scale businesses with a forward thinking, problem solving-oriented approach. Excels guiding customers and partners through industry transformations with a solid record of accomplishment. Builds strong teams and cultivates deep relationships with key customers, technical and commercial partners.

### About Sparkle

Sparkle is TIM Group’s fully owned Global Operator, first international service provider in Italy and among the top ten worldwide, with a proprietary backbone of more than 540,000 km of fiber spanning from Europe to Africa, the Americas and Asia. Leveraging its global IP, Data, Cloud, Data Center, Mobile Data and Voice Platforms, Sparkle offers a full range of ICT solutions to Internet Service Providers, OTTs, Media and Content Players, Application Service Providers, Fixed and Mobile operators as well as Multinational Enterprises. Its sales force is active worldwide and distributed over 34 countries. Find out more about Sparkle following its Twitter and LinkedIn profiles or visiting the website [tisparkle.com](https://www.tisparkle.com).

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INTERVIEW WITH:

**ELISABETTA ROMANO**

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER AT SPARKLE

