

MED'2020 REPORT

The 28th Mediterranean Conference on Control and Automation, MED'2020, initially scheduled to hold on June 16-19 in Saint-Raphaël, France, finally took place on September 16-18 and was operated as a fully virtual event from Nancy, France. As usual, the conference was sponsored by the Mediterranean Control Association. It was technically co-sponsored by the IEEE Control Systems Society, the IEEE Robotics and Automation Society and supported by Université de Lorraine and more precisely by the Research Center for Automatic Control of Nancy, France.

The decision to postpone the date of the conference was taken at the end of March 2020 after following and monitoring carefully and continuously the World Health Organization's situation updates regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. The final decision was delayed for as long as we could, but it became clear, on July 1st, that an in-person event wouldn't be possible. Indeed, although the lockdown provisions had been relaxed, very restrictive measures still applied to air travel, gatherings of all kinds and all public facilities (e.g. the Congress Center and restaurants) remained closed.

Under the general chairmanship of Didier MAQUIN, professor at the Université de Lorraine and researcher at the Research Center for Automatic Control of Nancy (CRAN), the Organizing Committee was composed of Kimon VALAVANIS (University of Denver, USA) and Didier THEILLIOL (Université de Lorraine) as Program Chairs, Dominique SAUTER (Université de Lorraine) as Registration and Finance Chair, Jean-Christophe PONSART (Université de Lorraine) as Invited Session Chair, Mayank JHA (Université de Lorraine) as Tutorial/Workshop Chair, unfortunately, due to this crisis situation, no such event could be organized, and Jean-Philippe GEORGES was responsible for Publication and Publicity Chair.

Throughout this period of uncertainty, the Organizing Committee kept on informing attendees and authors on a regular basis, publishing the latest news and decision on the website of the conference.

In response to the Call for Papers, and after extending the initial deadline by 11 days (from January 20th to January 31th) 257 submissions were received, 37 of which were in invited sessions. The review process was carried out according to the original schedule. The 68 members of the international program committee sent 1511 review requests and 807 reviews were collected. The average number of reviews per communication was therefore closed to π ($807/257$)!

In order to avoid as much as possible that authors do not submit their final version in the situation of high uncertainty due to the pandemic, the Organizing Committee decided in March 2020 to change the registration fees for the conference. Each accepted paper could be uploaded in its final version to PaperCept after a non-refundable payment of 200 USD. This fee was intended to cover the costs already incurred by the organization of the event and to guarantee authors that their contribution would be included in the final program.

This policy was very successful as 181 papers were submitted in final form and only 11 accepted papers were withdrawn. On May 24th - once all accepted papers had been uploaded - the conference proceedings were finalized and submitted for publication, before the conference itself. Indeed, the accepted papers were made available on IEEE Xplore on September 1st, 2020

On the basis of the 181 accepted papers, a program containing 32 sessions including 6 invited sessions was built. The papers were divided into 5 parallel tracks over 3 days. As usual for that

conference the authors of the communications come from more 30 different countries. The scientific program was completed by three plenary conferences: “Modeling, estimation, and control in deep brain stimulation”, by Prof. Alexander Medvedev from Uppsala University, Sweden, “Passivity theory in cooperative control: A network optimization perspective”, by Dr. Daniel Zelazo from Technion - Israel Institute of Technology, Haifa, Israël and “Civil aircraft reduced order modelling, control and validation: numerical and experimental challenges”, by Dr. Charles Poussot-Vassal from ONERA, the French Aerospace Lab, Toulouse, France. With the consent of these three speakers, the videos of their talks have been published under a creative commons license on the conference website.

Due to time shifts, participation in a virtual conference can be problematic. Like other virtual conferences held during the first semester of 2020 and taking advantage of the services offered by Pradeep Misra on his conference management platform PaperCept, the Organising Committee asked all authors to submit a video of up to 12 minutes duration of their work. The provision of this video was not mandatory but highly recommended. A best practice guide for making this video has been published on the conference website with the names of the simplest tools for making it and tips for ensuring its quality. The deadline for uploading the videos was fixed to August 20th. Once again, this operation was a great success as 179 were collected and I thank all the authors very much for their investment in this work.

The online proceedings of the conference, accessible to all registrants and including the program, the PDF of the communications and the corresponding pre-recorded video, were published on September 12th.

The zoom platform was chosen to manage the video-conferencing. Chairs / Co-chairs of the sessions were asked to broadcast the videos according to the program schedule and to lead the session according to the presence or absence of the authors. Only a few papers were presented without the authors being connected to the platform, which allowed for a classic question and answer session in real time between the speakers and the audience.

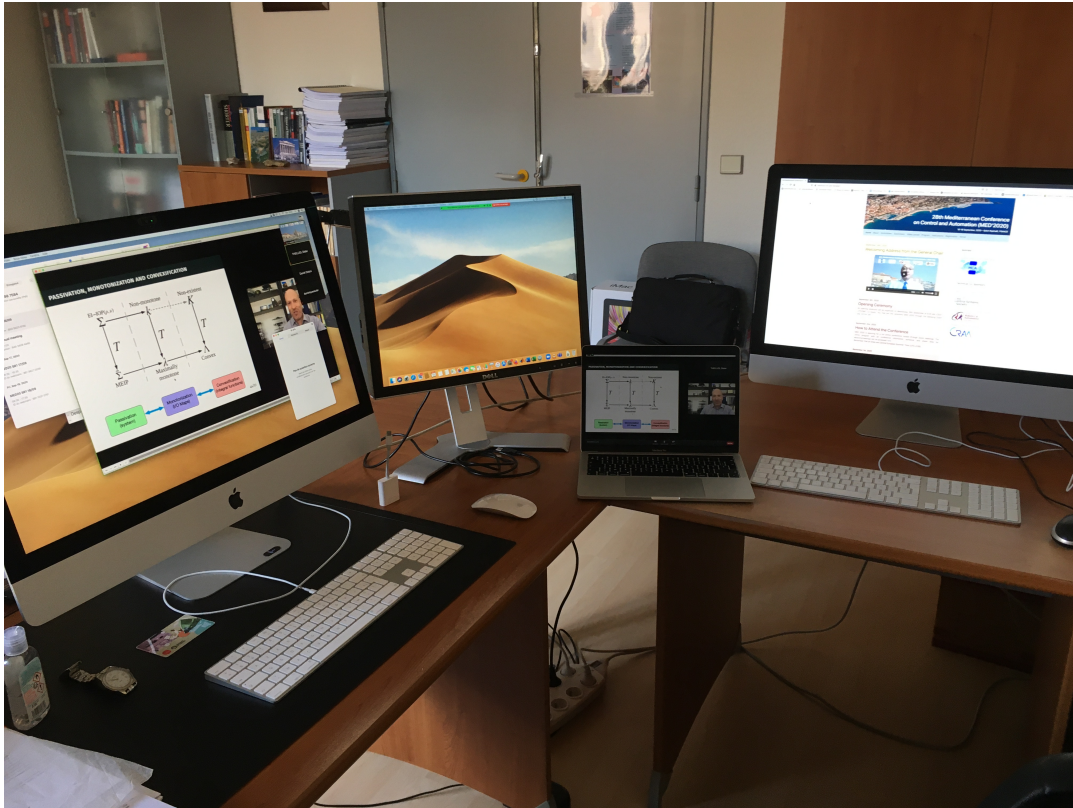
A PhD student was connected to each virtual room in order to assist the session chairs with technical concerns and he was prepared to step in and take on the chair duties if this latter was unable to do so.

Despite all the challenges and the inexperience of all the members of the organizing committee in setting up a virtual event, the MED'2020 conference was really a success. Based on the feedback received, participants were satisfied while being understanding and accommodating about the running of the event. Clearly, a virtual event cannot replace the informal human contacts which are so rich and which constitute the essence of such scientific event.

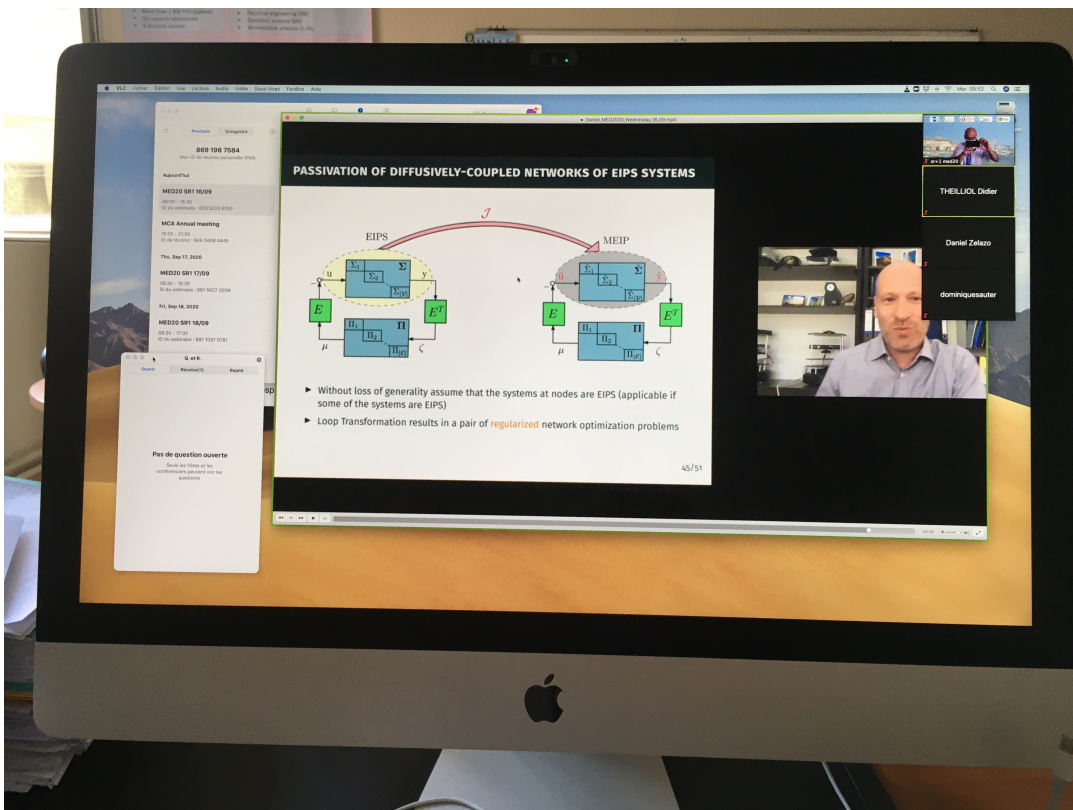
This was only the second edition organized in France after the one in 2008, which took place in Ajaccio, Corsica. I was obviously very proud and happy to welcome the "MED community" to Saint-Raphaël in this very nice and functional Congress Center and to offer the participants the possibility to discover this magnificent region.

I hope that this is only a postponement and that this pandemic, which has hit the whole world will recede or even disappear in order to resume activities in a more traditional setting. See you in Italy for the 2021 edition of the conference!

Didier MAQUIN, General Chair of MED'2020



General Chair's office turned into a conference control tower



Daniel Zelazo giving his plenary talk



The Congress Center of Saint-Raphaël



The town center of Saint-Raphaël