LA PAROLA A... LUIS JORGE ROMERO
DIRETTORE GENERALE DELL’EUROPEAN TELECOMMUNICATIONS STANDARDS INSTITUTE

Luis Jorge Romero
ETSI, the European Telecommunications Standards Institute, produces globally-applicable standards for ICT (Information and Communications Technologies), including fixed, mobile, radio, converged, broadcast and Internet technologies. ETSI is officially recognized by the European Union as a European Standards Organization and Global Telecoms Business magazine and website has recently named Luis Jorge Romero, Director General of ETSI, as one of the most powerful people in the telecommunications industry worldwide, joining top executives from the industry’s leading companies.

As Director General of ETSI, Luis Jorge Romero is in a unique position to get a global picture of the ICT industry and speak about the current trends and evolution.

In the global standard community, what is ETSI Role, how do you see its relations with the Ecosystem of other bodies and the impact of ETSI on the ICT Industry?

Thanks a lot for this opportunity. This question is very relevant. If I may, I would like to answer taking it from a slightly different perspective. ETSI is as global and relevant as its members are. Having said that, and being extremely proud of our Membership, I think ETSI strives to be the home for ICT standards, the place where our members feel at home to develop their standards. With that, we will try and be the good neighbours of our other SDO colleagues, for it is in our Members’ interest to have fluid relations, helping them globalize their work in standards. And we will try and influence our partner SDOs, to make things easier to our members.

ETSi is recognized as the European reference standard body for Telecommunications in Europe; what is ETSI role in Europe and the relations between ETSI and the European Commission?

My personal view is that ETSI plays, I’d rather say, should be the reference for ICT standardization for the European Commission (EC). The EC should look at ETSI and search for ETSI’s advice in any question that relates to ICT standardization.

Because of ETSI’s status as recognized standardization development organization for ICT in Europe, there is a legal requirement for the EC to address its standardization requests to ETSI. However, I think our relationship should go beyond the legal, administrative requirement and evolve into one of a more strategic nature.

We appreciated many enhancement during your mandate. What are the most significant results according to you?

First of all, thanks a lot for your appreciation. Indeed, I have taken
relationships with the EC as a very important objective in my mandate. As outlined before, ETSI is in a privileged position to engage in a strategic relationship with the EC, and both, them and us need to benefit from it. Something I am quite proud of is that since I took my position we have achieved to establish a high level dialogue with EC officials. This shows in the day to day business, where ETSI is more and more regarded as a good example to follow and, beyond, we see how the EC starts turning on us when they have some specific ICT standardization requirements: happened in the Cloud space, where we run the Cloud Standards Coordination activity for the EC, repeated in the Smart Appliance Project that was pushed into TC SmartM2M from the EC, and is seeing some continuation in projects such as the second phase of the Cloud Standards Coordination or the engagement of ETSI in the IoT field which, as we know, is one of the flagship projects of the EC.

**ETSI is not only Europe now. We see in the over 800 and more members many companies all over the world, including APPLE. This means a changing role for ETSI in the global scenario and a transformation as a global player in standard. Significative initiatives has been launched in India and US. Can you explain the strategy to be global and the most significant results achieved?**

I think that ETSI is as global as the topics it deals with. I am quite convinced that none – or very few – of ETSI members would appreciate an organization that develops standards that are only “locally” applicable. ICT is global in nature. ETSI’s membership is also global in nature. So it is but logical that what ETSI produces is also global in nature. We won’t forget though our strong European roots, and those we should be proud of. As I was saying before, our strong link with the EC gives us a plus, including a nice key to access the European market. Each of the relevant regions in the world have their Standards Development Organization, one or several, as is the case in the US. And their objectives in their parts of the world are equivalent as ETSI’s with regards to Europe.

What ETSI tries to achieve is to be able to cooperate on a peer level with all these different organizations, so that the standards that our members develop – under the umbrella of such cooperation – is almost automatically recognized in the other regions in the world. And under this assumption, we are willing to offer the best services so that our members are proud to be part of our family, not just because we are the nicest, but also because we provide the best return to their investment.

Today ETSI can proudly say that it originated and is one of the biggest contributors to 3GPP (the 3rd Generation Partnership Project), home of mobile communications since UMTS (aka 3rd Generation) up to LTE and what will come in the future. Similarly, we also are at the heart and soul of the creation and developments of the oneM2M Partnership Project, in essence similar to 3GPP but this time devoted to the Machine-to-Machine communications, and which has already published its first release of the specifications. And in the middle, we have helped to the creation of the Chinese SDO (CCSA) and more recently to the creation of the Indian ICT SDO (TSDSI).

**We saw significant success in launching partnership projects, after 3GPP the OneM2M initiative. How can this one follow the 3GPP success story? Even some ISG are getting great momentum. How can you explain the success of NFV ISG? What is its future? Do you see any other ISGs recently launched that can be so successful? Why?**

Following what I was just saying, oneM2M is now in a very good shape. Its origins were quite bumpy, but now it is running at cruise speed. It will be challenging for oneM2M, as there are already proprietary solutions deployed in the marketplace. Anyway, we are already witnessing developments based on the oneM2M specification, and this is the best sign of the health of a standard; that the industry is ready to develop products to put in the market. If we do it right – and there is a lot of effort being put by the industry to make it right – we will see that time will just make all the different solutions converge (at least, many of them), and oneM2M counts with some of the more relevant players in this space, from all over the world.

ISGs are a great success story. Here, ETSI succeeded in setting up the right “container” to allow companies to come and quickly start working in what they want. With NFV, we could put this excellent container together with the willingness of many – if not most – of the big network operators around the world that believe and are ready to fight for their idea. And we shouldn’t forget that, in this domain, the operators are the customers – hence, are always right. So there you go! It didn’t take long before everybody else wanted to (or had to) join the initiative. And having an instrument like ISGs that allow participation for interested nonmembers makes is additionally attractive.
There are a few ISGs that I believe will also be successful, e.g. MEC (Mobile Edge Computing) or mWT (millimetre Wave Transmission). The topics are of high interest but, what’s more important, there are clear business drivers behind each of them.

For ETSI the future means further exploring the ISG model, probably doing some fine tuning – that has been postponed for a while already, and it’s about time to review it. And also we need to further investigate into new models that may bring new opportunities for ETSI to facilitate collaborative work in standards to our members (current and future).

Thank you for your answers; standard bodies sometime seem far away from normal people’s lives, also because standards take time to be developed, transferred into devices and networks and finally have an impact on people’s everyday life; how do you see the role of ETSI with regard to the everyday life? What are the most visible signals that Standards have changed and are changing the people life?

This can be the easiest or more difficult question to answer, depending on how you tackle it. Let me take it from a very pragmatic perspective and develop the case of changing people’s lives. I will just relate the case, and let the reader work out what those changes have been, including changes in life styles.

And my case is, yes, of course, mobile communications!

The 80’s. We start seeing the first mobile phones (should we say “transportable”?). Only for the few “chosen”. Some standards, not global.

The 90’s, and because the stubbornness of some and willingness of others, in Europe we achieve to develop
GSM. It wouldn’t have been possible without the standard. To understand the huge impact this little first step has had into our lives, we need to keep on going with history – and relate it to subsequent standardization initiatives. Did GSM change anything in our everyday lives? As a reminder, during these years we started to hear “I could leave my home without my wallet, never without my mobile”).

GSM spreads across the globe (the standard has enabled it; it is not just technology, it is a full business model and the creation of an ecosystem). And in the late 90’s, we see the need of globalizing the standard: UMTS will not only be ETSI (originator), but ETSI decides to partner and create 3GPP (1998). 2000’s, and we see the development of a new standard – UMTS/3G – and a number of enhancements – up to HSPA.

Everybody is struggling to make the case for mobile broadband and, all of the sudden (mid 2000’s), Apple comes out with its iPhone. This wouldn’t have been possible without HSPA (hence, all the standards evolution since late 80’s and ongoing). Has this provoked any change in people’s lives?

2010’s, hunger for data is a fact, and now the run is for the next generation, that comes in the form of yet another standard, son of 3GPP: LTE. Explosion of Smartphones everywhere. Applications. Different from the 80’s? And what about life styles? And businesses?

I love this example.

We devoted several questions about the global scenarios, now look at the future, what are the main Standardization Technical Topics and Trends for 2020 and Beyond? Where do you see the ETSI work heading in the next years?

This is a very tricky question! Historically, we have always failed in our predictions of technology for the future. Paraphrasing Bill Gates, we always overestimate what we will achieve in the next 2 years and underestimate what we will do in the next 10. So at the risk that someone will read this in 5-6 years time and see how wrong I was, I will nevertheless look up my crystal ball to say that the technical topics and trends for 2020 and beyond will be: Internet of Things (or everything connected and communicating), security, software-ization (if that’s a proper word, that goes beyond virtualization) and, of course, more on the evolution of our communication networks. ETSI should be ready to accommodate all this work and many other different members coming from sectors other than the ICT.

The ICT industry is requiring standards produced with faster delivery time, higher technical quality and greater assurance of interoperability, we see a trend for a stronger role of Open Source Communities, what are your final reflections on the Open Source impact and Standard Evolution? Open Source and Standards are complimentary or alternative? In which scenario Open Source can have a key role? Is ETSI doing something for Open Source Software? This is an excellent question. I actually see Open Source from two different angles. One is related to pure technical development and “ways of doing”, i.e. methods and processes. The other relates to licensing and partnership. I think that we need to address both aspects in ETSI, but making sure that we don’t mix both up. And we are already taking steps in this direction.

With regards to methods and processes, our aim is learning how the Open Source community – or should I say the IT community – works in fast development and delivery, in short cycles. Whilst not forgetting or relaxing what makes of standards a solid reference for future implementations. Indeed, I think we need to embed the IT ways of doing where relevant in our existing processes, being ready to change/improve our process where feasible.

On the second part, we have started to study the different models and alternatives. This includes both licensing and ways of partnering. ETSI is of course deeply involved in the analysis of both as we understand it will be part of our future.

luis.romero@etsi.org
Luis Jorge Romero

Director General of ETSI, has more than 20-years experience in the telecommunications sector. At ETSI he has initiated a global standardization partnership for Machine to Machine communications, oneM2M, has overseen the rapid development of ETSI’s Industry Specification Group on Network Functions Virtualization, and has driven the implementation of the ETSI Long Term Strategy, an ambitious plan to prepare the institute for the future.

Previously he has held diverse Director positions in Spain, Morocco and Mexico, predominantly with Telefonica. As Global Director for International Roaming and Standards, and Director of Innovation and Standards, he oversaw Telefonica’s participation in global standardization activities, and participated directly in the work of the NGMN (Next Generation Mobile Networks) Alliance and in the GSM Association (GSMA). Before joining ETSI in July 2011, he held the position of Director General of Innosoft and was also a partner and board member of Madrid-based Innology Ventures •