



Women in Microwaves

Interview with Dr. Dominique Schreurs: The Road to Becoming the First Female MTT-S President

■ Sherry Hess and Wenquan Che

Dr. Dominique Schreurs (Figure 1), full professor at the University of Leuven in Belgium and long-time serving Member of the IEEE, has recently been named president of the IEEE Microwave Theory and Techniques Society (MTT-S). In the following interview, the first woman to hold the title of MTT-S president shares her thoughts on her goals for the future of the MTT-S and women in engineering with readers of *IEEE Microwave Magazine (MM)*. This new “Women in Microwaves” (WIM) column serves as a platform for WIM-related events and contributions from distinguished female professionals in the microwave/RF domain.

Dr. Schreurs has kindly taken time from her extremely busy schedule to comment on her new role and encourage other women with her inspiring stories of her experiences as a woman

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engineer. We all, men and women alike, wish her the best in her new role and look forward to her leadership in the future.

MM: Congratulations on becoming the first female president of the IEEE MTT-S. What are your key motivations for taking on this role?

Dominique Schreurs: Thanks. After having served for nine years on the Administrative Committee (AdCom) as an elected member, I was strongly interested in expanding my involvement in the MTT-S and continuing to serve MTT-S members.

MM: What are some of the growth experiences you have had in your career that brought you to this role?

Schreurs: When I was in high school, the majority of schools in my country, Belgium, were single-gender only. To start engineering at university, there was a tough entrance exam in mathematics. Every week, the boys in the boy's schools in my hometown received extra math classes to prepare for this exam during the free afternoons; I was not allowed to attend these extra classes, which made it harder for me to prepare for the entrance exam, but nevertheless I succeeded. In high school, I was the only girl in my year to take the combination of Latin and eight hours of mathematics.

MM: Are there any particular experiences and/or people in your career that stand out in your mind as having helped you to succeed in general and particularly in being tapped for this prestigious role?

Schreurs: This is a hard question as there have been several people throughout the years who have supported me in moving forward to take on next-level challenging roles. My answer is limited to a few names, but I would like to acknowledge all persons who crossed my path.

First of all, my parents, who were teachers, and my brother have always strongly supported me to move forward. Whereas my teachers in high school advised me to attend a local university not offering engineering, it is



Figure 1. MTT-S President Dominique Schreurs. (Photo courtesy of Lyle Photos, Atlanta, Georgia.)

thanks to my family that I moved away to a different city to pursue engineering studies. This may sound straightforward nowadays, but it wasn't obvious at that time, in my country.

My first experience with AdCom operation is when Dylan Williams (Figure 2) approached me to become chair of Technical Committee (TC) 10 (Technical Committee on Microwave Measurements). I had joined the

committee quite recently, and it hadn't crossed my mind yet to volunteer for the TC chair position. At the end of my term as TC chair, Dick Snyder, who was Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) chair at the time, involved me in the TCC operation; shortly thereafter, he proposed to nominate me for the MTT-S AdCom elections. I ran via the membership-at-large elections and was elected the first time. In my first AdCom meeting as elected member, I remember Jerry Hausner telling me, "Welcome to the MTT-S family," and, over the years I have come to understand better what this means. The first person who encouraged me to run for president-elect of the MTT-S was the late Kiyo Tomiyasu. At that time, I was still too junior on the AdCom, but he made me think about running one day, which eventually I did (Figure 3).

MM: What is your vision for how you will lead MTT-S? In general, do you have any particular goals you want to achieve or changes you will be working toward?

Schreurs: When I became MTT-S president unexpectedly, due to the sudden passing of 2018 MTT-S President Prof. Tom Brazil, I was still working on setting my vision for my original term



Figure 2. Dr. Schreurs with Dylan Williams. (Photo courtesy of Lyle Photos, Atlanta, Georgia.)



Figure 3. Dr. Schreurs chairing a session. (Photo courtesy of Lyle Photos, Atlanta, Georgia.)

as president in 2019. Therefore, in the initial phase, I am continuing in the footsteps of Prof. Brazil and trying to realize his 2018 plans as best as possible, with the help of the MTT-S AdCom chairs and members.

One of my goals, which aligned with Prof. Brazil's plans, is to find ways to enhance member experience. Intentionally, I am using the word *experience*, which in my view is more than member value.

Another goal is to involve young professionals (YPs) more actively in AdCom operations. YPs are our future, and they often have innovative ideas that are well tailored to today's societal developments (for instance, better use of social media).

A third goal is to plant more seeds around the world, meaning to involve local volunteers more actively in Chapter and AdCom operations. Today, a lot can be achieved by means of WebEx-type meetings. Therefore, physical presence at meetings has become less essential, so a broader range of volunteers can now become more involved.

MM: More particularly, as a female in a largely male-dominated industry, what do you intend to bring to the Society in terms of diversity?

Schreurs: More awareness about diversity—and not limited to gender diversity. MTT-S membership represents a strong international community,

and I feel that awareness about geographical and cultural diversity can still be improved. Also, in terms of membership experience, the MTT-S AdCom needs to continue its efforts to better reach wireless engineers in industry.

MM: You have been very involved over the years in WIM efforts during European Microwave Week (EuMW) and elsewhere to support and encourage women to enter the engineering industry. Do you have any specific plans for furthering our efforts to support, mentor, and network with women in the MTT-S?

Schreurs: Thanks. My first WIM event was at the International Microwave Symposium (IMS) in 1996. I was a Ph.D. degree student at the time, and I will never forget the WIM reception in a high-rise building in San Francisco. Actually, IMS1996 coincided with my first trip to the United States. Over the years, I always attended

the WIM events at IMS, except this year in 2018 when I had to attend another function as MTT-S president. In 2008, I served on the EuMW Steering Committee, and then I took the initiative to have EuMW also host a WIM event, sponsored by the MTT-S. The WIM event is no longer just another reception—over the years, the networking has grown, and interactions between female MTT-S members now continue well beyond the WIM events.

The present MTT-S AdCom WIM subcommittee is working on extending the number of WIM events at MTT-S conferences, in part with the help of external sponsors. In this way, a larger percentage of the MTT-S membership can be reached, compared to only the attendees at the major microwave conferences.

MM: Do you think, as a woman member of MTT-S, that the culture has changed as a result of efforts made by yourself and other WIM members to bring attention to and improve diversity?

I am continuing in the footsteps of Prof. Brazil and trying to realize his 2018 plans as best as possible, with the help of the MTT-S AdCom chairs and members.

Schreurs: Together with Kate Remley, we managed to pass an AdCom motion a number of years ago that all written AdCom documents should be phrased to be gender neutral. Since then, we no longer have the “chairman’s dinner” at IMS or an “ombudsman,” as examples. All official Society texts were revisited at that point of time. Today, there is still oral use of the old terms from time to time, but it is improving.

MM: Young women especially need encouragement and inspiration to feel empowered as engineers. How do you think you can use your position to provide a positive role model for these women?

Schreurs: I sensed that my new role is inspiring young female students when two female students from Texas walked up to me at the IMS exhibition in Philadelphia this spring. They were very nervous at first to approach me, but we had a pleasant

and constructive conversation.

It may be a coincidence, but right now half of the Ph.D. degree students I am supervising or cosupervising are female. It is my experience that female students often require more encouragement to convince them about their abilities.

MM: Along these same lines, do you have any suggestions for young women engineers in terms of career development?

Schreurs: Follow your interests. Do not think in terms of “female/male” professions.

MM: Are there any other comments you'd like to share at this time? Any words of advice or encouragement to other female members of our Society?

Schreurs: Feel welcome to contact me with your suggestions/questions. My e-mail inbox (dominique.schreurs@ieee.org) is open 24/7.

