Early this year, the IEEE Robotics and Automation Society (RAS) was faced with a major challenge when our president, Ning Xi, became unable to perform the duties of his office. We had to react quickly to stay operational and properly deal with the multiple important decisions facing our Society. Together with the IEEE, the RAS Administrative Committee (AdCom) held a special meeting to find a solution. In accordance with the RAS constitution and bylaws and with IEEE bylaws, the AdCom decided to remove Ning Xi from the office and elected me to be the new president of the RAS for the 2018–2019 term.

During this year’s IEEE International Conference on Robotics and Automation (ICRA) in Brisbane, Australia, we held a Town Hall meeting dedicated to discussing the situation with all attending members. The current president of the IEEE, James A. Jefferies, and the IEEE managing director for Technical Activities, Mary Ward-Callan, attended this meeting. In addition to myself, panel members available to answer questions included Torsten Kroeger, vice president of RAS Conference Activities; Zhidong Wang, vice president of RAS Electronic Products and Services; Yasushi Nakauchi, vice president of RAS Financial Activities; Dominik Boesl, vice president of RAS Industrial Activities; Nancy Amato, vice president of RAS Member Activities; Eugenio Guglielembali, vice president of RAS Publication Activities; and Lianqing Liu, vice president of RAS Technical Activities (Figure 1).

The goal was to inform everyone about this case and to maximize transparency. Overall, the many questions raised and the detailed answers given demonstrated that the RAS is functioning well. Even in difficult times, we are able to listen and identify solutions.

In addition, I would like to mention that, when I was elected president of our Society, I had served as president-elect for just three months: my term as president was supposed to start in January 2020. The president-elect typically installs a long-range planning committee to discuss future directions and potential goals for our Society, which he or she aims to carry out while serving as president. I had to step into the presidency without such an opportunity to plan, but I will dedicate myself to the challenges facing the RAS.

For example, the RAS is not growing at the same rate as IEEE Societies in other areas, such as in computer vision, pattern recognition, and machine learning. Here, we need to identify the reasons and investigate how we can attract more members, especially representatives from industry. At the same time, we need to investigate how to deal with open source publication strategies, which will require innovative models for financing our publication media. A further issue will be monitoring our technically and financially (co)sponsored conferences, which will impose an enormous burden on our volunteers.

Our Society has proven to be robust against unexpected difficulties, even in times where there are substantial challenges ahead. Our flagship conference, ICRA, once again demonstrated an exciting interaction within the RAS. I look forward to a great collaboration with all of our Society members in the remaining 18 months of my presidency.

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