

## 1995-2005: Ten Years of WG CEF How the story began!

**W**eather does not know any border, and if you intend to make weather forecasts for more than a few hours, you have to look beyond the borders of your country. This was well known from the very beginning and therefore international co-operation was immediately organised after the build-up of the National Meteorological Services (NMS's) in the developed States – within IMO at first and WMO now.

This co-operation not only includes the exchange of data and products and maintenance of the relevant infrastructure, but also conferences and meetings of the representatives of the NMS's. The latter often involve Directors and experts in their respective subjects, but rather seldom people involved in operational weather forecasting. That is also due to the fact that after the advent of the first NWP-models, the focus of interest was shifted more from the manual work of forecasters towards computing and modelling. With advanced progress in this field, the impression was given that the problem of weather forecasting was generally solved and that contributions by forecasters to that cause were less and less important. The perception was that operational forecasting was and is of general interest only when the forecasts dramatically failed or a warning was missing in the case of a significant weather event! In these cases, however, it was often only the forecasters that were accused to be responsible for the failure.

One of these events was the storm in October 1987 that hit southern England and was poorly predicted by forecasters at the Met Office, with their short-term model guidance providing misleading signals. In this case, Météo-France provided a better solution and the Director of the Met Office, Prof Julian Hunt, concluded that direct contact between both Met Services could have been highly beneficial. He subsequently proposed the development of a well organised bi-or multi-lateral co-operation between forecasters of the European NMS's and promoted this idea in the early 1990's.

In other parts of Europe also, there were very few direct contacts between forecasters beyond national borders at this time. One of the few exceptions (and a good example of effective co-operation for a special purpose) was the Warning Service for Lake Constance in central Europe, carried out jointly by the forecasters of Deutscher Wetterdienst (DWD) and Meteo-Swiss. This was developed with the aid of mutual contacts and the need of an agreement before the warnings were issued. The service remains to this day.

In the early 1990's there were some other important developments that influenced the idea to create an organ for the co-operation between the forecasters of the different NMS's. After the end of the "Cold war", contacts between western and eastern Europe increased dramatically. This was also true for the respective NMS's and as one of the follow-up actions, forecasters from eastern Europe got the first chance to visit their colleagues in the west. I remember some events in Offenbach, organised by DWD, to which forecasters from the NMS's in eastern Europe were particularly invited and at which were demonstrated the methods of work and the products provided by RSMC Offenbach following a relevant recommendation of WMO. Contacts with our westerly neighbours were also enhanced in this time. Twice a year, the Directors of Météo-France and DWD met and agreed upon measures for better co-operation between both Services. One of the actions was that mutual visits of forecasters should be organised and that was done – at first between the Central Offices at Toulouse and Offenbach and later between the neighbouring Regional Offices at Strasbourg and Stuttgart. Jean Coiffier who formulated concrete ideas for the co-operation between forecasters in subsequent years, was one of the colleagues responsible for these contacts from the French side.

Another activity of great influence was the creation of the series of European Conferences on Applications of Meteorology (ECAM), with the first one held at Oxford in 1993 and the second one at Toulouse in 1995. Since weather forecasting is surely the most important application of the science of meteorology, it was clear that contributions from forecasters also had to be considered and included in the Conference programme of these Conferences. They indeed provide one of the rare occasions to speak on actual forecast problems or new methods, e.g. for nowcasting and very-short-range forecasting.

During preparations for the second ECAM, a proposal was made by Prof Hunt and others to establish a working group to deal with the possibilities of organised co-operation between forecasters of the NMS's in Europe. I was asked to act as convenor for this group.

As a first action, I sent a letter to all European NMS's asking for their opinion and proposed concrete ideas for a closer co-operation formulated by Jean Coiffier. Twenty-one of the thirty-five services to which the letter was sent responded positively. That meant that the majority of the European Met Services were in favour of the proposal to improve co-operation between the forecasters.

A first meeting of the contact persons appointed by the NMS's was organised during ECAM 95 in Toulouse. Representatives from the Meteorological Services of Belgium, Finland, France, Hungary, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom participated in the meeting and discussed a working paper prepared by the convenor who, of course, also represented DWD. Other already appointed members were unable to attend due to lack of resources.

The main question of the discussion was focussed on what were the real benefits of the proposed co-operation. It was agreed that the expected main advantages should be:

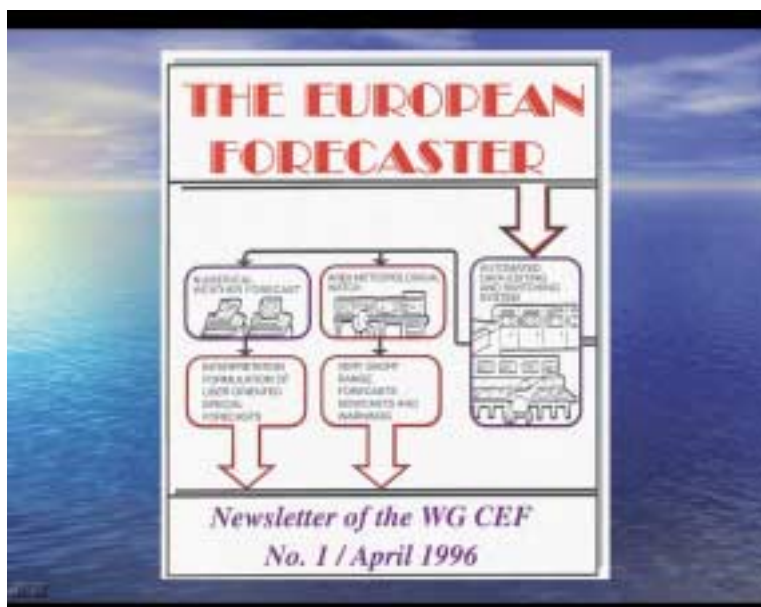
- **A direct improvement of operational forecasting in specific weather situations i.e. through direct contacts or exchange of warnings;**
- **An increase of personal knowledge and performance, through exchange of information, visits and training events.**

The aim of the working group was defined to promote, encourage and monitor activities in these directions.

In the framework of improved co-operation special proposals were formulated. The following proposals are compared with the actions taken subsequently and the situation we have today:

### Exchange of information about the Forecast Offices of the European NMS's:

This was done with aid of a Newsletter, in which a description of the structure and organisation of the relevant parts of the Services was given together with names and addresses of responsible colleagues.



Since that was published roughly ten years ago, the question arises as to whether this information is still valid. Therefore an update is strongly recommended.

### Production of a Newsletter issued twice a year containing interesting and useful information for forecasters:

This was produced once a year with a lot of useful information. Besides the information on the Forecast Offices just mentioned, there were articles describing examples of successful co-operation between forecasters, new tools for forecasters and special

weather situations of general interest. Other contributions were devoted to important topics like “The present and future role of the forecaster”, “Warnings and the exchange of warnings”, “Tools for manual diagnosis and forecasting”, “Education and Training in WMO RA VI” and others. The publication of the Newsletter must therefore be continued. However, the question remains as to whether all forecasters have access to it. This should be and must be addressed by the appointed members of the Working Group.

#### Promotion of visits and exchange of forecasters:

Mutual visits were organised and also individual forecasters got the chance to work at an Office of a neighbouring Met Service. This was done, however, only by few Services and on an irregular basis, obviously due to lack of resources.

Exchange of information during hazardous weather conditions and in the case of major nuclear or chemical accidents:

This very important proposal was indeed taken up by many Services and a bi-or multi-lateral exchange of warnings was partly realised. Meanwhile the EUMETNET project EMMA (European Multiservice Meteorological Awareness system) was created. It is described in issue N°.9 of the Newsletter.

#### Promotion of special conferences suited for forecasters as part of other conferences or as a special event:

That is especially true of the European Conferences on Applications of Meteorology (ECAM) and the International Conferences of Alpine Meteorology (ICAM). Many of the meetings of the WG CEF therefore took place in conjunction with these Conferences. A very special event was the Conference on the December storms of 1999 proposed by the former French member of the Working Group, Brigitte Benech, and organized by Météo-France in October 2000 at Toulouse. Reports on this Conference can be found in N°.6 of the Newsletter.



The realisation of the proposed actions implied the agreement of the participating NMS's and the willingness of volunteers to take over the responsibilities for the different tasks or to contribute to them. In order to organise this work, it was proposed to retain the Working Group as a permanent organ for forecasters of the European Meteorological Services. This was agreed by the NMS's involved and the WG CEF started its fruitful work.

Manfred **Kurz**,  
Former staff member of DWD and first chairperson of the WGCEF