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Impact of soil moisture initial conditions on multi model summer predictions over mid-latitudes

Constantin Ardilouze (1), Chloé Prodhomme (2), Lauriane Batté (1), and Michel Déqué (1)

(1) Meteo France / CNRS, CNRM-GAME, Toulouse, France (constantin.ardilouze@meteo.fr), (2) BSC-CNS, Barcelona, Spain

Land surface initial conditions have been recognized as a potential source of predictability at seasonal time scales. As an example, results from GLACE-2 (phase 2 of the Global Land-Atmosphere Coupling Experiment) highlighted the impact of spring soil moisture in summer near-surface air temperature prediction over Europe and Northern America with global long-range forecast systems (Koster et al., 2011, van den Hurk et al.,2012). Yet, few studies have explored such an influence over a sufficient hindcast period to produce a robust quantitative assessment. In the framework of the FP7-SPECS project, dedicated experiments have been carried out with June-August hindcasts from 5 distinct Atmosphere Ocean Global Climate Models initialized either by realistic or climatological soil moisture conditions on May 1st.

Realistic initialization leads to an improved 2-meter temperature prediction skill over parts of Europe in the multi model, particularly the Balkans peninsula which had been identified as a hot spot of soil moisture-atmosphere coupling (Seneviratne et al. 2006) However no improvement was found over North-American Great Plains in spite of the high potential of this region. Further analyses suggest that this lack of skill stems from a common shortcoming of the models. All of them tend to overestimate the positive feedback between soil moisture, temperature and precipitation with respect to the observations. Hence, tackling model systematic biases over the US Southern Great Plains appears as a necessary prerequisite for summer predictability enhancement.