Author’s response

Please find below the point-by-point response to the reviews, which includes all relevant changes made in the manuscript in respect to the first version. Note that with respect to Author’s responses published during the discussion phase, we provided additional explanations and we slightly modified some replies, in accordance to the final modifications made to the manuscript.
The response to the reviews is followed by the marked-up manuscript version.

Reply to Reviewer 1

The procedure is applied to the Balkan flood in May 2014 and the plausibility of the results is checked using observed and reported data. In this context also the limitations of the procedure are discussed. In view of an increasing importance of considering consequences within risk oriented flood management the paper addresses a relevant topic and could make a valuable contribution to the field. It is therefore suitable to be published in NHESS.

We thank Reviewer 1 for his/her positive comments on our work.

However, there are a number of points which should be taken into consideration to make the paper stronger. The most important ones are:

1) What is the definition of risk used in the paper? It would be more appropriate to use e.g. impact forecasting, particularly in the title and throughout the mansucript.

We reckon that in the first version of the manuscript the terms “impact” and “risk” were not correctly used. We carefully revised the use of these terms through the text following the standard definitions used in flood risk literature (see for instance page 2, lines 48-50).
*In particular, we modified Section 2 to clarify how the proposed procedure provides all the elements for evaluating flood risk, following the definition risk = hazard * vulnerability * exposure (recalled at page 3, lines 96-97). Section 2.2.2 explains how EFAS ensemble discharge forecasts are elaborated to estimate the expected flood hazard, thus taking into account the probability of occurrence of the forecast flood event. See also the reply to point ‘A” for additional details.*

2) What is the benchmark you use? I think also this term is not very appropriate in the title because actually no benchmark is available. I would suggest to reword the title 'An operational procedure for rapid flood impact assessment in Europe'

Following the Reviewer's suggestion, we reworded the title as 'An operational procedure for rapid flood risk assessment in Europe'

3) The main achievement of the flood impact forecasts is currently not sufficiently elaborated. The focus shut be on the added value of the impact forecasts: i.e. the evaluation of consequences. Knowing the consequences of the flood in advance allows to take cost-benefit considerations into account which in turn allows to prioritize emergency and response measures. You should then also discuss issues concerning the protection of human life against economic loss.

We addressed this remark raised by Reviewer 1 by adding a new discussion section in the revised paper (4.4), where we analyse the potential uses of the new procedure and discuss current limitations that need to be overcome before the full potential of risk forecasts can effectively be used for emergency management. This is addressed in particular in the following part (pages 20-21, lines 581-629): "As discussed in the Introduction, the availability of a risk forecasting procedure able to transform hazard warning information into effective emergency management (i.e. risk reduction) (Molinari et al., 2013), opens the door to a wide number of new applications in emergency management and response. However, to better understand the limitations of the procedure, as well as its potential for future applications, some considerations have to be made.

First, it is important to remember that EFAS is a continental scale system which is mainly designed to provide additional information and support the activity of national flood emergency managers. Therefore, the practical use of risk forecasts to activate emergency measures would need to be discussed and coordinated with services and policy makers at local level.

Second, the new procedure needs to undergo an accurate uncertainty analysis before risk forecasts can effectively be used for emergency management. While a detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, to this end, we recently started to evaluate the performance of the procedure by applying it to flood events recorded in the EFAS and Copernicus EMS databases.

Another point to consider is the approach chosen to assess flood risk. In the current version of the procedure, we decided to produce a single evaluation based on the ensemble forecast median to provide a straightforward measure of the flood risk resulting from the overall forecast. A more rigorous approach would require to analyse all relevant flood scenarios resulting from EFAS forecasts and estimate their consequences together with the conditional probability of occurrence, given the flood forecast itself (e.g. the range of ensemble forecast) and forecast uncertainty (Apel et al., 2004).While such a framework would enable the analysis

of benefits and costs of response measures in an explicit manner, it would also require to evaluate the consequences of wrong forecasts, like missing or underestimating impending events ,or issuing false alarms (Molinari et al., 2013; Coughlan et al., 2016). Given the difficulty of setting up a similar framework at European scale, during the initial period of service EFAS risk forecast will be used to plan "low regret" measures like satellite monitoring and warning of local emergency services. For instance, we are currently evaluating the use of EFAS risk forecast to trigger satellite rapid flood mapping through Copernicus EMS, with the aim of improving response time and detection of flooded areas. More demanding measures (e.g. monitoring flood defences, deployment of emergency services in areas at risk planning evacuation of people at risk), could instead be put in place upon confirmation from local flood monitoring systems".
The issue of human safety is not addressed in the current version of the EFAS risk assessment procedure because this information has not been requested so far by end users. However, in section 4.4 we also discussed this issue and its possible inclusion in page 21, lines 587-593): "For the same reasons, human safety and the protection of human life have not been addressed in this study, despite their importance in emergency management. The scale of application of the EFAS risk assessment is not compatible with risk models for personal safety based on precise hydrodynamic analysis, like the one presented by Arrighi et al. (2016), whereas probabilistic risk methods (e.g. de Bruijn et al., 2014) and the use of mortality rates calculated from previous flood events (e.g. Tanoue et al., 2016) are more feasible of integration and could be tested for next releases of the risk forecasting procedure".

4) Background information on different components of the system is sparse. For instance no information is given on the DEM used. Also, the model approach for flood impact assessment remains obscure. This should be clearly improved.

Following the Reviewer's remark, the revised manuscript now includes more information on data and methods used in this study, including exhaustive references about the DEM and flood impact assessment. For more details we refer to the replies to points "G" to "O".

5) Figures 4, 5 and 6 should be combined in a multi panel graph for better comparison between the different settings.

In the revised version we combined these figures in a single multi-panel graph, as suggested by the Reviewer.

Further remarks are given in the annotated PDF file.

Please find in the following a reply to all the remarks.

P1: suggestion to change the order to be in accordance with previous clause.

We changed the phrase as suggested by the Reviewer.

a) P2 L47: a definition of how the term risk is used in this paper would be useful. The procedure proposed here provides a flood impact forecast. Flood risk (probability*consequences) is not assessed.

As mentioned in the reply to Point 1, in the revised manuscript we carefully revised the use of the terms "impact" and "risk". To begin with, we explicitly introduced a definition of flood risk as suggested by Reviewer 1 in page 2, lines 46-49: "While early warning systems are routinely used to predict flood magnitude, there is still a gap in the ability to translate flood forecasts into risk forecasts, that is, to evaluate the possible consequences generated by forecast events (e.g. flood prone areas, affected population, flood damages losses), given their probability of occurrence."
*In addition, in the revised manuscript we modified Section 2 to clarify how the proposed procedure provides all the elements for evaluating flood risk, following the definition risk = hazard * vulnerability * exposure. Section 2.2.2 explains how EFAS ensemble discharge forecasts are elaborated to estimate the expected flood hazard, thus taking into account the probability of occurrence of the forecast flood event. Furthermore, in Section 4.3 of the revised manuscript we now provide an additional analysis of EFAS forecasts by comparing forecasted and observed return periods, to evaluate whether predicted flood hazard resulting from ensemble members is comparable with observations. Finally, in Section 4.4 we provide additional discussion on the approach chosen to quantify flood risk based on EFAS ensemble forecasts (see reply to point 1 for more details).*

b) P2 L49: please provide context what is meant by static.

We rewrote that paragraph, which now reads as follows (page 2, lines 49-52): "Generally, flood impacts are evaluated considering reference risk scenarios where a fixed return period is used for all the area of interest, for instance based on official maps issued by competent authorities (EC 2007). However, this implies some degree of interpretation to delineate flood prone areas and define impacts in case of a flood forecast."

c) P2 L57: check if repetition is needed

We deleted the repetition as it was not necessary.

d) P2 L60-65: One could argue that these tasks can already be done using flood forecasts. I think you should focus on the real added value of the impact forecast, which is the evaluation of consequences. Knowing the consequences of the flood in advance allows to take cost-benefit considerations into account which in turn allows to prioritize emergency and response measures. You should then also discuss protection of human life against economic loss.

As discussed in the reply to Point 3, the revised manuscript will focus more on the added value given by evaluation of flood probabilities and consequences, highlighting the possibilities offered in respect to standard flood forecasting. Regarding the paragraph considered by Reviewer 1, we modified it as follows (page 2, lines 60-65) :"At local scale, the joint evaluation of flood probabilities and consequences may not only increase preparedness of emergency services, but also allow cost-benefit considerations for planning and prioritizing response measures (e.g. strengthening flood defences, planning evacuation of people at risk). At European scale, the possibility to receive prior information on expected flood risk would help the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) in prioritizing and coordinating support to national emergency services."

e) P2 L60: s.a. the term impact forecasting seems to be more appropriate than risk forecasting

Please refer to our reply to Point 1 and A.

f) P3 L100: only three components are introduced but four sub-sections are following. You should consider merging 2.1 and 2.2

In order to keep consistency with the scheme in Figure 1, sections 2.2 and 2.3 in the first version of the manuscript have been placed into separate subsections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2. Note that we kept separated the descriptions of the map database and rapid flood mapping for the sake of clarity.

g) P4 L140: The reasoning behind this is not clear. Why don't you use the simulated hydrographs?

To clarify this part, we added the following paragraph in page 5, lines 145-150: "Since hydrographs simulated in the EFAS reference simulation are not referred to specific return periods, we use a statistical analysis of extreme values to derive peak discharges in every cell of the river network for reference return periods of 10, 20, 50, 100, 200 and 500 years. In addition, we extract flow duration curves from the reference simulation which are used together with peak discharges to calculate synthetic flood hydrographs (see Alfieri et al., 2014b for a detailed description"

h) P4 L142: Background information about data sources, e.g. DEM should be added, since this is referred to later on L421

The DEM used for downscaling the river network and running flood simulations is a component of the River and Catchment Database developed at JRC and described in Vogt et al., (2007). This reference was included in the revised manuscript (page 5, lines 158-163).

i) P5 L151: is it correct that only some river sections are shown?

The conceptual representation is correct, however it must be noted that there is not a 1:1 correspondence between 5km and 100m river sections, given the different resolutions. During downscaling of discharge information, where the coarse and high resolution river networks do not overlap, flood points are linked with the closest 0.1° pixel in the upstream direction. In particular, some 5km sections have no related section in the 100m river network, while others can have more than one. This additional explanation has been added in page 5, lines 151-158.

j) P5 L163: Is this taken into account in the LISFLOOD-FP simulations in some way?

We could not consider flood protections in LISFLOOD-FP simulations because we don't have information about the location and geometry of flood protection structures (e.g. levees). Therefore, LISFLOOD-FP simulations are run as if there were no protection structures. This additional explanation has been added in page 7, lines 190-193.

k) P6 L168: To which extend are these data available, for which fraction of river reaches from the whole network?

Following a similar request from Reviewer 2, the revised paper now includes an appendix with a list of the updates to the flood protection level map developed by Jongman et al.
The list shows the regions where values have been updated, the old and new values, and the source of information.

l) P6 L182: Please provide some background information on this approach.

   This information is taken from the map of World Cities available in the online ESRI database. The reference is now reported in the revised manuscript.

m) P6 L185: Please add a reference

We added in the revised manuscript a reference to the Corine Land Cover webpage on Copernicus website (http://land.copernicus.eu/pan-european/corine-land-cover)

n) P6 L187: The references do not provide sufficient details about these depth-damage functions. The reference Huizinga 2007 is not a scientific publication and not available to the public. Additional information should be given here.

In the revised manuscript (page 7, lines 213-221) we have provided additional information on the depth-damage functions used: "More specifically, we use a set of normalized damage functions to calculate the damage ratio as a function of water depth, spanning from zero (no damage) to one (maximum damage). The damage ratio is then multiplied by the maximum damage value, calculated as a function of land use and country's GDP, to calculate actual damage. Separate damage functions are applied for the land use classes that are more vulnerable to flooding (residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural). In addition, to account for the variable value of assets within one country, damage values are corrected considering the ratio between the gross domestic product (GDP) of regions (identified according to the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS), administrative level 1) and country's GDP."
Besides these additional details, in the revised paper we added a reference to a recent JRC report by Huizinga et al. (2017), which describes a novel dataset of depth-damage functions at global scale, including also the damage functions for Europe. This report will soon be publicly available.

o) P6 L195: What is the approach to derive these additional curves? Please explain.

We have added additional details on this point in page 7, lines 222-228: "For countries where specific damage functions could be found in literature, Huizinga et al. (2007) produced normalized functions based on this national data. In addition, the same authors elaborated averaged functions to be used for countries without national data, in order to produce a consistent dataset at European scale. The same approach has been applied in the present study to elaborate damage curves for countries not included in the original database, like Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina .The complete set of damage functions and the detailed description of the methodology are available as supplementary data of the recent report by Huizinga et al. (2017)"

p) P7 L216: but in large areas of your test area additional damage curves have been derived, cf. L195, L223. What is this test worth for the European perspective?

This comment has been addressed in page 21, lines 580-587:" … damage estimation has been included in the impact assessment upon request of EFAS end users, despite the known *limitations of the damage functions dataset, in particular the absence of country-specific damage functions for the majority of countries in Europe. From this point of view, the case study described in this work is representative of the level of precision that might be achievable in these countries. Future improvements can be possible with the availability of detailed, country-specific damage reports at building scale (i.e. reporting hazard variables and the consequent damage for different building categories) would allow to derive specific damage functions.*

q) P7 L236: Do you mean Sava river?

No it is correct, the Sana River is a tributary of the Una River.

r) P11 L310: please include references

We included a reference to the ISRBC report (page 12, line 353).

s) P11 L321: But in the reference simulation also dike failures have been included in the inundation maps, right? cf L269

True, but in forecast-based maps the effect of defence failures or strengthening could be considered only as hypothetical scenarios. Therefore we deemed more correct to evaluate them without taking into account dyke failures or strengthening. These considerations have been included in page 12, lines 355-359.

t) P11 L335: you should introduce this scenario explicitly and explain on which information sources it is based.

This scenario is actually the reference simulation described in Section 3.2, we corrected this oversight.

u) P12 L347: The term validation is not appropriate. You are rather doing plausibility checks on the different components of your system.

In the revised paper we used the term "evaluation" instead of validation (page 13 line 382).

v) P12 L353: On which basis have these sections been selected? How many are considered out of the total number of sections?

We used a confusing terminology here and we apologize for this. We considered here those areas affected during the flood event in the Sava River where satellite flood extent maps from

Copernicus were available. Areas were grouped considering the main source of flooding, either a tributary (e.g. Bosna) or the Sava River. For the Sava River, we considered two separate areas because of the large extent of the flooded areas, and because flood extent was not continuous. We could not consider other flooded areas for which satellite maps were not available. This explanation has been included in pages 11-12, lines 328-333.

w) P12 Table 3: reference simulation

Table 3was corrected as suggested

x) P12 L360: The footnotes could be aligned with Table 1.

We aligned footnotes as suggested.

y) P12 L363: s.a. (*see above?*)

We corrected this as reported in the reply to Point "v"

z) P13 L376: withstand

Suggestion accepted

aa) P13 L392: no details provided on DEM, please add

In the revised manuscript it is specified now that the DEM has a 100m resolution (see also Point 4 and h).

bb) P14 Table 6: simulated in reference simulation?

Yes, this has been amended.

cc) P14 L416: suggested to rephrase

We rephrased the sentence to eliminate the repetition.

dd) P14 L426: indicate or estimate

We replaced "report" with "indicate".

ee) P15 L430:but damage curves have been specifically derived for Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina (L195). This argument is therefore rather weak. How would such a calibration look like?

The explanation on this point was not clear and we apologize for this. As explained in the reply to point "O", for Serbia and Bosnia- Herzegovina we applied depth-damage functions derived from data for other countries and averaged over all the European countries. Therefore, the availability of detailed, country-specific damage reports at building scale (i.e. reporting hazard variables and the consequent damage for different building categories) would allow to derive specific damage functions for these countries and improve damage estimates (see Section 4.4, lines 584-587).

ff) P15 L433: You should also reflect on the completeness of official damage reports.

We included a brief discussion on this point in page 16, lines 478-486 of the revised paper: "The observed underestimation has to be evaluated considering the limitations of both observed data and damage assessment methodology. On one hand, the damage functions available for Croatia are not specifically designed for the country, as discussed in Section 2.3.Also,estimated damages include only direct damage to buildings, while infrastructural damage is only partially accounted for (e.g. damage to the dyke system). On the other hand, official estimates are affected by the absence of clear standards for loss assessment and reporting (Corbane et al., 2015; IRDR, 2015).Thieken et al. (2016) observed that reported losses are rarely complete and that it may require years before reliable loss estimates are available for an event".

gg) P15 L443: why? It would be interesting to see if the reference simulation is within the range of 25-75 quantiles.

The revised paper now includes results from the simulations of 25 and 75 quantiles for May 13.

hh) P17 L476: please state how many days

In the revised paper we added a specific discussion on the performance regarding lead time in page 17, lines 503-507: "However, it has to be considered that peak flow timing was rather variable across the Sava river basin, due to its extent. While in the Kolubara river the highest discharges occurred on 14and 15 May, peak flows in other tributaries were reached later (between 14thand 16th for Bosna River, on 16thfor Drina, on 17thfor Sana River), and on the main branch of the Sava River the flood peaks occurred after 17 May".

ii) P17 L491: It would be valuable to refer to the existing international frameworks on impact data collection, see also: Thieken, A. H., Bessel, T., Kienzler, S., Kreibich, H., Müller, M., Pisi, S. and Schröter, K.: The flood of June 2013 in Germany: how much do we know about its impacts?, Nat. Hazards Earth Syst. Sci., 16(6), 1519–1540, doi:10.5194/nhess-16-1519-2016, 2016.

We thank the Reviewer for the suggestion, in the revised paper we elaborated on this point adding references to the suggested paper and to reports by IRDR (2015) and Corbane et al. (2015).

jj) P17 L496: please name the benefits

We further elaborated this paragraph which now reads as follows (page 22, lines 620-624):"As such, forecast-based risk assessment should be regarded as plausible risk scenarios that can provide valuable information for local, national and international authorities, complementing standard flood warnings. In particular, the explicit quantification of impacts opens the road to a more effective use of early warning information in emergency management, allowing to evaluate costs and benefits of response measures."
Please note also that in the revised paper the benefits provided by the risk forecasting procedure are now mentioned and discussed in other sections (see reply to points "3" and "d" for more details)

Additional references

Corbane, C., de Groeve, T., and Ehrlich, D.: Guidance for Recording and Sharing Disaster Damage and Loss Data – Towards the development of operational indicators to translate the Sendai Framework into action, Report, JRC95505, EUR 27192 EN, 2015.

Coughlan de Perez, E. van Aalst, M. K. et al., Action-based flood forecasting for triggering humanitarian action, Hydrology and Earth System Sciences 20, 3549-3560, 2016.doi:10.5194/hess-20-3549-2016

De Bruijn, K. M., Diermanse, F. L. M., Beckers, J. V. L., An advanced method for flood risk analysis in river deltas, appliedto societal flood fatality risk in the Netherlands .Nat. Hazards Earth Syst. Sci., 14, 2767–2781, 2014, doi:10.5194/nhess-14-2767-2014.

ESRI map of World Cities, accessed on 06/03/2017 at http://www.arcgis.com/home/item.html?id=dfab3b294ab24961899b2a98e9e8cd3d.

European Commission, Copernicus Land Monitoring Service, accessed on 02/02/2017 at http://land.copernicus.eu/pan-european/corine-land-cover

Huizinga, J., de Moel, H., Szewczyk, W. (2017). Global flood damage functions. Methodology and the database with guidelines. EUR 28552 EN. doi: 10.2760/16510

Tanoue, M., Hirabayashi, Y., Ikeuchi, H., 2016. Global-scale river flood vulnerability in the last 50 years. Scientific Reports, 6, 36021.

Vogt et al., A pan-European river and catchment database, JRC Reference Reports 2007,doi:0.2788/35907

Reply to Reviewer 2

The authors present a first attempt to develop a flood impact forecasting procedure that is fully integrated in a continental scale flood early warning system. They demonstrate this system by benchmarking various components against a flood events in May 2014in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia. The paper builds on two directions of several previous works of the various authors: (1) the EFAS system that has previously been used for forecasting peak flows; and (2) the impact assessment module that has been used in several past risk studies for current and future conditions. In my opinion, this is a laudable effort – the need for such studies has been clearly vocalized in many past papers, and in many scientific and policy-related fora. I greatly appreciate the effort undertaken not simply to present the framework, but to try to benchmark it for an actual event. Of course, 1 event remains a limited benchmarking, but I believe that the benchmarking has been carried out in a way much more thorough to past studies in large scale risk modelling. The novelty here is not in the models themselves, which have been developed in pervious papers, but bringing them together for impact forecasting. The paper is well written and clear, and provides enough level of detail on the already developed models, without too much repetition.

We thank Reviewer 2 for his/her positive comments on our work.

I believe that the paper therefore is an important first step forward in this direction, and therefore merits publication in NHESS, subject to the authors being able to address the following issues:

1) L119-121: “In case thresholds are exceeded persistently over several forecasts, flood warnings for the affected locations are issued to the members of the EFAS consortium.” Please explain this statement better: which thresholds? And what is meant by “over several forecasts”?.

To address this comment we rephrased part of the section which now reads as follows (page 4, lines 122-129):“The reference simulation is also used to estimate discharge values for the return periods corresponding to 1, 2, 5 and 20-year at every point of the river network. All flood forecasts are compared against these discharge thresholds and the threshold exceedance is calculated. In case the 5 year threshold is consistently exceeded over 3 consecutive forecasts, flood warnings for the affected locations are issued to the members of the EFAS consortium. The persistence criterion has been introduced to reduce the number of false alarms and focus *on large fluvial floods caused mainly by widespread severe precipitation, combined rainfall with snow-melting or prolonged rainfalls of medium intensity".*

2) L161-162: "We first identify the maximum discharge predicted over the full forecasting period, calculated using the median discharge from ensemble forecasts at each river grid cell". It is not clear to me from this sentence how this works. Do you take the maximum discharge across the entire ensemble for each lead time? (e.g. for lead time 1 day take the max discharge of all the ensemble members at 1 day lead) Or is something else meant here? Please clarify.

This sentence has been rephrased as follows (page 6, lines 178-180: "At each grid cell, we first identify the median of the ensemble forecast given by the latest EFAS prediction, and then select the maximum discharge of the median over the full forecasting period (10 days)".

3) It is stated that the flood protection standards of Jongman et al. (2014) are used, and integrated with information from literature review and local authorities where available. In terms of transparency and reproducibility, I recommend a list (e.g Supplementary Information or in Appendix) showing the regions in which the values from Jongman et al were replaced, and which values were used.

Following the Reviewer's suggestion, the revised paper now includes an appendix with a list of the updates and additions to the flood protection level map developed by Jongman et al.
The list will show the regions where values have been updated, the old and new values, and the source of information.

4) In the validation of the inundation maps, the authors have chosen only to report the hit rates. I find this problematic, as a (theoretical) model that greatly overestimates flood extent would tend to have very high hit rates. Therefore, in itself it only tells half the story. I believe that it would be more prudent to also report the false alarm ratios. This is especially important, since in Table 3 it is shown that the simulations show a much larger flooded area than the observed datasets, which could be leading to the high hit rates.

We agree with the Reviewer on that presenting the results also in term of overestimation is necessary. To this end, in the revised version Table 3 now includes overestimation (or underestimation) ratios between simulations and all the available observations, to provide a more objective presentation of the results.
However, regarding the results in Table 4 we believe that it is more correct not to compute false hit ratio because, as discussed in the manuscript, we know that the available satellite flood maps underestimated the actual flood extent. As such, false alarm ratio scores would be low without being supported by reliable observations, giving an incorrect view of the performance (see page 12, lines 339-342).

5) With regards the validation of the flood risk (I think it would be better called “flood impacts”), expressed as affected population, on lines 414-415 it is stated that: “. . .results from the reference simulation match well figures reported for all the flooded counties of Croatia except for the Vukovar-Srijem County.” This is a very subjective statement: how is “match well” defined? For example, in the Osjek-Baranja Country, the observed dataset reports 200 people, whilst the simulated dataset suggests 1300 – i.e. a difference of 550%. I realise that the definitions used in the simulated/observed datasets are different, and so the direct comparison is difficult, but it would be more transparent to report the differences openly than disguise relatively large differences with ambiguous language.

We agree on that the evaluation of results requires the use of a more precise language. In Section 4.2 of the revised manuscript we modified accordingly the presentation of results, commenting the limitations of simulated impacts and focusing on the areas with larger differences between simulations and observations (page 16, lines 459-470).
Also, we carefully revised the use of terms “flood risk” and “flood impact” in the paper (see also the reply to points 1 and A raised by Reviewer 1 for a more detailed discussion).

6) One of the reasons given for the large difference in simulated damage between the reported and simulated dataset is that the damage curves applied have not yet been calibrated for Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia. If this is the case, is it even useful to include this information in the warning?

This comment has been addressed in the new Section 4.4, page 21 lines 575-587: “When designing the structure and output of risk assessment, it has to be considered that the type and amount of information provided must be based on users’ requests. As a matter of fact, different end users may be interested in different facets of flood impact (Molinari et al., 2014), but at the same time it is important to avoid information overload during emergency management. Again, finding a compromise requires a close collaboration with the user community.
For instance, damage estimation has been included in the impact assessment upon request of EFAS end users, despite the known limitations of the damage functions dataset, in particular the absence of country-specific damage functions for the majority of countries in Europe. From this point of view, the case study described in this work is representative of the level of precision that may be achievable in these countries. Future improvements can be possible with the availability of detailed, country-specific damage reports at building scale (i.e. reporting hazard variables and the consequent damage for different building categories) would allow to derive specific damage functions.”

7) In the conclusion, it is stated that the “Comparison of reported and simulated flooded areas suggests that the methodology enables to identify areas at risk well in advance. . .” Whilst the

results do indeed show some encouraging skill, I think the phrase “well in advance” seems like oversell. The 12th May forecast for the 14th May flood showed little sign of flooding. The impacts were rather clear on the 13th May, giving a good confidence warning 1 day in advance. It is of course subjective whether 1 day is “well in advance” – it depends on the actions that planners need to take.

We apologize for not having been precise on presenting the performance regarding lead time. To solve this issue, in the revised manuscript we modified this part of the conclusion by reporting the lead times provided by EFAS forecasts without additional comments, and we added a dedicated description at page 17, lines 503-512:” However, it has to be considered that peak flow timing was rather variable across the Sava river basin, due to its extent. While in the Kolubara river the highest discharges occurred on 14and 15 May, peak flows in other tributaries were reached later (between 14thand 16th for Bosna River, on 16thfor Drina, on 17thfor Sana River), and on the main branch of the Sava River the flood peaks occurred after 17 May. Thus, in a hypothetical scenario where EFAS risk forecast were routinely used for emergency management, on one hand there would have been still time to improve risk estimates thanks to updated flood forecasts. On the other hand, the forecast released on 13 May would have given to emergency responders a warning time of at least 2 days to plan response measures in several affected areas, chiefly in the Kolubara and Bosna basins.”

Minor comments:

a) L60: the authors refer to a paper by Ward et al., 2016 to support the claim that “flood impact forecasts are increasingly being requested by end users of early warning systems”. This facet is already discussed in Ward et al (2015), which would seem a more prudent paper to cite.

We agree with the Reviewer, in the revised manuscript we replaced the reference as suggested.

b) L131: “we decided create” to “we decided to create”; L222: wide spread to widespread; L368: “time o image” to “time of image”.

These typos have been corrected.

c) L179: Batista e Silva et al. (2012)→Batista and Silva et al. (2012)

The reference is actually correct, first author’s surname is “Batista e Silva”.

An operational procedure for rapid flood risk assessment in Europe

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Keywords: real-time, early warning system, flood hazard mapping, flood impact, economic damage, population, risk assessment

Abstract

The development of methods for rapid flood mapping and risk assessment is a key step to increase the usefulness of flood early warning systems, and is crucial for effective emergency response and flood impact mitigation. Currently, flood early warning systems rarely include real–time components to assess potential impacts generated by forecast flood events. To overcome this limitation, this work describes the benchmarking of an operational procedure for rapid flood risk assessment based on predictions issued by the European Flood Awareness System (EFAS). Daily streamflow forecasts produced for major European river networks are translated into event-based flood hazard maps using a large map catalogue derived from high-resolution hydrodynamic simulations. Flood hazard maps are then combined with exposure and vulnerability information, and the impacts of the forecast flood events are evaluated in terms of flood prone areas, economic damage and affected population, infrastructures and cities.

An extensive testing of the operational procedure is carried out by analysing the catastrophic floods of May 2014 in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia. The reliability of the flood mapping methodology is tested against satellite-based and report-based flood extent data, while modelled estimates of economic damage and affected population are compared against ground-based estimations. Finally, we evaluate the skill of risk estimates derived from EFAS flood forecasts with different lead times and combinations of probabilistic forecasts. Results show the potential of the real-time operational procedure in helping emergency response and management.

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1) Introduction

Nowadays, flood early warning systems (EWS) have become key components of flood management strategies in many rivers (Cloke et al., 2013; Alfieri et al., 2014a).They can increase preparedness of authorities and population, thus helping reduce negative impacts (Pappenberger et al., 2015). Early warning is particularly important for cross-border river basins where cooperation between authorities of different countries may require more time to inform and coordinate actions (Thielen et al., 2009).

In this context, the European Commission has developed the European Flood Awareness System (EFAS) which provides operational flood predictions in major European rivers as part of the Copernicus Emergency Management Services. The service is fully operational since 2012 and available to hydro-meteorological services with responsibility in flood warning, EU civil protection and their network.

While early warning systems are routinely used to predict flood magnitude, there is still a gap in the ability to translate flood forecasts into risk forecasts, that is, to evaluate the possible consequences generated by forecast events (e.g. flood prone areas, affected population, flood damages losses), given their probability of occurrence. Generally, flood impacts are evaluated considering reference risk scenarios where a fixed return period is used for all the area of interest, for instance based on official maps issued by competent authorities (EC 2007). However, this implies some degree of interpretation to define flood impact and risk in case of a flood forecast.

A few research projects are being developed where flood impact estimation is automated and linked to event forecasting (Rossi et al., 2015; Schulz et al., 2015; Saint-Martin et al., 2016), however to our knowledge these systems are still at experimental phase, and not yet integrated into operational EWS.

The availability of real-time operational systems for assessing potential consequences of forecast events would be a substantial advance in helping emergency response (Molinari et al., 2013), and indeed flood risk forecasts are increasingly being requested by end users of early warning systems (Emerton et al., 2016; Ward et al., 2015). At local scale, the joint evaluation of flood probabilities and consequences may not only increase preparedness of emergency services, but also allow cost-benefit considerations for planning and prioritizing response measures (e.g. strengthening flood defences, planning evacuation of people at risk). At European scale, the possibility to receive prior information on expected flood risk would help the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) in prioritizing and coordinating support to national emergency services.

In the present paper, we describe a methodology designed to meet the needs of EWS users and overcome the limitations mentioned so far. The methodology translates EFAS flood forecasts into event-based flood hazard maps, and combines hazard, exposure and vulnerability information to produce risk estimations in near-real time. All the components are fully integrated within the EFAS forecasting system, thus providing seamless risk forecasts at European scale.

To demonstrate the reliability of the proposed methodology, we perform a detailed assessment focused on the 2014 floods in the Sava River Basin in Southeast Europe. A large dataset for the evaluation of the results has been collected, which consists of observed flood magnitude, flood extent derived from different satellite imagery datasets, and detailed post-event evaluation of flood impacts, economic damage assessment and affected population and infrastructure.

The reliability of the flood mapping procedure is first assessed by assuming a "perfect" forecast, where flood magnitude is taken from real observations instead of EFAS predictions. The effect

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of flood defences failure is also taken into account. After that, we test the performance of the operational flood forecasting procedure, to evaluate the influence of different lead times and combination of forecast members.

2) Methodology

In this section we describe the three components which compose the rapid risk assessment procedure: 1) streamflow and flood forecasting; 2) event-based rapid flood hazard mapping 3) impact assessment. Figure 1 shows a conceptual scheme of the steps composing the methodology.

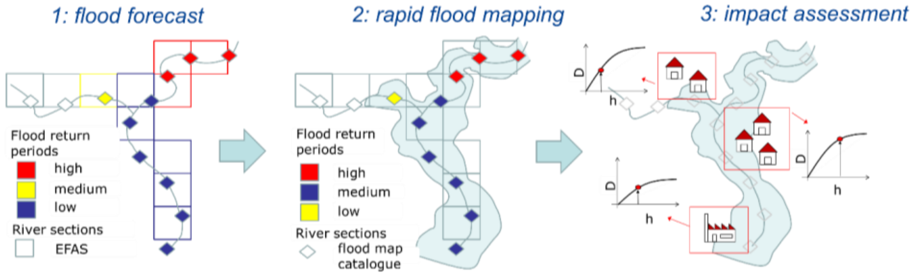

Figure 1: conceptual scheme of the rapid risk assessment procedure

The basic workflow of the procedure is the following:

- Every time a new forecast is available, we evaluate the river sections potentially affected and local flood magnitude, expressed as return period of the peak discharge;
- we identify areas at risk of flooding using a map catalogue, which defines all the flood prone areas for each river section and flood magnitude; these local flood maps are then compared against local flood protection levels and merged to derive event-based hazard maps;
- Event hazard maps are combined with exposure and vulnerability information to assess affected population, infrastructures and urban areas, and economic damage.

The described procedure is fully integrated in the existing EFAS forecast analysis chain and run in near-real time. When a new EFAS hydrological forecast becomes available (step 1), the risk assessment procedure is activated in those locations where predicted peak discharges exceeds the flood protection levels (step 2). When activated, the execution time depends on the extent and spatial spread of the affected areas over the full forecasting domain. Even in case of flood events occurring simultaneously in different European countries, the results of the analysis are delivered within one hour after the EFAS forecast runs are finished.

The following sections provide a detailed description of each component.

2.1 Flood forecast: the European Flood Awareness System (EFAS)

The European Flood Awareness System (EFAS) produces streamflow forecasts for Europe using a hydrological model driven by daily weather forecasts. We provide here a general description of the EFAS components, the reader is referred to the website (www.efas.eu) and to published literature for further details (Thielen et al., 2009; Pappenberger et al., 2011; Cloke et al., 2013; Alfieri et al., 2014a).

Hydrological simulations in EFAS are performed with Lisflood (Burek et al, 2013; van der Knijff et al., 2010), a distributed physically based rainfall-runoff model combined with a routing module for river channels. The model is calibrated at European scale using streamflow data from a large number of river gauges and meteorological fields interpolated from point measurements of precipitation and temperature. Based on this calibration, a reference hydrological simulation for the period 1990-2013 is run for the European window at 5 km grid spacing, and updated daily. This reference simulation provides initial conditions for daily forecast runs of the Lisflood model driven by the latest weather predictions, which are provided twice per day with lead times up to 10 days. The reference simulation is also used to estimate discharge values for the return periods corresponding to 1, 2, 5 and 20-year at every point of the river network. All flood forecasts are compared against these discharge thresholds and the threshold exceedance is calculated. In case the 5 year threshold is consistently exceeded over 3 consecutive forecasts, flood warnings for the affected locations are issued to the members of the EFAS consortium. The persistence criterion has been introduced to reduce the number of false alarms and focus on large fluvial floods caused mainly by widespread severe precipitation, combined rainfall with snow-melting or prolonged rainfalls of medium intensity.

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To account for the inherent uncertainty of the weather forecast, EFAS adopts a multi-model ensemble approach, running the hydrological model with forecasts provided by the European Centre for Medium Weather Forecast (ECMWF), the Consortium for Small-scale Modelling (COSMO), and the Deutscher Wetterdienst (DWD).

2.2 Rapid flood hazard mapping

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2.2.1 Database of flood hazard maps

Linking streamflow forecast with inundation mapping is complex because inundation modelling tools are computationally much more demanding than hydrological models used in early warning systems, which currently prevent a real time integration of these two components. To overcome this limitation, in the present work we decided to create a catalogue of flood inundation maps covering all the EFAS river network and linked to EFAS streamflow forecast.

The hydrological input for creating the map catalogue is derived from the streamflow dataset of the EFAS reference simulation, described in Section 2.1. The information is available on the EFAS river network at 5km grid spacing for rivers with upstream drainage areas larger than 500 km^2. Since hydrographs simulated in the EFAS reference simulation are not referred to specific return periods, we use a statistical analysis of extreme values to derive peak discharges in every cell of the river network for reference return periods of 10, 20, 50, 100, 200 and 500 years. In addition, we extract flow duration curves from the reference simulation which are used together with peak discharges to calculate synthetic flood hydrographs (see Alfieri et al., 2014b for a detailed description).

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The streamflow data is then downscaled to a high-resolution river network (100m), where reference sections are identified at regular spacing along stream-wise direction each 5km. 100m sections are then linked to a section of the 0.1° river network, in order to assign to each section a synthetic discharge hydrograph. Where the coarse and high resolution river networks do not overlap, flood points are linked with the closest 0.1° pixel in the upstream direction. Note that there is not a 1:1 correspondence between 5km and 100m river sections. In particular, some 5km sections have no related sections in the 100m river network, while others can have more than one.

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Figure 2 shows a conceptual scheme of the two river networks. The DEM used to derive the 100m river network is a component of the River and Catchment Database developed at JRC and described in Vogt et al., (2007). The same DEM is used also to run flood simulations at 100 m resolution at each 100m river section using the 2D hydrodynamic model LISFLOOD-FP(Bates et al., 2010), fed with synthetic hydrographs. Therefore, for every 100m river section we derive flood maps for the 6 reference return periods.

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The flood maps related to the same EFAS river section (i.e. pixel of the 5km river network) are merged together, to identify the areas at risk of flooding because of overflowing from a specific EFAS river section, and archived in the flood map catalogue. The merging is performed separately for each return period, in order to relate flooded areas with the magnitude of the flood event.

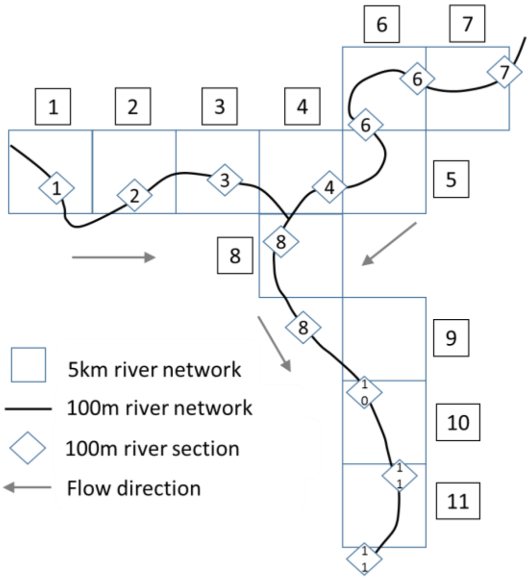

Figure 2: conceptual scheme of the EFAS river network (5 km, squares) with the high resolution network (100m) and river sections (diamonds) where flood simulations are derived. The sections of the two networks related are indicated by the same number. Adapted from Dottori et al. (2015).

2.2.2 Event-based mapping of flood hazard

This step of the procedure provides a rapid estimation of the expected flood hazard, using the database of flood maps described in Section 2.2.1 to translate EFAS discharge forecasts into event-based flood mapping.

At each grid cell, we first identify the median of the ensemble forecast given by the latest EFAS prediction, and then select the maximum discharge of the median over the full forecasting period (10 days). The value is compared with the reference long-term climatology to calculate the return period. In this way, the range of ensemble forecasts is taken as a measure of the probability of occurrence, while forecast return periods allows to estimate the magnitude of predicted flood events.

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Then, predicted streamflow is compared with the local flood protection level, and river grid cells where the protection level is exceeded are considered to activate the impact assessment procedure. Flood protection levels are given as the return period of the maximum flood event which can be retained by the defence measures (e.g. dykes). The map of flood protections used is based on risk-based estimations for Europe developed by Jongman et al. (2014), integrated, where available, with the actual level of protection found in literature review or assessed by local authorities (see Appendix for more details).Note that flood protections are not considered in LISFLOOD-FP simulations because at European scale there is no consistent information about the location and geometry of flood protection structures (e.g. levees). As such, LISFLOOD-FP simulations are run as if there were no protection structures.

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Selected river cells are reclassified into classes according to the closest return period exceeded (10, 20, 50, 100, 200, 500 years) and the corresponding flood hazard maps are retrieved from the catalogue and tiled together. For instance, if the estimated return period is 40 years, the flood map for 20 years return period is used. Where more maps related to more river sections overlap (see Section 2.2), the maximum depth value is taken.

2.3 Flood impact assessment

After the event-based flood hazard map has been completed, it is combined with the available information defining the exposure and vulnerability at European scale.

The number of people affected is calculated using the population map developed by Batista e Silva et al. (2012) at 100m resolution. A detailed database of infrastructures produced by Marín Herrera et al. (2015) is used to compute the extension of the road network affected during the flood event. The list of major towns and cities potentially affected within the region is derived from the map of World Cities developed by ESRI (2017). The total extension of urban and built-up areas (differentiated between residential, commercial and industrial areas) and agricultural areas is computed using the latest update of the Corine Land Cover for the year 2012 (Copernicus LMS, 2017).

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The land use layer also provides the exposure information to compute direct economic losses in combination with flood hazard variables and flood damage functions, following the approach developed by Huizinga et al. (2007). More specifically, we use a set of normalized damage functions to calculate the damage ratio as a function of water depth, spanning from zero (no damage) to one (maximum damage). The damage ratio is then multiplied by the maximum damage value, calculated as a function of land use and country's GDP, to calculate actual damage. Separate damage functions are applied for the land use classes that are more vulnerable to flooding (residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural). In addition, to account for the variable value of assets within one country, damage values are corrected considering the ratio between the gross domestic product (GDP) of regions (identified according to the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS), administrative level 1) and country's GDP.

For countries where specific damage functions could be found in literature, Huizinga et al. (2007) produced normalized functions based on this national data. In addition, the same authors elaborated averaged functions to be used for countries without national data, in order to produce a consistent dataset at European scale. The same approach has been applied in the present study to elaborate damage curves for countries not included in the original database, like Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The complete set of damage functions and the detailed description of the methodology are available as supplementary data of the recent report by Huizinga et al. (2017).

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All the results computed during the risk assessment procedure are aggregated using the classification of EU regions of EUMetNet (the network of European Meteorological Services, www.meteoalarm.eu). The regions considered are based on the levels 1 and 2 of the NUTS classification, according to the EU country, with the advantage of providing areas of aggregation with a comparable extent.

3) Benchmarking of the procedure

In order to perform a comprehensive evaluation of the risk assessment procedure, it is important to evaluate each component of the methodology, namely, streamflow forecasts, event-based flood mapping, and the impact assessment. The skill of EFAS streamflow forecasts is routinely evaluated (Pappenberger et al., 2011) while impact assessment was successfully applied by Alfieri et al. (2016) to evaluate socio-economic impacts of river floods in Europe for the period 1990-2013. Here, the complete procedure is tested using the information collected for the catastrophic floods of May 2014, which affected several countries in Southeast Europe. In particular, we focus on the flooding of the Sava River in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia.

3.1 The floods in Southeast Europe in May 2014

Exceptionally intense rainfalls from 13 May 2014 onwards following weeks of wet conditions led to disastrous and widespread flooding and landslides in South-eastern Europe, in particular Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia. In these two countries, the flood events have been reported to be the worst for over 200 years. Over 60 people lost their lives and more than a million inhabitants were estimated to be affected, while the estimated damages and losses exceeded 1.1 billion Euro for Serbia and 2 billion Euro for Bosnia-Herzegovina (ECMWF, 2014; ICPDR and ISRBC, 2015).Critical flooding was also reported in other countries including Croatia, Romania and Slovakia. Serbia and Croatia requested and obtained access to the EU Solidarity Fund for major national disasters (EC 2016).

According to the technical report issued by the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River and the International Sava River Basin Commission (ICPDR and ISRBC, 2015), the flood events were particularly severe in the middle-lower course of the Sava River and in several tributaries. The discharge measurements and estimations carried out between 14 and 17 May indicated that the peak flow magnitude exceeded the 500 years return period both in the Bosna and Kolubara rivers and in part of the Sava River downstream of the confluence with Bosna. Discharges above 50yearswere observed in the Una, Vrbas, Sana and Drina rivers (Figure 3).

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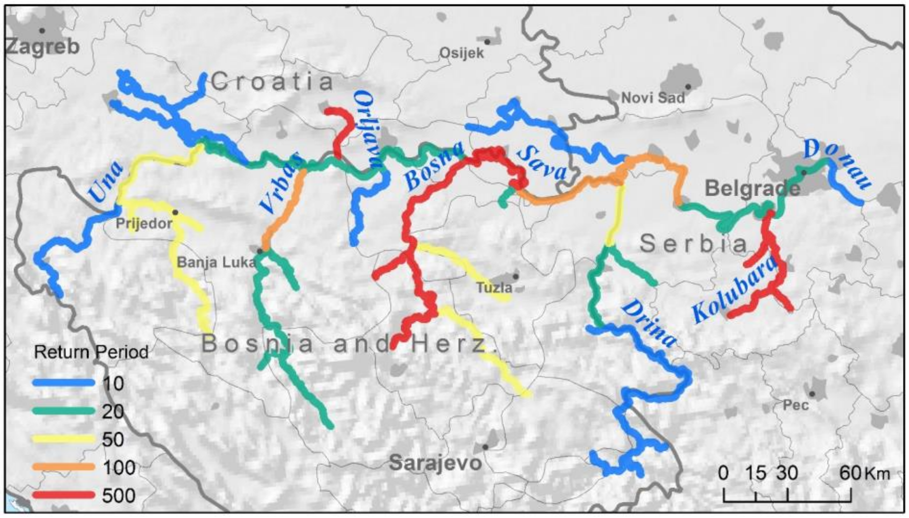

Figure 3.Reconstruction of return period of peak discharges in Sava River basin (source: ICPDR and ISRBC, 2015).

The lower reach of the Sava was less heavily affected because upstream flooding reduced peak discharges and hydraulic operations on the Danube hydraulic structures reduced water levels in the Danube (ICPDR and ISRBC, 2015). Due to the extreme discharges, multiple dyke breaches occurred along the Sava River, and severe flooding occurred at the confluence of tributaries like Bosna, Drina and Kolubara (Figure 4). In many areas, dykes were reinforced and heightened during the flood event to withstand the peak flow; also, additional temporary flood defences were built to prevent further flooding, and drains were dug to drain flooded areas more quickly. Other rivers in the area experienced severe flood events, such as the tributaries of the Danube Velika Morava and Mlava, in Serbia.

Table 1 reports a summary of flood impacts at national level for Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia, retrieved from different sources.

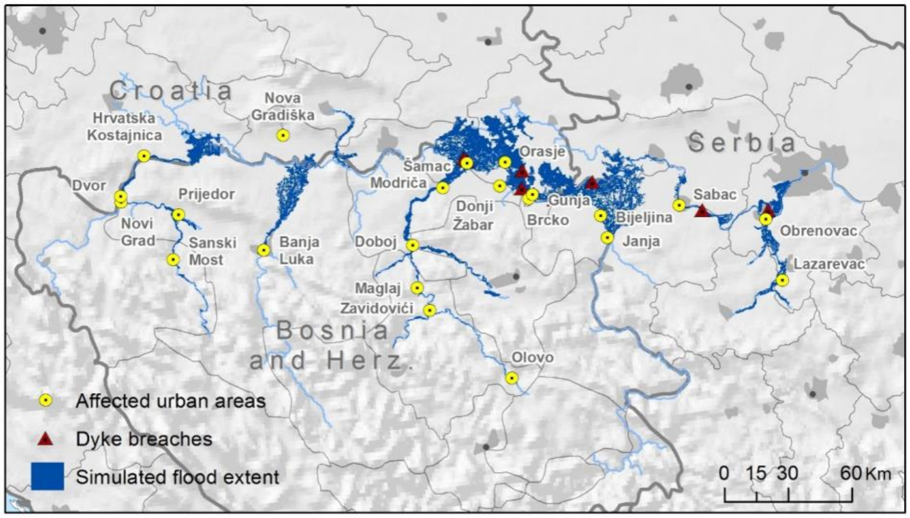

Figure 4.Reconstruction of affected urban areas and dyke failure locations along the Sava River (sources: UNDAC, 2014; ICPDR and ISRBC, 2015). The flood extent of the reference simulation with the proposed procedure is also shown (see Section 3.2).

	Flooded area (km^2)	Casualties(1)	Affected population(1)	Evacuated population(1)	Economic impact (M€)
Bosnia-Herzegovina	266.3(1); 831(2)	25	1.6 million	90000	2040
Croatia	53.5(1); 110(3); 210(4)	3	38000	15000	300
Serbia	22.4(1) ; 221(3); 350(5)	51	1 million	32000	1530(1)

Table 1. Summary of flood impacts at national level. Figures have been retrieved from the following sources: 1- ICPDR and ISRBC (2015); 2- Bosnia-Herzegovina Mina Action Center (BHMAC, Bajic et al 2015);3–Copernicus EMS Rapid Mapping Service; 4- Wikipedia (2016); 5- GeoSerbia geoportal (2016).

3.2 Evaluation of the flood hazard mapping procedure

We considered in our analysis the river network of the Sava River basin, where some of the most affected areas are located and for which detailed information is available from various reports. To evaluate the skill of the flood hazard mapping procedure, we used observed flood magnitudes (Figure 3) to identify the return period of peak discharges and thus select the appropriate flood maps. In addition, we used the information on flood protection level and dyke failures to select only those river sections where flooding actually occurred, either because of defence failures or exceeding discharge. The resulting flood hazard map will be named from now on as "reference simulation". Such a procedure excludes the uncertainty due to the hydrological input from the analysis, focusing on the evaluation of the flood hazard mapping approach alone. In other words, the test can be seen as an application of the procedure in case of a single, deterministic and "perfect" forecast. The resulting inundation map is displayed in Figure 4.

It is important to note that a margin of uncertainty remains because of the emergency measures taken during the event. In several river sections of the Sava River, the flood defences were actually able to withstand discharges well above their design value, thanks to timely emergency measures such as the heightening and strengthening of dykes. Moreover, the preparation of temporary flood defences in the floodplains helped to protect some areas which would have been otherwise flooded. A further issue of the methodology is that, where flood protections are exceeded, flooding can occur on both river banks, while in case of dyke failure flooding is usually limited to one side where protection level is lower. This has not been corrected and therefore the results are affected by this limitation.

The flood events in the Sava River have been mapped by several agencies and institutions using both ground observations and satellite imagery (see UN SPIDER (2014) for a complete list). The most comprehensive flood maps were developed by the Copernicus Emergency Management System (EMS) using Sentinel-1 data (EMS, 2014), and by NASA using MODIS Aqua (UN SPIDER, 2014).For Serbia, the Republic Geodetic authority has acquired and processed further satellite images, which are available on the geoportal GeoSerbia (2016).

Despite this large amount of data sources available, the evaluation of the simulated flood extent is not straightforward. All the available images have been acquired during the flood recession (from 19 May onwards), while flood peaks where observed between 15 and 17 May. Therefore, several areas which have been reported as flooded in the available documentation are not included in the detected flood footprints, which results in a significant difference between satellite-detected and reported flood extent from ground surveys (see Table 1). On the other hand, EMS satellite maps are designed to produce a low rate of false positive errors, therefore they can be considered as a “lower limit” for the real flood extent. Finally, it has to been considered that the available sources of information report for each country different extents of flooded area, as can be seen in Table 1.

In order to take into account these issues, we first compare the total simulated and reported flood extent at country level, calculating overestimation (or underestimation) rates against all the available reported data. Then, we evaluate the agreement between satellite-derived and simulated flood extent considering those areas in the Sava River basin affected by the flood event and where satellite maps from Copernicus were available. Areas were grouped considering the main source of flooding, either a tributary (e.g. Bosna River) or the Sava River. For the Sava River, we considered two separate sectors because of the large extent of the flooded areas, and because flood extent was not continuous. The agreement is evaluated using the hit ratio H (Alfieri et al., 2014b), defined as:

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$$H = (Fm \cap Fo)/(Fo\ ) \times 100 \qquad (1)$$

where $Fm \cap Fo$ is the area correctly predicted as flooded by the model, and Fo is the total observed flooded area. Note that we did not consider indices to evaluate false hit ratios because, as previously discussed, we know that the available satellite flood maps underestimate the actual flood extent. Consequently, false alarm ratio scores would be low without being supported by reliable observations, giving an incorrect view of the performance. As a further element, we compare the number of urban areas (cities, towns and villages) which were reported as flooded by UNDAC (2014) and ICPDR and ISRBC (2015).

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3.2Evaluation of forecast-based flood hazard maps

To evaluate the overall performance of forecast-based flood hazard mapping, we considered the EFAS forecasts issued on 12 and 13 May for the Sava river basin, that is, immediately before the occurrence of first flood events on 14 May. We first applied the standard procedure described in Section 2 to derive peak discharges, estimated return periods and flood maps using the median of the EFAS ensemble forecasts. To provide a more complete overview of risk scenarios, we also applied the procedure considering the 25 and 75 percentiles of discharge in the ensemble forecasts. As a first step, wee valuate EFAS forecast by comparing forecast and observed return periods. Then, forecast-based flood hazard maps are evaluated against the reference simulation, comparing the river sectors and the urban areas (or municipalities) at risk of flooding. Note that we selected the reference simulation as benchmark because it represents the best result achievable in case of a perfect forecast. Conversely, we did not carried out a comparison against observation-based flood maps, because they incorporate the effect of defence failures or strengthening, which could be considered in forecast-based maps only as hypothetical scenarios.

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3.3 Evaluation of impact assessment

Inundation maps derived from the reference simulation and flood forecasts have been used to compute flood impacts in terms of number of affected people, affected major towns and cities, and economic damage.

The results are compared with the available impact estimations both at national and local level. For Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the national figures reported in Table 1 are referred to the total impact given by river floods, landslides and pluvial floods, therefore they cannot be directly compared with methodology results. As such, the comparison has been done only for Croatia and for a number of municipalities (e.g. Obrenovac in Serbia) where impacts can be attributed to river flooding alone.

The figures of affected population computed with the reference simulation are also useful to test the reliability of the population map used as exposure dataset. Similarly, damage estimations provide an indication of the reliability of depth-damage curves for the study area.

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As done for the flood hazard maps, forecast-based risk estimations are evaluated against the results from the reference simulation, comparing both population and damage figures. Note that other variables produced by the operational procedure (e.g. roads affected, extent of flooded urban and agricultural areas) could not be tested due to the lack of observed data and therefore are not discussed here. To add a further term of comparison, affected population has been computed using Copernicus-EMS flood footprints.

4) Results and discussions

The results of the evaluation exercise are shown and discussed separately for each component of the procedure.

4.1 Flood hazard mapping

Table 3reports the observed flood extent data from available sources and the simulated extent derived from the reference simulation (i.e. the mapping procedure applied on discharge observations). The ratios between simulations and observations are also included. Table 4 reports the scores of the hit ratio H for the considered flooded sectors, together with a comparison of towns flooded according to simulations and observation.

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	Flood extent (km^2)			
Country	Reference simulation	Satellite	Reported by ICPDR-ISRBC	Reported (other sources)
Bosnia - Herzegovina	995	339	266.3 (1)	831 (2)
Croatia	919 (319)	110	53.5 (1)	>210(3)
Serbia	582	221	22.4 (1)	>350 (4)

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	Extent ratio			
Country	Reference simulation	Satellite	Reported by ICPDR-ISRBC	Reported (other sources)
Bosnia - Herzegovina	1	0.34	0.27	0.84
Croatia	1	0.12 (0.34)	0.06 (0.17)	>0.23 (0.66)
Serbia	1	0.38	0.04	>0.60

Table 3. *Comparison of observed and simulated flood extent data at country scale. Satellite flood extent is referred to Copernicus EMS maps. Values between parentheses for Croatia are referred to a modified simulation, as explained in the text. Reported flood extent has been retrieved from the following sources: 1- ICPDR and ISRBC (2015); 2- Bosnia-Herzegovina Mina Action Center (BHMAC, Bajic et al 2015); 3- Wikipedia (2016);4 –GeoSerbia geoportal (2016).*

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Affected areas	**Hit ratio**	**EMS flooded area (km^2)**	**Affected towns and cities**
Bosna River	90.6%	58.46	Maglaj, Doboj, Modriča
Sava River between confluences with Bosna and Drina	63.9%	134.76	Orašje, Šamac, DonjiŽabar, Brcko, Gunja, (Zupanja),Bijeljina
Sava River between confluences with Drina and Kolubara	83.7%	405.43	Sabac, Obrenovac, Lazarevac
Total	79.9%	598.65	

Table 4. *Scores of the hit ratio H for the considered flooded sectors, and affected towns and cities. Names between parentheses refer to towns and cities wrongly predicted as flooded, otherwise towns and cities have been correctly predicted as flooded.*

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As expected, the simulated flood extent is significantly larger in all the cases than the satellite extent (see Table 3), given the delay between flood peaking time and time of image acquisition mentioned in Section 3.2.Flood extent indicated in the ICPDR and ISRBC report is also consistently lower than values from both simulated and satellite maps. Simulated and reported extent are instead more comparable when considering data reported by other sources. For Bosnia-Herzegovina, the simulated value is close to the reported flood extent published in the report by Bajic et al. (2015). For Serbia, the flooded area detected from GeoSerbia satellite maps is smaller than the simulation, but it has to be considered that these maps have the same problem of delayed image acquisition mentioned for Copernicus maps. For Croatia, the flood mapping methodology is largely overestimating both the satellite-based and reported flood extents. The main reason is that flooding on the left side of Sava was limited due to the reinforcing of river dykes in the area close to the city of Zupanja, which could withstand the reported 500 years return period discharge despite having been designed for a 1 in 100 year event.

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In fact, all the left bank of Sava in this area was reported as an area at risk in case of a flood defence failure, and only the emergency measures taken prevented more severe flooding (ICPDR and ISRBC, 2015). Therefore we performed an additional flood simulation excluding any failure on the river left bank between the Bosna confluence and Zupanja, and in this case we found a total flood extent of 319 km^2. Even if this estimate still exceeds reported flood extent (Wikipedia, 2016), it has to be considered that this figure is referred only to the Vukovar-Srijem county, which was the most affected area, therefore the total affected area in all the country was probably larger.

Regarding Table 4, the scores of the H index indicate that the mapping procedure correctly detected most of the flooded areas, although with the partial exception of the lower Sava area. In particular, the great majority of towns reported to have been flooded are correctly detected by the simulations, with only few false alarms (e.g. the already mentioned Zupanja).

When looking at the results it is important to keep in mind the limitations of the procedure. As mentioned in Section 2.3, the mapping procedure is able to reproduce only maximum flood depths, and the dynamic of the flood event is not taken into account. This means that processes like flood wave attenuation due to inundation occurring upstream cannot be simulated, and possible flood mitigation measures taken during the event are not considered as well. Furthermore, due to the coarse resolution (100m) of the DEM used in flood simulations, flood simulations do not include small scale topographic features like minor river channels, dykes and road embankments.

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4.2 Flood impact assessment

Tables 5 summarizes reported and estimated impacts on population, based on both the reference simulation and Copernicus satellite maps, for the 3 countries affected by floods in the Sava basin. Tables 6 reports simulated and reported impacts on population for a number of administrative regions where impacts can be attributed to floods only. For evaluating the performance of impact assessment, we take into consideration only Table 6, because national estimates in Table 5 consider also people displaced by landslides and pluvial floods not simulated in EFAS.

Note that in both tables we compare simulated impacts with figures of evacuated population because reported estimates of affected population included also people affected by indirect effects like energy shortage and road cuts. Note also that the figures of evacuated population are not equivalent to directly affected population (i.e. whose houses were actually flooded). In some areas, evacuation was taken as a precautionary measure, even if flooding did not eventually occur.

Country	Evacuated population (reported)	Affected population (satellite)	Affected population (simulated)
Bosnia-Herzegovina	90.000	51.010	215.200
Croatia	27.260	5.760	57.000
Serbia	32.000	13.700	29.800

Table 5.Comparison of evacuated population (reported) and affected population estimated from satellite and simulations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia (source: ICPDR and ISRBC, 2015).

Administrative area	Country	Evacuated population (reported)	Affected population (simulated)
Obrenovac municipality	Serbia	> 25000	17600
Brcko district	Bosnia-H.	1200	1700
Brod-Posavina county	Croatia	13700	12800
Osjek-Baranja county	Croatia	200	1300
Sisak-Moslavina county	Croatia	2400	3300
Požega-Slavonija county	Croatia	2300	1500
Vukovar-Srijem county	Croatia	8700	39200

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Table 6.Comparison of evacuated population (reported) and affected population (simulated) in administrative areas in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia (source: ILO, 2014; ICPDR and ISRBC, 2015; Wikipedia, 2016)

As can be seen, differences between results and reported figures are in the order of hundreds, suggesting that the procedure is able to provide a general indication of the impact on population, but with a limited precision where impacts are small, as in the case of the Osjek-Baranja county. However, differences are larger for the Vukovar-Srijem county in Croatia, and the Obrenovac municipality in Serbia. For the former, this is due to the overestimation of flooded areas discussed in Section 4.1. If dyke failures are not included in the simulation for this county, the affected population is reduced to 8600 people, extremely close to the reported figure. The underestimation in the Obrenovac municipality may indicate that flood simulations are less reliable for urban areas, even if estimated figures still depict a major impact on the city. In fact, the DEM used in the simulations is mostly based on elevation data from the Shuttle Radar Topography Mission (SRTM) which is known to be less accurate in urban and densely vegetated areas (Sampson et al., 2015).

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For flood impacts related to monetary damage, the simulations for Croatia indicate a total damage of 653 M€, against a reported estimate of 298 M€. However, if the already mentioned overestimation of flooded areas is considered, then the estimate decreases to 190 M€. The difference is relevant but still within the usual range of uncertainty of damage models (Wagenaar et al., 2016). As already mentioned, damage figures for Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina could not be used because available estimates aggregate damages from landslides and river and pluvial flooding.

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The observed underestimation has to be evaluated considering the limitations of both observed data and damage assessment methodology. On one hand, the damage functions available for

Croatia are not specifically designed for the country, as discussed in Section 2.3. Also, estimated damages include only direct damage to buildings, while infrastructural damage is only partially accounted for (e.g. damage to the dyke system). On the other hand, official estimates are affected by the absence of clear standards for loss assessment and reporting (Corbane et al., 2015; IRDR, 2015) and can strongly deviate from true extents and damages. Thieken et al. (2016) observed that reported losses are rarely complete and that it may require years before reliable loss estimates are available for an event.

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4.3 EFAS forecasts

Commented [FD35]: *Section 4.3 of the revised manuscript we will evaluate EFAS forecast by comparing forecast and observed return periods.*

Table 7 illustrates return periods of peak discharge derived from 12 and 13 May forecasts for the main rivers of the Sava basin, visible in Figure 3. Simulations are compared against values reported by ICPDR and ISRBC (2015).

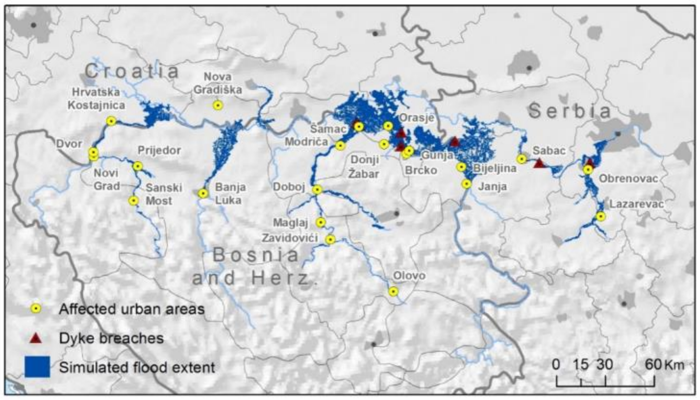
River	12/5 25p.	12/5 50p.	12/5 75p.	13/5 25p.	13/5 50p.	13/5 75p.	Reported
Return period forecast (years)							
Una	< 5	< 5	< 5	< 5	< 5	< 5	50
Sana	< 5	< 5	< 5	< 5	5-10	5-10	50
Bosna	< 5	5-10	10-20	5-10	20-50	50-100	500
Vrbas	< 5	5-10	10-20	5-10	10-20	20-50	100
Drina	< 5	< 5	5-10	<5	5-10	10-20	50
Kolubara	10-20	20-50	100-200	20-50	50-100	>200	500
Sava (upper reach)	< 5	< 5	< 5	< 5	< 5	< 5	20
Sava (middle reach)	< 5	< 5	< 5	<5	5-10	5-10	500
Sava (lower reach)	5-10	5-10	10-20	10-20	10-20	20-50	100

Table 7. Comparison of forecast and observed return periods in the main rivers of the Sava Basin. The Sava River has been divided in 3 sectors. Upper: up to confluence with the Bosna River; middle: between the confluences with Bosna and Drina rivers; lower: from the confluence with the Drina River to the confluence into the Danube River.

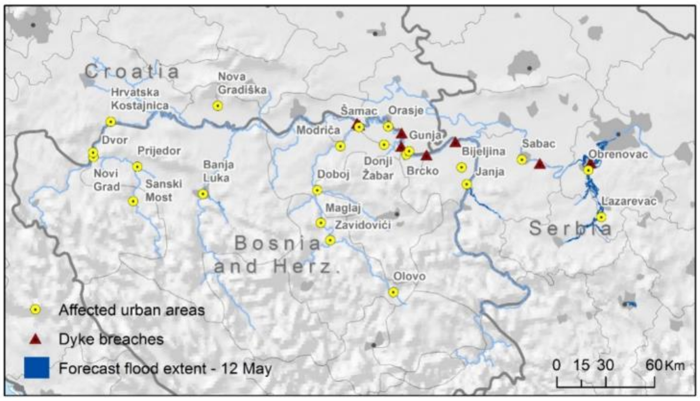
Results show that forecasts for 12 May are significantly far from observations even considering the 75th percentile, with the exception of Kolubara River. The performance improves for the 13 May, when the magnitude of predicted discharges indicates a major flood hazard in most of the considered rivers, although with a general underestimation especially in the Una, Sana and in the upper and middle reaches of the Sava River. However, it has to be considered that peak flow timing was rather variable across the Sava river basin, due to its extent. While in the Kolubara river the highest discharges occurred on 14and 15 May, peak flows in other tributaries were reached later (between 14th and 16th for Bosna River, on 16th for Drina, on 17th for Sana River), and on the main branch of the Sava River the flood peaks occurred after 17 May. Thus, in a

Commented [FD36]: Reply to comments R1-HH / R2-7 hypothetical scenario where EFAS risk forecast were routinely used for emergency management, on one hand there would have been still time to update flood forecasts. On the other hand, the forecast released on 13 May would have given to emergency responders a warning time of at least 2 days to plan response measures in several affected areas, chiefly in the Kolubara and Bosna basins.

Figure 5 shows the inundation maps derived using the median of ensemble streamflow forecasts issued on 12 and 13 May (that is, the standard procedure adopted for the operational procedure).



a



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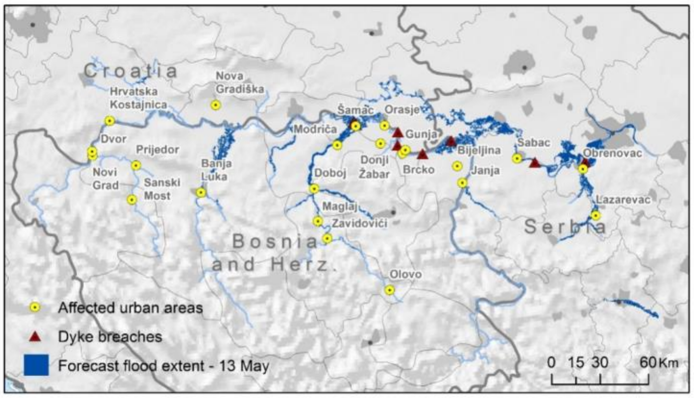

c

Figure 5. Simulated flood extent based on reference simulation (a), 12 May (b) and 13 May forecasts (c), with location of reported flooded urban areas and dyke failures.

In addition, Table 8 illustrates the outcomes of impact forecasts, compared to impacts obtained from the reference simulation. For both dates, we considered predicted maximum streamflow values based on the 25th, 50th and 75th percentiles of the ensemble forecast. All of estimations are computed taking into account local flood protection levels.

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Country	12/5 25p.	12/5 50p.	12/5 75p.	13/5 25p.	13/5 50p.	13/5 75p.	Ref. Sim.
flood extent (km^2)							
Bosnia-Herz.	0	5	196	110	406	494	995
Croatia	0	0	100	54	95	135	919
Serbia	91	187	385	241	562	664	582
affected population							
Bosnia-Herz.	0	5,230	2,046	20,600	95,530	117,280	215,180
Croatia	0	0	3,600	1,940	2’780	4,480	57,050
Serbia	2,790	6,010	15,120	11,150	25,950	32,660	29,760
economic damage (million €)							
Bosnia-Herz.	0	10	36	28	245	342	378
Croatia	0	0	41	13	22	37	653
Serbia	14	31	92	77	197	249	141

Table 8. Comparison of forecast flood impacts with the reference simulation.

Commented [FD38]: See if impacts are compatible with observed discharges

Figures in Table 8 allows to further expand the analysis done on predicted flood magnitudes, and illustrates the evolution of flood risk depicted by EFAS ensemble forecasts. As can be seen, the impact estimate derived from 12 May forecast was indicating a limited risk with the exception of Serbia, even if the figures for the 75th percentile already indicated the possibility of more relevant impacts. The overall risk increases with 13 May forecast, with severe and widespread impacts associated to the ensemble forecast median, even though for Bosnia- Herzegovina and especially Croatia there is still a significant underestimation with respect to reference simulation. A further important result is that the location of forecast flooded areas is mostly consistent with the reference simulation shown in Figure 3, with several urban areas already at risk of flooding in the map based on 13 May forecast (Figure 6).

In a hypothetical scenario, these results would have provided emergency responders with valuable information to plan adequate countermeasures, based on the expected spatial and temporal evolution of flood risk. A more detailed discussion on these topics is reported in Section 4.4.

4.4 Discussion

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As discussed in the Introduction, the availability of a risk forecasting procedure able to transform hazard warning information into effective emergency management (i.e. risk reduction) (Molinari et al., 2013), opens the door to a wide number of new applications in emergency management and response. However, to better understand the limitations of the procedure, as well as its potential for future applications, some considerations have to be made.

First, it is important to remember that EFAS is a continental scale system which is mainly designed to provide additional information and support the activity of national flood emergency managers. Therefore, the practical use of risk forecasts to activate emergency measures would need to be discussed and coordinated with services and policy makers at local level.

Second, the new procedure needs to undergo an accurate uncertainty analysis before risk forecasts can effectively be used for emergency management. While a detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, to this end, we recently started to evaluate the performance of the procedure for the flood events recorded in the EFAS and Copernicus EMS databases.

Another point to consider is the approach chosen to assess flood risk. In the current version of the procedure, we produce a single evaluation based on the ensemble forecast median to provide a straightforward measure of the flood risk resulting from the overall forecast. A more rigorous approach would require to analyse all relevant flood scenarios resulting from EFAS forecasts and estimate their consequences together with the conditional probability of occurrence, given the range of ensemble forecast members and the forecast uncertainty (Apel et al., 2004). While such a framework would enable a cost-benefit analysis of response measures in an explicit manner, it would also require to evaluate the consequences of wrong forecasts, like missing or underestimating impending events, or issuing false alarms (Molinari et al., 2013; Coughlan et al., 2016). Given the difficulty of setting up a similar framework at European scale, during the initial period of service EFAS risk forecast will be used to plan “low regret” measures like satellite monitoring and warning of local emergency services. For instance, we are currently evaluating the use of EFAS risk forecast to trigger satellite rapid flood mapping through Copernicus EMS, with the aim of improving response time and detection of flooded areas. More demanding measures (e.g. monitoring and strengthening of flood defences in endangered river sections, road closures in areas at risk, deployment of emergency services, evacuation planning of endangered people), could instead be put in place upon confirmation from local flood monitoring systems.

When designing the structure and output of risk assessment, it has to be considered that the type and amount of information provided must be based on users' requests. As a matter of fact, different end users may be interested in different facets of flood impact (Molinari et al., 2014), but at the same time it is important to avoid information overload during emergency management. Again, finding a compromise requires a close collaboration with the user community.

For instance, damage estimation has been included in the impact assessment upon request of EFAS end users, despite the known limitations of the damage functions dataset, in particular the absence of country-specific damage functions for the majority of countries in Europe. From this point of view, the case study described in this work is representative of the level of precision that may be achievable in these countries. Future improvements can be possible with the availability of detailed, country-specific damage reports at building scale (i.e. reporting hazard variables and the consequent damage for different building categories) that would allow to derive specific damage functions.

For the same reasons, human safety and the protection of human life have not been addressed in this study, despite their importance in emergency management. The scale of application of the EFAS risk assessment is not compatible with risk models for personal safety based on precise hydrodynamic analysis, like the one presented by Arrighi et al. (2016), whereas probabilistic risk methods (e.g. de Bruijn et al., 2014) and the use of mortality rates calculated form previous flood events (e.g. Tanoue et al., 2016) are more feasible of integration and could be tested for next releases of the risk forecasting procedure.

5) Conclusions and next developments

This paper presents the first application of a risk forecasting procedure which is fully integrated within a continental scale flood early warning system. The procedure has been thoroughly tested in all its components to reproduce the Sava River basin floods in May 2014, and the results demonstrate the potential of the proposed approach.

The rapid flood hazard mapping procedure applied using observed river discharges was able to identify flood extent and flooded urban areas, while simulated impacts were comparable with observed figures of affected population and economic damage. The evaluation was complicated on one hand by the scarcity of reported data at local scale, and on the other hand by the considerable differences in impacts reported by different sources, especially regarding flood extent. This is a well know problem in flood risk literature, due to the fact that existing standards for impact data collection and reporting are still rarely applied (Thieken et al., 2016). Therefore,

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further improvements of impact models will require the availability of impact data complying with international standards (Corbane et al., 2015; IRDR, 2015).

The application using EFAS ensemble forecasts enabled to identify areas at risk with a lead time ranging from 1 to 4 days, and to correctly evaluate the magnitude of flood impacts, although with some inevitable limitation due to difference between simulated and observed streamflow. When evaluating the outcomes, it is important to remember that, even in case of a risk assessment based on "perfect" forecasts and modelling, simulated impacts will always be different from actual impacts. As we have shown in the test case of the floods in the Sava River basin, unexpected defence failures can occur for flow magnitudes lower than the design level, thus increasing flood impacts. On the other hand, flood defences might be able to withstand greater discharges than the design level, and emergency measures can improve the strength of flood defences or creating new temporary structures. As such, forecast-based risk assessment should be regarded as plausible risk scenarios that can provide valuable information for local, national and international authorities, complementing standard flood warnings. In particular, the explicit quantification of impacts opens the road to a more effective use of early warning information in emergency management, allowing to evaluate costs and benefits of response measures.

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After a testing phase started in September 2016, since March 2017 the procedure is fully operational within the EFAS modelling chain. Besides the version currently in use and described in this paper, we plan to test a number of modifications and alternative approaches for hazard mapping and risk assessment will be tested in the near future. Currently, inundation forecasting is computed using the median of EFAS daily ensemble streamflow forecasts, but in principle the methodology can easily more detailed risk evaluations taking into account less probable but potentially more severe flood scenarios predicted by ensemble members (see the application described this paper). Furthermore, additional risk scenarios can be produced by considering the failure of local flood defences, or replacing EFAS flood hazard maps with official hazard maps developed by national authorities, where available. The influence of lead time on flood predictions could also be assessed, for instance by setting a criterion based on forecasts persistence over a period to trigger the release of impact forecasts. All these alternatives will be tested in collaboration with the community of the EFAS users, to maximize the value of the information provided and avoid information overload which can be difficult to manage in emergency situations.

A further promising application that is being tested is the use of inundation forecast to activate rapid flood mapping from satellites, exploiting the Copernicus Emergency Mapping Service of the European Commission.

Finally, the proposed procedure will also be incorporated into the Global Flood Awareness System (GloFAS), which would allow to establish a near-real time flood risk alert system at global scale.

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Appendix

Update of flood protection maps for Europe

We include in Table S1a list of the updates to the flood protection level map developed by Jongman et al. (2014), in use for the risk assessment procedure. The table shows the rivers where values have been updated, the geographic location (in some cases, the protection values has been modified only at specific locations along the river), previous and updated values, and the source of information (either the report .Protection values are expressed in years of the event return period.

In addition to the modifications in Table S1, it is planned to further update the EFAS database using the global flood protection layer FloPROS (Scussolini et al., 2016).

River	Region, Country	Previous values	Updated values	Reference
Sava	Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina,	Not included -20	100	ISRBC, 2014
Drina	Bosnia-Herzegovina,	Not included	50	ISRBC, 2014
Una, Vrbas, Sana, Bosna	Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia	Not included-10	30	ISRBC, 2014
Kolubara	Serbia	Not included	50	ISRBC, 2014

Table S1. Update of the flood protection level map developed by Jongman et al. (2014), in use for the risk assessment procedure.

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