



EDXC conference in Metz

Alan Pennington
reports from North East France

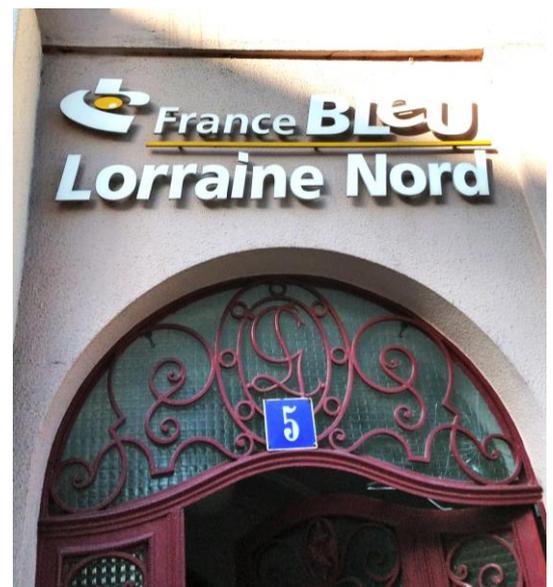


The European DX Council had organised a conference for its member clubs, broadcasters and DXers every year (apart from one) since 1967. But because of the Covid pandemic, the last one was held four years ago, in September 2019 in Andorra. So, it was very good news that the annual EDXC conferences were finally able to resume this year, with the 53rd held in Metz in France's northeastern Grand Est region on 8th and 9th September.

The city of Metz (population circa 120,000) was founded at the confluence of the Moselle and Seille rivers, just 27 miles from the tripoint where the borders of France, Luxembourg and Germany meet. Mainly French speaking, Metz was ceded to Germany in 1871 following the Franco-Prussian war, only returning to France after WW1 in 1919. This period under German rule is apparent in the style of some of buildings in the Imperial Quarter, especially the railway station, where we arrived after a 1 hour train journey from Luxembourg.

The conference venue was the modern Campanile Metz Centre hotel, conveniently just behind the station for those of us arriving by train. Attendees at the conference were from eight countries: Germany (5), UK (4), Finland (3), France (2), Italy (2), Austria (1), Belgium (1) and Denmark (1). Most participants arrived on Thursday, in time for two visits arranged the next day by EDXC Assistant-Secretary General and organiser of the conference, Christian Ghibaudo.

Next morning after breakfast we visited the studios of, **France Bleu Lorraine Nord**, on the third floor of 5, rue d'Austrasie, a ten-minute walk from our hotel. It is one of national public broadcaster Radio France's network of more than forty local and regional France Bleu stations. France Bleu Lorraine Nord can be heard on four FM frequencies in the region: 98.5 (Metz), 98.8 (Forbach), 101.5 (Thionville) and 104.0 (Sarreguemines) with RDS ID: BLEULORN. Since June 2023 it can also be heard locally on DAB+, part of the regional Moselle ensemble (Block 8A 195.936 MHz). We were met by Géraldine Carème, station Director, who told us it was the only Radio France station on DAB+ in the Metz area (no national stations yet). Programmes are all in French with local news, music and outside broadcasts (e.g. from a national book fair in Nancy that day). They also cover sports, mainly the local football team FC Metz, handball and volleyball (but not rugby, despite the Rugby World Cup taking place in France at the time). Following our tour of the studios, we left with gifts of France Bleu eco coffee cups (but stickers are no longer printed we were informed!).



After lunch we travelled east by coach, just over the border into Germany, to visit the impressive **Europe 1 long wave transmitter** site, situated on a 370m high hill (Sauberg) between Felsberg and Berus in the Saarlouis district. Its transmissions on 183 kHz had ended on 31st December 2019 and the remaining masts blown up in October 2020. It had been operated by Broadcasting Center Europe (BCE), a subsidiary of RTL. However, the landmark transmitter hall remains and is a listed structure, now owned by the Überheern municipality who bought it for €120,000.

The special status of the Saarland Protectorate after WW2 had allowed the long wave transmitter to be sited there, even though private radio stations were not allowed in France or Germany. Saarland only became part of Germany in 1957 before which it was economically connected to

France, but politically independent. So, its government could give permission for the transmitter site, which was conditional on the operators also building a TV station for the Saarland. Construction began in June 1954 and the site launched, after tests, on 1st January 1955.

Our guides inside were Christoph Switalla, who had been a shift manager on transmitter operations since 1978, and Roland Biesen who had worked there for 38 years. They referred to the transmitter hall as “the Cathedral of the Waves”. It was in 1955 the most modern building of its time, built in the shape of a scallop shell with a re-enforced self-supporting concrete ceiling. The hall was intended also as a venue for public events of the TV station and so has a huge volume of 31,000 m³, with a surface of 2700 m² (1,770 m² of which is double-glazed glass). The building was heated by waste water from the transmitters.



We toured the old transmitters still in situ in the building. Originally operating with 400 kW on 182 kHz, adjusted to 180 kHz in 1960, with power increased to 2 megawatts in 1976, with frequency 183 kHz from 1978. BCE had replaced the 1975 valve transmitters in 2015 with transistorised transmitters housed in a

small building next to the two 234m high reserve antennas, which then became the main antenna. This system then did not need to be constantly manned by technicians and was remotely controlled from Luxembourg.



The re-enforced concrete tower next to the transmitter hall was originally used for the Telesaar TV channel. Now, since November 2020, it has been used by Saarländischer Rundfunk to radiate digital TV and DAB+ radio signals.



The LW antenna masts have now all gone from the site but we could still see the supports for antenna feeders standing (photo above). The directional antenna system used to have four masts of 270-280m height, maximising the signal to the south west into France and with a null to the north east into Germany.

A nice addition to the huge transmitter hall is a small museum (photo left) with old radios, advertising signs etc from different eras.

And a footnote for any broadcaster needed valves for their long wave transmitter. There were new valves, at least ten in number, presumably spares and still in packing cases stored in the transmitter building!

photo below: The Europe 1 signal on 183 kHz long wave ended on 31st December 2019 and the last masts were demolished in October 2020. But the impressive concrete transmitter hall, completed in 1955 and now a listed building, still stands (with a concrete mast used for digital TV and DAB alongside).



Below left: Alan Pennington with an old Europe 1 sign showing wavelength 1647m GO (Grandes Ondes). *Below right:* Old transmitter valves still in situ: Europe 1 broadcast with a power of 400 kW from its launch in 1955, but increased power to 2 Megawatts in 1976.



Our visit on a very warm sunny afternoon into Germany ended with some welcome German beer at “Schmuggelbud” (Smuggling Inn) on the German-French border before crossing back to Metz. Saturday dawned sunny and cloudless again and the morning saw a number of presentations in our conference hotel. But first we remembered regular attendees at previous EDXC conferences who had passed away: Kaj Bredahl Jorgensen, Raimo Kaksonen and Dario Monferini. Christian also received messages to the conference from Anker Petersen, Risto Vähäkainu, Jeff White, Alexander Beryozkin, Chrissy Brand and Kari Kivekäs.

In the first presentation, Ydun Ritz gave us an illustrated history of the long wave Danmarks Radio (DR) station on the Gisseløre peninsula, **Kalundborg**, in her home country of Denmark. It was inaugurated on August 29th 1927 on 260 kHz with a power of 7.5 kW. Six years later, protests from Greenland saw a 60 kW transmitter installed in 1933 and a switch to 238 kHz (adjusted to 240.5 kHz in April 1936.) In 1950 DR moved to 245 kHz and new 150 kW Marconi transmitter was used from 1954. This was replaced by a 300 kW AEG-Telefunken transmitter in 1980 (but using 150 kW still). In November 1982, it moved to its current frequency, 243 kHz.

After 80 years in service, it was decided to close long wave in February 2007, leaving 1062 kHz, also from Kalundborg, as the only Danish AM frequency.

A new Nautel 50 kW transmitter was bought but used only for LW DRM tests 2008-2011. In June 2011, AM broadcasts resumed on 243 (and 1062 closed).

It is still on the air for a few hours each day but its closure has now been announced for 31st December 2023. (So only a few months left to hear its distinctive tuning music!)

Ydun first saw the Kalundborg masts in 1966 as a new radio officer on a ship in the harbour. She saw them again in August 2017 when invited by station manager Jens Christian Seeburg to the 90th anniversary celebrations at the station. Jens is now retired but will still reply to reception reports sent to: jseeberg@post3.tele.dk (but be patient!).

After closure, the two towers will remain as used for FM, DAB etc. The building could become a cultural historical heritage centre?



Next, Christian Ghibaudo told us the story of **Europe 1** station (we had visited its long wave site in Saarland the previous day) from its pre-war beginnings with Charles Michelson and Radio Tangiers through the developments of ‘postes peripheriques’ – radio stations such as Radio Andorra, Monte-Carlo, Luxembourg and (from 1955) Europe 1, broadcasting to France from just outside the French border, challenging the French state’s monopoly on broadcasting. We heard Europe 1’s first ID on long wave and its carillon chimes.

From 1970-1982 it was the most listened to station in France. But its listenership declined as it was not on FM when the band was opened to private stations by President Mitterand in 1981. So, stations like NRJ took its listeners. It now has a big FM network in France, started in 1986 but in 2023 ranked in 11th place in popularity of French radio stations.



Since 2022 Europe 1 is owned by Vincent Bolloré but well-loved announcers have been fired (e.g. Julie Leclerc above).



Harald Süss gave the final talk of the morning: **Modern QSL Chasing (don't give up!)** in which he showed us examples of how to still receive confirmations of your reception from stations. His examples included a QSL from Radio Nacional Angola after 38 years and another received after a visit to a station in Nicaragua 33 years later! Other examples were a QSL on cassette from Macedonia and one typed on a pennant in 1976 from Radio San Sebastian 1025 kHz in Spain! Hints from Harald on sending reports include embedding audio in a Word file and still sending letters in the post to NHK stations in Japan. Plenty of incentive to continue sending reports!



A venue for the **2024 EDXC Conference** has already been proposed by Risto Vähäkainu in Finland (dates to be decided). The location being Tartu in Estonia (also European capital of culture in 2024!). As well as presentations other possibilities are a walking tour, bus trip to Valka in Latvia and a visit to Pereradio (1035 kHz). Also with the possibility to meet up in Helsinki prior to travelling to Estonia. This proposal, still in the planning stage, was accepted by those in Metz.

After lunch there was a guided walking tour of **Metz's Imperial quarter** in English, keeping to the shade where possible in the 33° heat! As well as the railway station (below) with its many carvings, the now empty main Post Office (La Poste), the Chateau d'eau (water tower for steam locomotives) and 15th century Tour Camoufle featured on our tour.



In the afternoon we saw two films: RTL's recent "**History of Radio Luxembourg**" in which Olivier Catani also climbs one of the Junglinster 215m high masts (rather him than me!): <https://play.rtl.lu/shows/en/pisa-science-and-history/episodes/r/3327953>

Also a slide show of **Radio For Peace International** by Sylvain Clament (RFPI President), a French NGO set up in 2019, with a studio in Gironde, France. It currently broadcasts on shortwave in Farsi, French and Ukrainian via WRMI (USA) and Bulgaria – schedule here: <https://www.rfpi.eu/la-grille/201904196/comment-ecouter-radio-for-peace-internationale>

Later that evening, the conference closed with an enjoyable traditional **EDXC Banquet** held at Brasserie ABC close to our hotel (with a cool Ricard welcome on a very warm evening!).

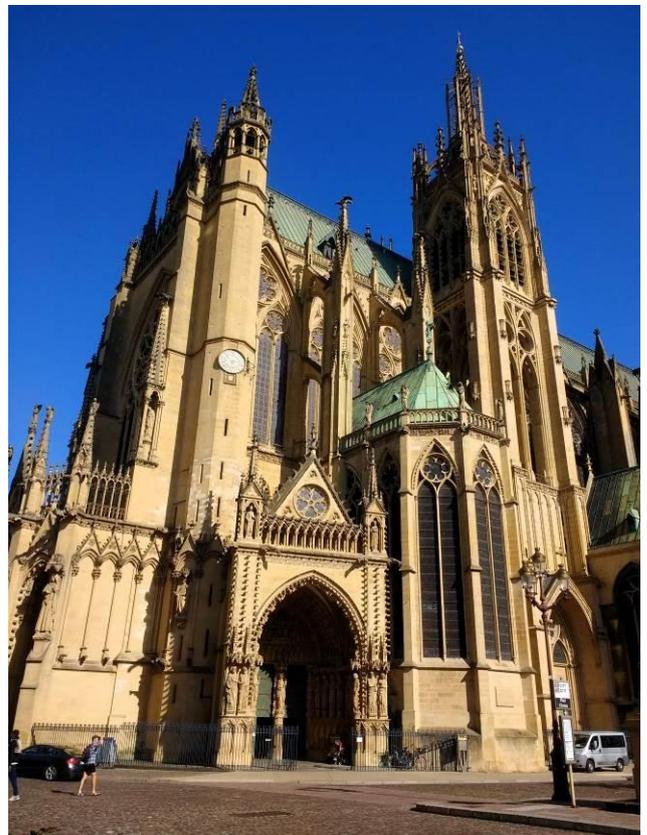
Many thanks to **Christian Ghibaudo** for all his hard work in organising this year's conference in Metz, and for his work as Assistant Secretary General of the EDXC – he announced he would be stepping down from the post at the end of this year.

Eric Tiffon has made a short film which will give you a flavour of the conference in Metz which can be viewed on YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWwVisvJbOc>



photo above: some of the participants at EDXC 2023 at the Europe transmitter site.

right: Saint Stephen's cathedral in Metz old town.



above: Carvings of telegraphists on top of columns at Metz-Ville railway station – one of many carvings on this listed building which has been voted most beautiful railway station in France.

(‘EDXC conference in Metz’ text & photos © British DX Club October 2023)