

ARMLET: SETTING-UP AN AIR MARSHAL TRAINING CENTRE

In September 2016, delegates from across the Europe gathered in Bucharest to attend the closing conference for the Romanian-led ARMLET project. **Lucy Rawlings** attended the event to report on the initiative itself and witness first-hand some of capabilities of the air marshals trained as part of this European Union-funded programme.



Co-funded by the Prevention of and Fight against Crime Programme of the European Union

The ARMLET project first came to life in 2014 with the mission of creating an air marshal training centre and programme, and was dedicated to “increasing the operational capacity for authorities in the field of fighting against in-flight threats”. The main objectives of the project were: to establish a permanent training facility for personnel involved in in-flight security operations; to provide the necessary know-how for European Union Member States interested in implementing an in-flight security programme; and, to become a platform for sharing ‘best practices’ and ‘lessons learned’.

The project has been led by the National Intelligence Academy ‘Mihai Viteazul’ as part of a joint venture with the Gradistea Training Centre and, from the Romanian Intelligence Service, the General Directorate for the Prevention and Countering of Terrorism/Antiterrorist Brigade.

It has been co-funded by a 1.6 million Euro grant from the ‘Prevention Of and Fight Against Crime Programme’ of the European Union.



ARMLET was awarded the funding as the programme and training centre are seen to be vital in helping to support key aviation security goals within the EU's security development plans and aid them in securing their nations' borders.

Radoslaw Olszewski, the Policy Officer for the Counter Terrorism Unit at the European Commission, spoke on behalf of the EU at the ARMLET Closing Conference and stated that the EU would like to help strengthen other nations in this field and encourage them to utilise the facilities in Romania. He emphasised the importance of sharing knowledge and information and that the risk of not doing so could be much greater than simply fearing the information could fall into the wrong hands.

"...train with the best to be ready for the worst..."

Dr. Nicolae Iancu, rector of the National Intelligence Academy and ARMLET project manager, asserted ARMLET's mission statement: 'Train with the best to be ready for the worst'. This sets the true undertone for the project's collaborative expertise and promotion of a new approach to aircraft security through intelligence led operations. The project's name, ARMLET, stands for the values it represents: A - ambition, "We encourage you to overcome your limits"; R - resilience, "We train you to withstand adversity"; M - motivation, "We stimulate and support your professional commitment"; L - legality, "We cultivate respect for the law"; E - excellence, "We embody the highest level of excellence"; and T - training, "We will help you become a truly skilled professional".

The first Romanian air marshal unit was established in 1970 and operated exclusively on Tarom (Romania's flag carrier) flights. Today, Romania is one of only eight EU member states that run such a programme, including the Czech Republic, Austria, France, Poland, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the UK (although the UK's in-flight officers are only deployed in a state of emergency). The ARMLET project is at the forefront in developing an even more refined and specialist air marshal training programme suited to the demands of aviation security and the threats it faces in the modern day.



Dr. Nicolae Iancu, rector of the National Intelligence Academy and ARMLET project manager

Air marshal programmes, in part due to the deterrent effect, can only be truly beneficial to the global industry if they are internationally widespread and, at ARMLET, they are trying to promote the spread of such programmes across Europe by developing a programme capable of being implemented across all EU member states.

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The ARMLET Closing Conference was the final stage in the development of the programme and its official debut in the world of aviation security and the fight against terrorism. It is a subject often shrouded in secrecy, with national governments generally taking the view that the less said in public, the better; the public's awareness that air marshals exist is enough. That said, with relatively few states actually having such in-flight protection on offer, there is a marketing message to be transmitted.

Air marshals are specially trained, armed aviation specialists who are deployed upon passenger aircraft in order to prevent potential terrorist attacks against aviation in flight, as well as to detect those within the airport intent on causing harm and to stop them in their path. They are seen as the 'last line of defence'. They travel covertly, posing as normal passengers, dressed in civilian clothes and, in many states, go through the airport process in the exactly the same way as anybody else; they arrive at the

airport, go through the check-in lines, check their bags in, go through the security checkpoint, take a walk around the shops and restaurants before the departure gates, before sitting and waiting for their allocated flight at the departure gate.

The role of air marshals is unique; their aim is to remain unidentifiable so that those aiming to cause harm will not even suspect they are there. ARMLET believes that the role of the air marshal should be a covert one and that nobody on board, aside from the pilot-in-command, should be aware that there is a marshal on any given flight. This is to ensure the safety of cabin crew and passengers. Air marshals cannot operate on every flight, and their deployment is based upon both randomisation and certain higher risk routes being selected. The belief, however, is that by there being widespread knowledge that they operate on board flights of a particular nation and that there are a relatively high number of them, this provides a deterrent for those selecting where to stage an attack.

The training is rigorous, and the ARMLET Closing Conference explained the processes they put their air marshals through and what it takes to develop such a specialist programme. Sorin Losnita, of the Antiterrorist Brigade of Romania, stressed that it was an intelligence-led operation with behavioural analysis as its key base. He explained that the training has an emphasis on identifying key behavioural indicators which allow the air marshals to detect those with



Shooting Range

malintent, who may be planning to act in a violent manner and may be conducting surveillance. The marshals also received training in areas such as: applied psychology in order to develop their understanding of the psychological processes behind words, gestures and behaviours; questioning techniques, predominantly in a non-oppressive form, which allow them to elicit information whilst remaining covert; laws and regulations in the In-Flight Security Officer (IFSO) field as well as aviation security regulations; and, skills with firearms, developed through training on the centre's shooting range as well as drills in their mock-up plane.

"...it is no exaggeration when I say that there was nothing left of the toilet cubicle..."

As part of a tour of the training facility, the ARMLET team set up a demonstration on the explosives range to highlight the importance of the marshals' role in detecting individuals with negative intent. The experiment comprised a few simple items; a toilet roll, a nitromethane-based liquid explosive, a detonator, and an intact aircraft toilet. As the explosives were planted in the bathroom and the door on it shut, we were advised to keep our distance (I decided to take cover behind something which appeared to be a phone box!). As the home-made explosive (HME) was detonated it created quite a blast! It is no exaggeration when I say that there was nothing left of the toilet cubicle. It was then explained to us that nitromethane is a common chemical,

which is used by hobbyists as a fuel in motor racing. It is a colourless liquid, which is insoluble in water. A pure form is needed to create an explosive and on its own it cannot be made to detonate; however, by adding a sensitiser, such as ammonia-containing compounds, which are often found in household glass cleaners, a very effective explosive can be produced. Only small amounts of these liquids need be used and could be carried on board in small 100ml containers along with a small detonator, which could be concealed and go undetected. It is at this point we have to rely on the sky marshals, who would need to identify negative intent and act swiftly before detonation.

In addition to being in peak physical fitness, and skilled in defence and combat, air marshals must have excellent firearm skills and the ability to handle them in a safe manner; air marshals are required to carry a firearm whilst on duty and may find it necessary to use it in order to protect themselves or citizens. They must, therefore, be able to use their firearms under extreme pressure and time constraints and need to be accurate at firing at intermediate and long distances as well as when kneeling and in barricade positions.

In order to receive highly comprehensive, practical training, the marshals develop their skills in a variety of scenarios and situations within the training centre, and in the airport, to allow them to put their behavioural analysis skills to the test. During the development of the ARMLET project, the team devising the programme, along with the first group of marshals the programme trained, had the opportunity to take their training into the air and act

out a hijacking scenario in-flight. This involved the team pretending to turn up at the airport as regular passengers, going through security and airport processes, and boarding the flight. Two 'passengers' were actors, pretending to be terrorists, and two of the air marshals were put 'on duty' to see if they could identify who was the threat. The marshals were successful in their identification and were able to prevent the 'attack'. This process allowed the team to put their skills to the test in as close to a real situation as possible while allowing the assessment of their techniques, which had been developed and refined during the project.

During the conference one delegate posed a question about the ability of those who had received training to deceive another person who had gone through the same, or similar, training. This question was put across with the basis of its concern being that; if someone with negative intent had received the training, or the techniques had 'fallen into the wrong hands', would they be able to get past the marshals and succeed with their plan? However, it was pointed out to us that even someone who had received the training would be unable to deceive another as it is completely impossible to fully conceal a lie or deceit as the person would still subconsciously 'leak' a number of behavioural and verbal indicators, which the marshals, having gone through rigorous training, would be able to detect.

In order for the ARMLET project to develop a highly specialised training programme and associated training centre, a great deal of international collaboration was involved to allow them to produce a programme comprehensive enough to guide 'best practice' in air marshal training in the future. The programme has been developed to be pan-European and thus it was European experts who were involved. One of the outcomes of the project so far has been the development of an IFSO Programme Implementation Guide, which has been created to help support other nations wishing to set up their own air marshal programme. It shares their 'best practices' and has been suggested that it could be used to guide standardisation. The Romanian Intelligence Service encourages states to come and train at their facility as they believe they have expertise that should be shared.

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The Implementation Guide also outlines the training modules which ARMLET offers. The basic training module is built up of 300 training hours, 240 of which are practical drills, 17 are assessments and the rest are made up of classroom based learning and debate. The general requirements to gain a place on the course include: being a member of the military or intelligence agency, to be acquainted with weapons and close combat techniques, to have good English language skills, and for a formal letter of application to be made to ARMLET by the agency under which the applicant is employed. The aim of this module is to provide a firm grounding in IFSO skills and competencies. The advanced module is a 240-hour programme, which aims to reinforce the skills acquired during the basic course and allow marshals to fine tune their skills and capabilities in tactical teams. To graduate from the advanced course candidates must pass assessments in: tactics of on-board intervention, use of arms, close quarter battle, foreign languages, and legalities and regulations surrounding the IFSO domain. Supplementary to this, they will undertake training in; detection of hostile surveillance, detection and analysis of suspicious behaviours, and first aid techniques. Moreover, ARMLET note the importance of recurrent training and suggest attendance on a monthly recurrent training module (5 days/month) to maintain skills and implement lessons that have been learned in practice. The entire process relies on a curriculum, which has been developed with intelligence-led principles at its core and been analysed during a consultation process with external partners in the USA, UK, France, Poland, Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic.

Moving forward, the ARMLET Project is an evolving programme and research will be conducted in the coming months to assess the success rates of using this type of intelligence in airports. Despite the finality its name might suggest, the 'closing conference' in September

was not seen to be the end of the process but rather the beginning, as all the groundwork that has been done so far becomes operational and put to the test in working airports. With the ongoing support of the EU it is hoped that the success of the project to date will be lasting, become widespread across Europe, and that the collaborative work of the project will help guide standardisation and continue to boost confidence in civil aviation security. ■

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