

# Portuguese SEF shows European document experts the ropes

**Isabel Baltazar**

Document inspectors from various EU member states – both old and new – converged on Lisbon in early March for the European Seminar for Basic Examiners of Security Documents. Their mission: to gain a better understanding of the security features found in ID and travel documents. In Lisbon, the challenge of transferring the requisite knowledge fell to experts of the Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras (SEF), as well as several lecturers from other European countries. Organiser Isabel Baltazar provides a brief overview of the seminar programme and objectives.

Today's counterfeiters use the latest methods and techniques to produce increasingly ingenious forgeries and counterfeits. The financial losses that fake documents give rise to affect tax payers, companies and (government) organisations in equal measure. In the end, it is a problem that demands a broad yet well-organised counteroffensive. To assist in the creation of greater awareness and the exchange of expertise, the European Commission has established the ARGO programme, an initiative that encourages administrative cooperation in the fields of asylum, visas, immigration and external borders. The programme also sponsored the European Seminar for Basic Examiners of Security Documents.

## Authenticity

During the seminar, which primarily focussed on the authenticity of security documents, participants were shown how genuine documents are manufactured, and how individual security features should be inspected. Within this context, an understanding of the composition and functionality of a given security feature is clearly of importance. Armed with this knowledge, participants were subsequently taught a systematic method for inspecting documents, based on the principle of assigning a green, orange or red light. According to this method, documents whose authenticity cannot be established are assigned an orange light, indicating the need for a secondary inspection, using bespoke equipment. The secondary inspection will either show the document to be

authentic, in which case the light switches to green, or forged, in which case the light switches to red. At the end of the seminar, participants were able to reach the right conclusions by applying this standard methodology for establishing the authenticity of identification as well as travel documents.

## Exam

At the end of the seminar, participants were required to pass an exam, thus proving that they had acquired the knowledge needed to inspect security documents correctly. Again, participants used the methodology taught during the seminar to examine a series of documents. The outcome of their investigations was reviewed by a committee of two document experts, who judged the participants' conclusions and methodology. Although the need to sit an exam can be stressful, it does ensure that participants take a proactive interest from the outset.

## Benefits

By attending the course, document inspectors not only mastered skills and techniques that are essential to their daily work, they also had the opportunity to establish a network of contacts throughout Europe (and other parts of the world). It was noted that the use of common terminology greatly facilitates the exchange of information within these networks.

In a day and age when the protection of security documents is prioritised and biometrics is considered an essential weapon in the fight against organised crime and terrorism, seminars like the European Seminar for Basic Examiners of Security Documents provide an ideal platform for introducing the most up-to-date technologies. They also allow the latest expertise and information to be exchanged.

## Teaching other experts

With the structure, programme and lecture content already in place, the SEF has been asked to organise a Transatlantic Seminar in cooperation with the Canadian authorities. Although the Portuguese Immigration Service has agreed to organise the event, it will be funded by the Canadian authorities, which recognise the need for high-quality inspection standards.



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