

FRANCE ON HIGH ALERT

With the high-profile UEFA Euro 2016 football tournament – the largest European sporting event this year – about to kick-off in 10 host cities across France, organisers will be hoping that the security measures being fielded are up to the task. Certainly the events in Paris at the end of 2015, which included the Stade de France as a target, have necessitated a re-think on security over the last seven or eight months. Thankfully, a series of remedial measures have been taken and additional expenditure allocated – the Euro 2016 security budget has doubled in size from 12 million to 24 million Euros – with the aim of shoring up the defences, especially around the stadiums, fan zones and team hotels. The French Government has also sought to extend the ‘state of emergency’ setup post-Paris to cover the period of Euro 2016 and the Tour de France. Putting the case for such an extension, the French Prime Minister, Manuel Valls, recently said: “Faced with an event this big which must take place in conditions of security, and which at the same time should be a celebration, we have to ensure security”. To give some idea of the mammoth security challenge that Euro 2016 represents, during the tournament – which runs for a whole month from 10 June to 10 July – 51 matches are scheduled to be played in front of 2.5 million spectators. Added to this seven million visitors are expected to watch these matches on giant screens positioned in specially created fan zones. The scale of the fan zones is unprecedented for a European Championship, with the one on the Champs de Mars, near the Eiffel Tower, by itself expected to accommodate 92,000 people.

Putting a human dimension on the Euro 2016-related security efforts, according to the French Government, a total of 72,000 police and gendarmes are being mobilised plus 5,200 civil security personnel – including bomb disposal experts. Beyond this, it is planned to pre-position elite police and gendarmerie squads at stadia and areas around the fan zones. In terms of the French Military's own involvement, 10,000 soldiers are now tasked under Operation Sentinelle. Regarding the Euro 2016 organisers themselves, it is reported that UEFA is drafting in between 10,000 and 15,000 security staff at 110-plus sites.

In light of recent history, those responsible for security at Euro 2016 can certainly not afford to rest easy. The Islamist terror attacks last November, which are still fresh in the memory, and other incidents serve to underline

the enormity of the threat that is still very much out there. It is also worrying, following raids on Islamist terrorists in Brussels after the twin incidents which hit that city, to read reports suggesting that the Euro 2016 tournament was actually on a list of potential targets. For its part the French *Liberation* newspaper suggests that Mohamed Abrini, who was involved in both Paris and Brussels, even told Belgian investigators

Police take part in a mock terrorist attack exercise



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that one intention of the terror cell was to target Euro 2016 rather than undertake what actually transpired in Brussels.

Returning to the situation at the Stade de France last November, the fact that fans watching a friendly football match between France and Germany could be targeted by suicide bombers in this way was definitely a wake-up call for the French authorities. Ultimately, the fans on that fateful night had a lucky escape given the way that events unfolded – they could have been so much worse. In light of the efforts that have already been expended in the ensuing seven months to beef up security at France's National Stadium – the Stade de France – the spectacle at the end of May of fans clashing, throwing flares, and setting seats on fire during the Coupe de France final between Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and Olympique de Marseille, resulting in 30 arrests, shows that nothing can be taken for granted, even at this late stage. According to France 24, despite reinforcements, the police and security staff were simply overwhelmed by the troublemakers before and during the cup game. Philippe

Galli, the police chief responsible for the Saint-Denis area, where the Stade de France is situated, gave a frank assessment to Europe 1 radio admitting that when the system was under pressure: "It broke down in a number of places". Among the failings, spotlighted by Galli, was the fact that, due to security personnel being unable to handle the scale of the crowd, many fans were able to elude security pat downs and, crucially, that banned objects – such as flares – found their way over a wall, which had been put up around the stadium's perimeter.

So what was the reaction of the French Government to these apparent failures, only weeks away from the Euro 2016 kick-off? In a statement issued soon afterwards, the French Interior Minister – Bernard Cazeneuve – tried to play things down emphasising that lessons will be learned from the incidents that occurred at the Coupe de France final. He went on to stress that the lapses occurred at a time when the stadium's UEFA [Euro 2016] setup was not yet complete. Moving ahead he underlined that: "Smooth-flowing entrance points, flow management, and systematic searches of each person entering are the three priority areas".

On the question of the influence of the terrorist attacks that hit France in 2015 on the final shape of security for Euro 2016, in his statement Cazeneuve stressed that even from the beginning of preparatory work for the tournament the terrorist risk had been taken into account: "The consequence of the attacks was, therefore, not an overhaul of the security principles implemented but their adaption to the changing modus operandi observed both in France and in other countries affected by attacks," said Cazeneuve.

Elsewhere in his statement, Cazeneuve acknowledged that Euro 2016 could, potentially, be in the firing line: "Even though no direct threat has been detected to date, Euro 2016 is clearly a potential target for terrorist groups because of the media exposure, the concentration of crowds and the presence on French soil of people of many nationalities".

The intelligence aspect is obviously a vital part of the security jigsaw and to this end, the Interior Minister confirmed, a unit, operating 24/7 has been set up, which is dedicated to analysing the risk: "This brings together all of the services contributing to domestic and foreign intelligence," said Cazeneuve.

Considering the wider Euro 2016 security measures for the tournament, some of the other key elements highlighted by Cazeneuve's statement include reaffirming the breakdown of security responsibilities: "The internal security of the sporting venues is the organiser's responsibility and the government is responsible for security outside of those venues. This distribution of responsibilities also applies to the fan zones established by the local host cities," said the Interior Minister.

Looking in more detail at the fan zones themselves, the Interior Minister pointed out that 'inter-ministerial instructions' had strengthened the security requirements for these environments by tightening entrance controls. To underline this point he drew attention to plans for the: "Frisking of spectators and the use of CCTV



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in all the fan zones". In addition he confirmed that pre-filtering measures have been prescribed to facilitate movement at fan zone entrances and to prevent people gathering on public highways. He also flagged up the fact that the French Government is providing additional financial assistance in the form of a one-third share of the security costs incurred by the host cities. A significant proportion of this financing is being devoted to CCTV. Metal detectors, barriers and other measures are also key elements of the zone security.

One person very much at the centre of things security-wise for Euro 2016 is the tournament's head of security, Ziad Khoury. It is perhaps not too surprising that Khoury has found himself in the media spotlight. When asked by ITV News, last month, what his biggest fear was between 'a terror strike' and 'hooliganism', he replied: "Terrorism, of course".

Speaking to Associated Press for another interview Khoury referenced the roll out of anti-drone technology, which garnered many subsequent headlines. While on the surface such a deployment may seem excessive for a football tournament, this innovative technology, Khoury explained, will help to enforce no-fly zones over the stadiums and team training grounds. The fact that the security bubble around the key venues extends to the air, as well as the ground, demonstrates that nothing is being left to chance: "We've noted the general proliferation of drone usage in society... in most stadiums and for most matches anti-drone measures will be deployed, working with the state, which will interfere with drones and take

control of them if they are spotted," he said.

He went on to offer the reassurance that the idea is not to actually destroy the drones as this might cause collateral damage, including seeing them crash into the public: "It is to prevent them from flying over the stadiums and perhaps to arrest the pilots". When interviewed, Khoury also reckoned that thanks to these measures, and the expanded perimeter security at venues, drone operators will have to keep their distance, so the risk now to matches from drones is pretty limited.

Staying on the anti-drone theme, the French authorities have already been training to deal with a range of drone-based scenarios. A case in point was an exercise held in Saint Etienne – one of the Euro 2016 host cities – back in April. The exercise was, apparently, set up around the premise that a drone carrying chemicals was targeting spectators at the city's stadium. Although the thought of drones being flown in this way may seem far fetched, it is certainly not unknown for drones to encroach on football matches, a case in point is the near riot situation that ensued when a drone with a flag attached appeared during a Serbia versus Albania football match. This led to altercations between fans and players and soon escalated into an international incident.

To conclude, with all of the efforts going into keeping Euro 2016 safe and secure, against aerial and ground-based threats, the hope has to be that everything runs smoothly, allowing spectators and players to enjoy a fantastic sporting spectacle, on and off the pitch, without being endangered by extremist elements.

72,000 police and gendarmes are being mobilised for Euro 2016

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