

## Parcel and Letter Security for Postal and Express Courier Flows



**PARSEC Unwrapped**

**What is the appeal of PARSEC?**

**Report on the RISE-SD Conference**

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# Welcome

I am delighted to welcome you to this issue of the PARSEC Newsletter. We are taking a look at the stakeholders that are so essential to everything we do – customs agencies; post and parcel operators; police forces at national, European and international level; key government and EU institutions; courier and freight organisations and their respective trade bodies.

We will be learning a bit more about some of our consortium partners and their roles in the project in each newsletter. The three in the spotlight this month are Poste Italiane, Dutch Customs and HALO X-ray Technologies.

PARSEC has been to 28 events in the first 18 months of the project and one of the most exciting events for us was RISE-SD 2023. Find out more about the conference on pages 6-7. Do email us if you have attended, or are planning to attend, any events as disseminating our work at national and international conferences is an important part of the project.

We hope you enjoy finding out a bit more about the current progress and successes in PARSEC and look forward to receiving your feedback.

Frank Janssens, CBRA Services  
Project Coordinator

## Mid-Term Demonstrations and Review

The PARSEC mid-term technical demonstration and review were held on 23rd and 24th April in Nottingham, UK where key parts of PARSEC detection equipment are located. Moving equipment elsewhere would have generated additional costs and administrative work to obtain all required licences for the equipment and test materials.

The two project reviewers, contracted by the Research Executive Agency (REA), first visited UK Border Force at East Midlands airport to observe the DHL express courier services, gaining understanding on the scale of the operations and the volumes of packages and speed of handling, sorting, selection and scanning.

This was followed first by online demonstrations by Varex Imaging and TWI, and second by a live demonstration by HALO X-ray Technologies – all about their scanning equipment with the PARSEC mid-term research and innovation outcomes embedded. Ultimately, the demonstrations showcased the capacity to detect illicit substances and distinguish between real substances and simulants with similar composition and characteristics.

Lastly, during the 23rd April, partner CBR presented the latest version of the PARSEC flow simulation tool. While simulating flow of detection process based on PARSEC system-of-systems architecture, the tool supports analysis of different input parameters, including ROCs (Receiver Operating Characteristics) and illicit goods probabilities; physical constraints and queues; man-hours, delays, peak-time loads; and so forth. The current design includes creating a flexible model capable of changing the system's architecture, flow control and input parameters.

The formal review of the project activities and progress during the first 18 months was held the following day. The work package leaders and the coordinator presented summaries of their Work Packages and the key achievements in each area of the project. The project officer and reviewers gave the team helpful feedback after the presentations, with some important recommendations for the next period. The review meeting was followed by a written review of the deliverables, and a technical report was submitted to REA on 31st May 2024.





# PARSEC Unwrapped

If you look up the word parsec in [Wikipedia](#), it will tell you that it is a “.. unit of length used to measure the large distances to astronomical objects outside the Solar System, approximately equal to 3.26 light-years”. That is quite some distance by human standards, but within the scale of the entire universe it is not that far at all! For the Horizon Europe funded PARSEC, it is all about the “Parcel and Letter Security for Postal and Express Courier Flows”. Our timescales are not measured in light years – the project duration is only from Oct 2022 to Sept 2025 – but our ambitions are to advance the detection of threats and illicit goods in postal and express courier flows for the immediate and near future. The 19 partners bring together research organisations, start-ups and other innovators, together with end users of the explored technologies. These are the postal services, customs, non-customs and other law enforcement authorities – and by extension, also their stakeholders.

Parcel and mail flows include the posting of letters and documents, as well as the shipment of small parcels with content like product samples, ecommerce purchases and gifts. Much of our social fabric depends on efficient postal and letter services, and many of the international operational arrangements are enabled by close international cooperation between operators. Guiding enabling regulatory frameworks include those of the Universal Postal Union, dating back to [1874](#), amongst other legal instruments put in place to safeguard public service expectations.

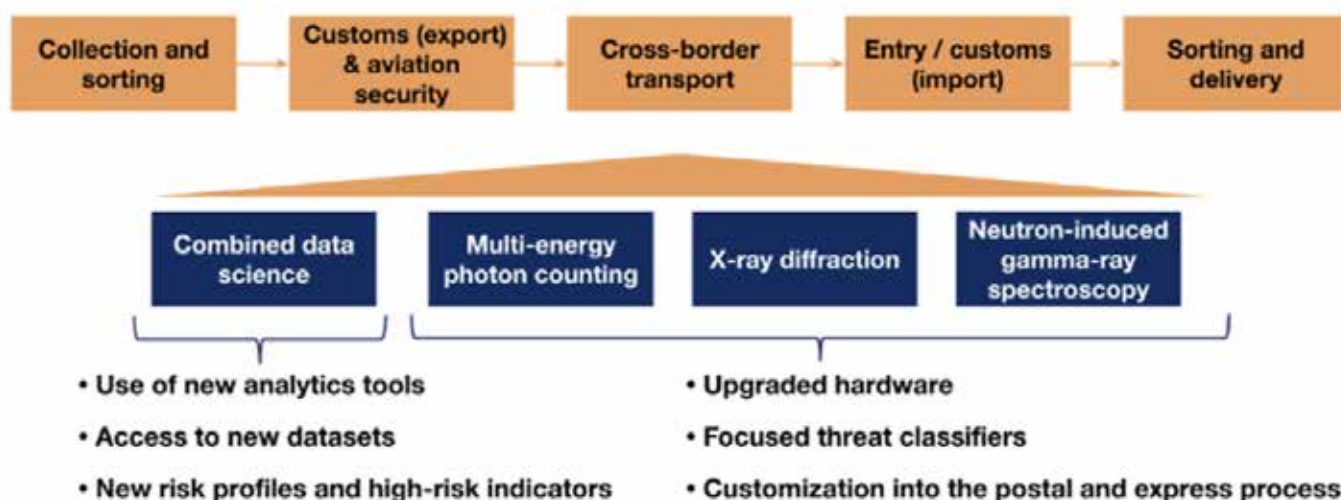
But postal services can also be – and are – used for illegal purposes. There is a need to make sure that any applicable trade regulations are enforced and

that any applicable import and export duties are paid.

The scanning of mail and parcel flows, and the application of risk management control principles, are a key feature in cross-border flows. Occasionally, scanning might also be necessary for domestic flows, such as to identify and detect the illegal distribution of drugs via postal networks. And for undeclared dangerous goods and explosives, the safety and security of the postal system is at stake. Subsequently, the list of items of interest is long, and includes:

- explosives and explosive precursors
- chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) material
- drugs and drug precursors
- cash
- counterfeit items, including counterfeit identity documents and fake medicines
- other contraband

This is where innovators come in. Science and technology can help change the way we see the world. The exchange between technological end-users like the postal service and border agencies with innovators enables us to think – literally – outside the box. This is what the Horizon Europe PARSEC project has set out to deliver by bringing together, and developing further, a number of exciting technologies. These include the wider application of recent advances in data sciences; multi-energy photon counting; X-ray diffraction; and neutron induced gamma ray spectroscopy, as the figure below shows.



The project use-case has three specific aims:

1. make smart use of data to reduce the physical inspection load through risk management and improve the utilisation of human and physical inspection resources;
2. develop capabilities, which enable fast and predictable postal and express courier operations without burdening inspection resources with high rates of false positives
3. enhance people safety by reducing the risk from illegal or undeclared shipments of explosives, CBRN threats and other hazardous materials.

The first half of the project has been very productive, but of course there is still much for the PARSEC project to achieve in the remaining 15 months. Much of the planning and specification stages and some key technical and prototype development stages have now been completed, and the whole consortium is working towards the successful implementation of the first pilots in the final months of the project.

Further details are available at the PARSEC project website at [www.parsec-project.eu](http://www.parsec-project.eu) and on our social media platforms [LinkedIn](#) and [X](#).

## What is the appeal of PARSEC?

*The focus of the project's work is simply centred around the detection of dangerous threats and contraband in the postal and parcel system, as well as for national and international couriers.*

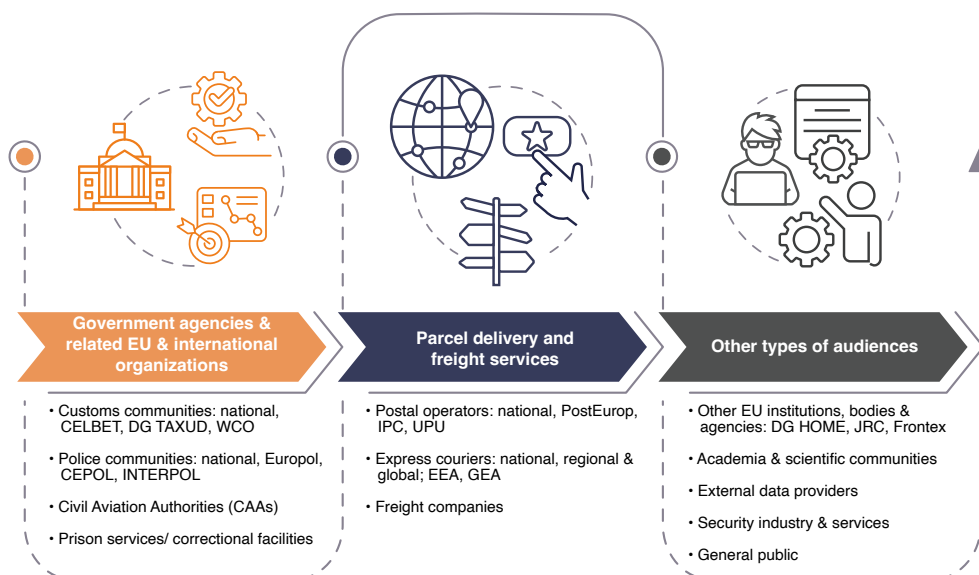
To achieve the core ambitious objective of enhancing the detection of these threats, the PARSEC team is developing innovative data analytics techniques and non-intrusive technologies that ultimately will result in higher logistics and detection performances of postal and express flows. This will inherently then strengthen the preparedness and reaction capacities in the postal and parcel service without disrupting the flow of business.

There is a wide group of stakeholders that the full scope of this technological development and other work have the real potential to appeal to. And we should never forget that this is an extremely important sector of the security market, which

impacts on the security of all citizens all across the EU. The threat of the postal, parcel and courier sectors being utilised by criminals to ship drugs, weapons and another contraband within national and international borders is not only very current and very real, but is also an increasing threat to us all.

PARSEC will deliver by the end of the project the blueprints for a comprehensive detection architecture that builds on four key innovation areas:

1. Combined data science for next-generation risk assessment
2. Multi-energy photon counting detector for quick and accurate first line inspection
3. X-ray diffraction screening solution for enhanced second line inspection
4. Neutron-induced gamma-ray spectroscopy for improved third line inspection



*Potential target audiences for the PARSEC project*

So, let us have a look in a bit more detail at which organisations make up the target audiences for the PARSEC system-of-systems? We can look deeper at these by segmenting them into three areas:

- Government agencies and related EU & international organisations
- Parcel delivery and freight services
- Other types of audiences, including EU institutions and academia

### **Government agencies, EU and international organisations**

If we look at this group first, we can clearly identify the broader Customs community as essential for our dissemination work. This community consists of all the European national customs administrations, the Customs Eastern and South-Eastern Land Border Expert Team (CELBET), the European Commission Directorate-General for Taxation and Customs Union (DG TAXUD) and the World Customs Organisation (WCO).

The PARSEC project addresses some specific customs threats, mainly related to the smuggling of illicit goods and materials, by providing a new set of innovative technologies and also by aiming to strengthen the cooperation between customs agencies and the postal and express operators, police agencies and the security industry sector. Stronger public-private cooperation could actually help the sector to re-design security control systems for optimal logistics and security performance to meet the needs of both customs and postal operators.

Police agencies also belong to this group, especially each Member State's national police force, as well as the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (EUROPOL), the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL) and the International Criminal Police Organisation (INTERPOL), an inter-governmental agency with 195 member states. Beyond these, we must also consider the prison services and correctional facilities and the Civil Aviation Authorities (CAAs), as much of the continent's mail and parcels are of course transferred between major hubs by plane.

### **Parcel delivery and freight services**

The second target audience group includes actors in parcel deliveries and in freight services. National postal operators are part of this group, as well as international postal organisations, in particular the Universal Postal Union (UPU), PostEurop (a trade association representing European public operators), and the International Post Corporation

(IPC). National and global express couriers also belong to the second audience group along with the industry's trade associations such as the Global Express Association (GEA) and the European Express Association (EEA). Freight service providers, especially airlines that carry international parcels, are also part of the freight sector.

### **Other types of audiences**

In the broadest terms, the third target audience group covers everything that is not part of the two earlier groups. This includes certain EU institutions, bodies and agencies, most notably the Directorate-General Migration and Home Affairs (HOME), the EU's Joint Research Centre (JRC), and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex). This group also involves experts from the academic community as well as from the security industry. External data providers, that can potentially supply PARSEC with risk-relevant data for research purposes, are important members of this group, as is the general public.

All in all, twelve specific target audiences divided into three groups have been identified and indeed the project continues to expand its contacts and discussions with them as we attempt to spread the word about PARSEC as widely as possible. During the second half of the project, the consortium will continue to learn more about them – not just about their practical interests, information needs, and willingness to influence work done in the project, but also about their concerns and constraints when it comes to subsequent efforts regarding innovation uptake and driving real (post-project) impacts.



# Frank Janssens aRISEs back from Rhodes with interesting insights from leaders in security and defence



*The most recent “Research and Innovation Symposium for European Security and Defense”, RISE-SD 2023, brought together leaders and policy makers from across the European research and development community to share insights and drive innovation. Frank Janssens from CBRA Services was there to showcase the PARSEC project. Here is what he had to say:*

**Hi Frank, great that you presented PARSEC at the [RISE-SD 2023](#) event. In a few words can you please tell us a little bit about yourself, your organisation and your role in PARSEC?**

My name is Frank Janssens and I’m an international expert on customs, border management and trade facilitation. My activities are mainly in Europe, the Middle East and Asia and concentrate on improving and digitalising customs procedures and operations.

In the area of border security, I’m active in two studies for the EU related to Customs Control Equipment which concentrate on state-of-the-art and innovative equipment and on new ways of improving public procurement of such equipment, including joint procurement. In the framework of the PARSEC project, I’m the official coordinator. The coordination is provided by CBRA Services, a company based in Belgium, and together with Dr. Juha Hintsa we are the co-founders. Valentina Scioneri, a senior researcher, is the third person in our coordination team.

Our tasks are mainly to keep in contact with the 19 partners, ensure progress is being made in line with the time plan, set up joint activities and meetings, as well as to ensure excellent relations with the Research Executive Agency (REA). We also are responsible for preparing a number of project deliverables, mainly in the domains of organisation, security, financial management, dissemination, communication, ethics and addressing any upcoming issues including providing support where needed.

**You probably met loads of interesting people, organisations and projects during the event. Can you share any highlights, including the most interesting questions presented by RISE participants?**

There were indeed loads of interesting people, including all the key persons representing over 20 security and defence projects, who all shared many interesting insights especially with regard to innovative detection technologies. The full proceedings can be downloaded from the conference website as a PDF booklet [here](#).

There were also many officials from the European Institutions covering the Commission, the Council and several Agencies. Their presentations were either on their scientific work or about the services offered by their organisations, including access to information, research support, and enabling & supporting research results being brought to the market and finding their way to a wider use than the current research environment. This is particularly important, as I find that there is still a gap between the working methods and tools used nowadays in daily operations and new research results which could be used to make the border control operations both more efficient and more effective.

Questions mainly related to a better understanding of the technologies used, their potential wider use in different domains, concrete possibilities for support and so forth. I now understand even more that technology permits border control by electronic means, including air and underwater drones with specialised cameras, stationary balloons with observation equipment for example in a way that we are close to full border surveillance. The challenge remains in the field of bringing these novelties into the operational environment to be used by skilled and trained operators. It was recognised by the organisers that the demand for new equipment such as these is still fairly low and efforts should be made to inform law enforcement agencies of relevant research results.

**What was the most memorable moment of the RISE-SD event, from your personal perspective?**

Besides lots of useful and relevant information on technological developments, I was very much



impressed by Mike Ellis' presentation about the MELCHIOR project and the reported, very worrying, threats about implanting illegal substances, such as explosives, through surgery into the human body to overcome detection at control points.

It was a shock for me to hear how far humans would go to achieve terrorist goals. Whilst I'm by nature interested in new things and recent developments, this practice crossed the line of what to be expected and worries me very much. I'm glad that colleagues are deeply looking into this and I hope their detection capacity will put an end to this most worrying development.

**What topics and themes would you suggest to the organisers to add for the next year's event? And, do you plan to attend again?**

As it was most interesting, I would certainly like to attend again and will make every effort to ensure that the PARSEC project can be represented there by the most suitable person available.

Whilst the focus on security and defence is important, I would like to see greater emphasis also placed on the difficulties that people experience when overcoming challenges. These could be scientific challenges, but also organisational and funding issues. As a last point I would hope it will lead to more opportunities to cooperate between research domains and projects, as well as potential users in the domain of enforcement agencies.

As a concluding remark it is worth stressing the impressive achievements so far, but also the need to overcome silos and explore the scope to develop ongoing and new partnerships.

**Thanks a lot Frank for this interesting interview with sage advice. Much work remains to be done, indeed, and your words offer some valuable takeaways for networks like PEN-CP to follow-up on.**

## Recent and Upcoming Events



### **TAPA EMEA Conference, 12-13 June 2024 Amsterdam, the Netherlands**

Over 500 participants attended the conference, which provided a platform for knowledge sharing, collaboration and advancing standards in supply chain security across EMEA. Also educational sessions, technical solutions and policy discussions. Approx. 100 PARSEC leaflets were distributed to participants. [conference.tapaemea.org](https://conference.tapaemea.org)



### **Innovation for e-Commerce Security and Countering Illicit Transactions Workshop 11 July 2024 Brussels, Belgium**

CBRA Services will present PARSEC at this CERIS workshop, whose focus will be on fighting illicit trafficking and criminal activities in the flow of goods and services across EU external borders, including the security of e-commerce, financial transactions and the circumvention of sanctions. [ec.europa.eu/newsroom/home/items/831740/en](https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/home/items/831740/en)



### **European Society of Criminology Annual Conference, 11-14 September 2024 Bucharest, Romania**

Transcrime will present PARSEC at the conference, which will tackle issues related to the development of criminology all over Europe and beyond. The full conference programme will be published on the dedicated website. [www.eurocrim2024.com](https://www.eurocrim2024.com)



### **International Security Expo, 24-25 September 2024 London, UK**

Attracting 10,000 people, this is one of the major annual exhibitions in the security industry calendar. The International Security & Resilience Conference will run in parallel with four themes – Transport & Aviation Security, Resilience, Security Skills and Innovation. [www.internationalsecurityexpo.com](https://www.internationalsecurityexpo.com)



### **2024 International Law Enforcement Intellectual Property Crime Conference 23-25 September 2024 Willemstad, Curaçao**

INTERPOL will cohost the 17th annual event with the Government of Curaçao. 'Reducing the Harm' is the theme with tracks focused on coordinating responses, aligning resources and leveraging opportunities, primarily examining free trade zones and supply chain security. [www.iipcc.org/conference.php](https://www.iipcc.org/conference.php)

# Partner Profiles

*The PARSEC consortium consists of 19 partners across customs and police end users; postal operators; and research, innovation and technology partners. For this issue of the PARSEC Newsletter, we have featured short interviews with three of the consortium partners – Poste Italiane, Customs Administration of the Netherlands and HALO X-ray Technologies.*

## Posteitaliane

With a 160 year history, approximately 12,800 post offices, 119,000 employees and total financial assets of €581 billion, **Poste Italiane** serves 35 million customers. The Group is Italy's largest service infrastructure, significantly contributing to the economy, and market leader in each of its three lines of business:

- Post and Parcels - benefitted from the recent growth of e-commerce
- Financial Services - through BancoPosta
- Insurance - life insurance market leader; expanding in asset management

For more information on Poste Italiane, please visit the website: <https://www.posteitaliane.it/>

Ms. Valentina Furbatto has worked for Poste Italiane (PIT) for almost 20 years. During the first 11 years she worked on defining the organisational structure of the postal sector, including the re-engineering of processes, resourcing requirements and defining standards and procedures for processing mail within sorting centres. Since 2017 her role has focussed on the physical security tasks company-wide, which includes the sorting and delivery centres, post offices and management buildings.

Valentina also works on the company's physical security policies and standards, risk analysis and assessment activities, monitoring and reporting, ensuring the management and development of the information systems underlying the security processes. This is the first time that her department has been involved in a project in the Horizon research programme.

Poste Italiane initially became involved in the project with another Italian PARSEC partner, Transcrime, which felt the aims of the project would also be of interest for their business. There were some good practices already underway in Italy with the collaboration between Poste Italiane, the Postal Police and the Direzione Centrale per i Servizi Antidroga (DCSA).

### Operationally useful end results

As an end user, PIT's primary role is to share the company's experience with other partners to make the developed solutions concretely usable and useful in an operational context, such as in the production reality of a postal plant. "It will be very interesting to test the technological developments in the field

to verify their performance in a real environment," confirmed Furbatto.

She continued: "During the first half of the project we met and worked with people of different backgrounds, attitudes and expectations regarding the project. What we have achieved so far is the construction of a common and precise objective and a clear path to achieve it. It is an excellent result for continuing and obtaining the desired achievements in the second part of the project."

Valentina believes that the main results from the project will be firstly a new technological direction that could make the postal network safer both for our employees and for our customers, whilst at the same time lowering the operating costs of these security controls. "It is a big challenge and each step we take can help us do our job better and better," she expanded.

### Satisfying multiple stakeholder types

Valentina went on to explain that perhaps the biggest challenge of the project will be to find a common solution that satisfies the needs of the different categories of stakeholders – Customs, Postal operators etc. – each of which may have a somewhat different approach to the subject.

When asked about how the project's Results could improve her daily work, the answer was that these outcomes could make work at the Poste Italiane plants more efficient and effective, especially inside the International Exchange Centres, where the scanning of postal items is more intensive.





Customs Administration of the  
Netherlands  
Ministry of Finance

**The Customs Administration of the Netherlands (DCA)** is one of the 27 EU Customs authorities, primarily responsible for the supervision of the Union's international trade. These authorities are required by law to put measures in place to protect the EU's financial interests and to protect it from unfair and illegal trade. These also cover the safety and security of its residents and the environment, while maintaining a proper balance between customs controls

and facilitation of legitimate trade. DCA is also responsible for ensuring that tax revenues are as accurate, timely and complete as possible.

DCA monitors international transport hubs with the focus mainly on the transport of goods and illicit substances through the port of Rotterdam and Amsterdam Airport Schiphol. Innovation of detection technologies is very important for this improved supervision with an increasing global trade market. DCA established a dedicated innovation team in 2009, which tests equipment in the laboratory and in the field.

For more information on Dutch Customs, please visit the website at: <https://www.belastingdienst.nl/wps/wcm/connect/en/customs/customs>

Ger Koomen has been employed within Dutch Customs since 1993 and as senior advisor innovation is heavily involved in its technical innovation work with scientific knowledge provided by the Dutch Customs Laboratory. He works closely with his colleague, Sharon Sap, who has responsibility as the PARSEC project lead within DCA.

"New calls in the Horizon Europe programme are always discussed within Dutch Customs and it became quite clear that this particular call was certainly of interest to us," explained Koomen. DCA has been involved right from the start of PARSEC following contact with CBRA, which led to them participating in the writing of the proposal together with the Dutch national postal organisation.

Dutch Customs has had good experiences from several previous Horizon Programme projects, for example: ACXIS, C-BORD, COSMIC, Bordersens, Multiscan 3D and is still an active participant in the PEN-CP project.

### **Huge rise in ecommerce**

There has been an enormous increase in ecommerce in recent years, meaning that the effective control of illegal goods is a huge challenge for all customs authorities worldwide. Improvements in risk profiles based on available data and new instrumental detection systems are needed for customs to fulfil their tasks efficiently.

Talking about the successes to date in the PARSEC project, Koomen goes on to say "We have a good overview of the data that are available and the

chances and ways to get access to more data. Also the development of two new types of detectors is brought to the stage, so that we can test them at least in a laboratory environment."

Perhaps the greatest reward for DCA would be if customs could have access to a methodology to obtain sufficient data in a timely manner about the parcels that are going to be imported and exported, so that we can apply optimal risk profiles. The same of course for new fast detection equipment that can identify illegal goods in parcels.

"I expect that this project will bring us an important step closer to the rewards mentioned above of having timely access to sufficient data regarding the import and export of parcels, as well as the huge benefits of having fast detection equipment. Both of these could impact very positively on our daily workload," enthused Koomen.





**HALO X-ray Technologies** was co-founded in 2012 by Dr Simon Godber and is an innovation company developing new and disruptive materials' identification systems for aviation security and customs & border protection.

HALO X-ray diffraction (XRD) uses revolutionary focal construct technology to increase diffraction signal strength by orders of magnitude over more traditional XRD techniques. This results in high fidelity material resolution, which delivers significant benefits both in terms of accuracy and speed of detection, resulting in higher detection rates and significantly reduced delays for rapid screening of aviation passengers and parcels.

For more information on HALO X-ray Technologies, please visit <https://www.haloxyray.com>

Dr Anthony Dicken is Head of Science and has worked in the field of material science since 2005 and developed X-ray diffraction tomographic imaging systems since 2008. Actively involved in the entire R&D effort from concept to delivery, he has generated significant intellectual property for HALO, authored over 20 directly relevant publications and is proud to be a named inventor on HALO patents.

HALO was introduced to PARSEC through UK Border Force, having previously worked collectively on a project to evaluate the efficacy of the HXT264 X-ray diffraction screening system at detecting narcotics. Following a successful outcome, PARSEC now provides an opportunity to test the equipment in an operational environment.

The HXT264 XRD spectra is sensitive to the local arrangement of atoms within suspected materials rather than the proportions of the elements present in the material, i.e., molecular rather than chemical formula, where the latter is measured by typical dual-energy X-ray systems. Materials with similar atomic ratios / chemical formula can be used to construct stable compounds (e.g. cheese, books) or unstable compounds (e.g. explosives). Interestingly, those same chemical proportions can also be used to build compounds with functional groups that have physiological effects on people (i.e. narcotics).

#### **Benefits from technical demonstrations**

The scanner was used at the recent demonstrations at the Parcelforce international sorting hub in Coventry, UK for early intelligence gathering and the collection of empirical data. This data is fundamental for developing classifiers and understanding quantitatively and how well the HXT264 can perform at identifying narcotics.

Dr. Dicken explained "The HXT264 was developed for explosives detection in the aviation security (AVSEC) market. The HALO team are system-of-systems experts and have experience in combining

the scanner with X-ray screening systems developed by several prominent aviation security companies."

HALO's goal in joining the PARSEC programme is to evaluate the effectiveness of the HXT264 for customs and border protection where the prohibited items, stream-of-commerce and operational requirements differ to AVSEC. The biggest reward has been to collect data on real narcotics to build threat recognition algorithms.

Equally important has been the opportunity to work alongside regulators and organisations with direct experience of the challenges of working in this environment, particularly those faced by the security agents.

"The Parcelforce deployment has already given some insight into the HXT264's performance at identifying narcotics. HALO's experience in integrating system-of-systems suggest that this performance could be increased even further by combining orthogonal datasets from multiple technologies. We are excited to see the performance metrics of a combined system-of-systems architecture," concluded Dr. Dicken.

A better understanding of pan-European postal screening operations will focus HALO development programmes and allow rapid changes to both its hardware and software products to align with this new market. It will also provide positive feedback to its AVSEC market solutions, as it continues to mature and improve its integrated system-of-systems solutions.



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## Parcel and Letter Security for Postal and Express Courier Flows

The official newsletter of the PARSEC Horizon Europe project is available at <https://www.parsec-project.eu>

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### PARSEC Online Presence



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