

Tackling crime - US-style

US government money helped set up and run a police training centre along FBI lines. Greg Spencer investigates.

THE opening of borders in eastern Europe was not only a boon to trade and personal liberty, it also spawned some of the world's most dangerous rings of organized crime.

That is why, in April 1995, the United States government, under a joint venture with Hungary, opened the International Law Enforcement Academy in Budapest.

The academy, whose \$1.5 million operating budget is paid by the United States, schools 250 east European police officers a year in a curriculum lifted from the FBI's own training school in Quantico, Virginia.

Students, all commissioned officers with at least five years experience, have come from 22 nations of the old Soviet bloc. The school aims to confer knowledge and forge relationships that will give its alumni the edge they need against international criminals.

"This is not just for the benefit of these countries," says ILEA director Leslie Kaciban, a special agent with the FBI.

"We're finding a lot of the organized crime cells are originating from this region and infiltrating the United States. We're trying to get a handle on how they work, and cut them off at their roots."

The ILEA is situated in Buda at a 100-year-old complex of buildings formerly home to the Hungarian mounted police. These days, the same complex also



CLASSROOM: Officers at the International Law Enforcement Academy follow an FBI style program and receive instruction from FBI agents. Simultaneous translation is available.

houses the Hungarian National Police Academy and the Central European Police Academy.

The ILEA has no permanent faculty, but rather a revolving line-up of instructors from the US and half-a-dozen participating countries.

The academy's *raison d'être* is an eight-week course modeled after the 16-week FBI National Academy.

Each session includes 50 students, representing no more than three countries at a time.

According to course guidelines, also taken from the FBI, the students have to be at least 25-years-old, be in excellent shape and have a strong moral character.

To accommodate non-English

speakers, the academy's main classroom as well as its plush-seated auditorium were designed for simultaneous translation.

Sound proof cubicles at the rear of the rooms accommodate the translators, who can be picked up at any seat over headphones.

These high-tech facilities were largely responsible for the ILEA's \$3 million start-up cost, \$2.5 million paid by the US and the remainder by Hungary.

The curriculum focuses on management skills, rather than technical ones.

Featured courses during a recent session for Hungarian, Slovenian and Croatian officers included human dignity, managing the problem employee, media

relations, narcotics investigations and Eurasian organized crimes.

Another key aspect of every course is fitness.

This is a comprehensive discussion about how to keep in good health, including dietary advice and exercise breaks at the academy's tennis and racquetball courts.

Students are also encouraged to stay off cigarettes, a point reinforced by a ban on smoking in all the academy's buildings, including the campus *söröző* (bar).

Though some students grumble about the difficulties of getting a smoke during the tightly scheduled class days, others embrace the healthy training.

Students of most sessions make

a competition to see who can lose the most weight over the eight weeks.

Two officers from Croatia share the record after losing 15 kilos a piece.

One criticism of the academy is that little of what the American police preach is applicable in eastern Europe.

Officers here aren't paid so well, they lack basic equipment, and they operate under different laws.

The academy's seminar on narcotics investigation missed the mark in Hungary for example.

"Hungary is primarily a transit country for drugs — they're just going through," said Lt Col Sándor Pásztor of the Hungarian Airport Police.

"The narcotics section focused on the issues of a destination country."

Robberies

However, the ILEA course did offer some useful training in areas in which the Americans have lots of experience: Violent crimes and bank robberies.

And the academy has been very effective in building professional ties among students and instructors.

"If you're familiar with the history of this region, you know it could do with more co-operation between countries," Pásztor said.

"The biggest benefit we've gotten is the relationships we've made with foreign colleagues. We've made some good friendships."

Kaciban adds that some of those friendships have already led to solved cases.

In one case, Latvian police, with assistance from the US Secret Service, broke a counterfeiting ring printing US dollars.