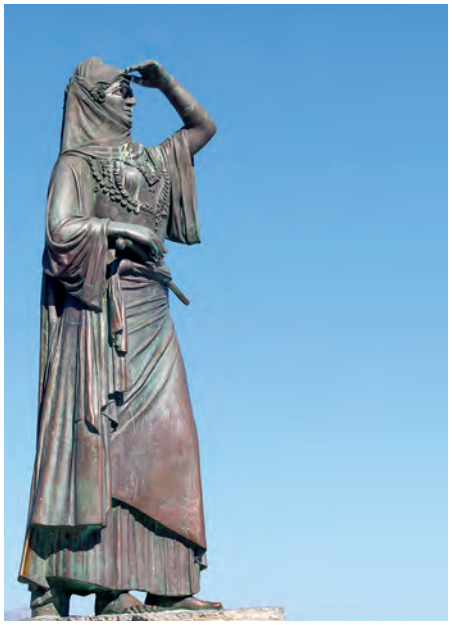
Lloyd's List

Greece & Cyprus 2021

A special report

Greece & Cyprus 2021

Greece and Cyprus have much in common and, in a maritime context, the two nations largely see eye to eye. Both are bastions of European shipping, with a global perspective on the industry. That is highlighted in this special report, which focuses on the extraordinary spread of trading by the Greek-owned fleet, using data from Lloyd's List Intelligence, and on the refreshingly outward-facing agenda of Cyprus Shipping Deputy Minister Vassilios Demetriades. We also look back 200 years ago to the outbreak of the war of independence that secured Greece's freedom, paving the way for the country's emergence as the world's biggest shipowning nation.



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Editor
Linton Nightingale

Lloyd's List Managing Editor
Richard Meade

Contributors
James Baker, Nidaa Bakhsh, Declan Bush, Richard Clayton, Nigel Lowry, David Osler, Janet Porter, Adam Sharpe, Cichen Shen, Inderpreet Walia, Eric Watkins, Michelle Wiese Bockmann, Fred Williams

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Printing
Paragon Customer Communications

Editorial
Lloyd's List,
Blue Fin Building,
110 Southwark Street,
London SE1 0TA
Tel: +44 (0)20 7017 5000
Email: **editorial@lloydslist.com**

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An historical memory is part of what makes Greek shipping tick: 11 vessels in the revolutionary fleet were named Themistocles.

Shipping and independence celebrate their kinship

The 200-year anniversary of the outbreak of the war of independence provides yet another reminder that Greek shipping's adaptability has been baked into it historically, **Nigel Lowry** reports

Today's Greek shipping industry has plenty of historic antecedents. That has been underlined in the past two years by an almost non-stop stream of anniversaries worthy of celebration.

In 2020, it was 2,500 years since the battle of Salamis, where Greek triremes vanquished the much-larger invading Persian fleet, protecting the ancient Athenian experiment in democracy.

This year, it has been the 200th anniversary of the Greek uprising of 1821 against the Ottoman Empire, marking two centuries of Greek freedom.

The war at sea, waged on the Greek side by merchant vessels owned and crewed from the islands of the Aegean, was crucial in the eventual success of the liberation struggle.

So important is this particular milestone that even in the country's maritime circles, it has gone relatively unnoticed that December 2021 represents the 75th anniversary of the acquisition by Greek owners of the first of 98 Liberty Ships from the US government after the end of World War Two.

In Greek shipping folklore, the rebuilding of the Greek-owned fleet after the war is often attributed solely to those "blessed" Liberty Ships.

While they helped provide immediate employment for many experienced Greek seafarers in the wake of the conflict — and were a cornerstone for some owners in recovering from their wartime losses — it should also be remembered that the vessels were not an American donation.

Greek owners swiftly acquired much more war-surplus tonnage for themselves on the open market.

With the extraordinary expansion and longevity of the industry during the past 50 years, there is no need to go too far back in time to locate achievements by Greeks in the maritime domain. Yet an historical memory has always been part of what makes Greek shipping tick.

Alexander Ypsilandis, an early leader of the 19th century Greek uprising against the Ottomans, consciously invoked the maritime defence strategy that gave Themistocles and the Greek city-states their victory over the Persians in 480 BC.

"Prepare your wooden walls to save your country like the Spartans and Athenians of old," he wrote to the island captains, referring to their ships. No fewer than 11 vessels in the revolutionary fleet were named *Themistocles*.

Similarly, modern Greek owners have often tipped their hat to the heroes of the revolution that led to Greece's independence in 1830, concentrating naturally enough on the leaders who emerged in the course of a lengthy and often bloody sea campaign.

Among them, Andreas Miaoulis, Konstantinos Kanaris and Laskarina Bouboulina have frequently enough been referenced in the names of Greek-owned tankers and bulk carriers.

Streets named after them are among the most important in the heart of Piraeus' waterfront shipping district.

A quartet of suezmax tankers that emerged from Daehan Shipbuilding earlier this year for Enesel, controlled by the Lemos brothers, included *Miaoulis 21* and *Kanaris 21*. Their sister tankers have been called *Lord Byron 21*, after the Philhellene poet who was killed during the siege of Messolonghi in the Peloponnese; and *Kapodistrias 21*, after the first governor of newly independent Greece, Ioannis Kapodistrias.

In the war of independence, Greek ships disrupted the Ottoman Empire's supply chains and prolonged the war until, finally, the allied powers of Britain, France and Russia intervened on the Greek side and dealt a crushing defeat to the Ottoman and Egyptian navies at Navarino Bay in 1827.

After Navarino, the fighting did not end, and what we know as Greece today had yet to come entirely together. Yet Greek independence, in some form, was guaranteed.

From 1821 to 1826, the war at sea was funded and fought exclusively by shipowners and seafarers hailing from islands such as Hydra, Spetses, Psara and Kassos, as well as a number of other islands.

December 2021 represents the 75th anniversary of the acquisition by Greek owners of the first of 98 Liberty Ships from the US government after the end of World War Two.

Between seasonal bouts of warfare, the same ships were often found trading commercially in the eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea, or else privateering. The crews, their owners and their home islands still had to make a living and eat.

As well as trading on the open market, a secondary market for vessels hired by the provisional Greek government grew up to ensure sea transport for supplying land forces, including besieged cities and strongholds around the country.

There is evidence, however, that during the conflict, Greek ships were forced to withdraw from trading to western Mediterranean ports.

The Greek fleet of merchant ships was armed and crews had grown hardened to risk, not only from defending themselves against attacks by pirates but also through running the British blockade during the Napoleonic Wars.

These wars had ended in 1815 — and, with them, went a vital source of revenue for the vessels' owners and crews. With many ships idled, there was no siren call of a lucrative shipping market to interfere with the patriotic instincts of shipowners when the call came to join the revolution.

In 1821, the initial fleet mustered by the various islands, consisting of about 40 lightly armed merchant barques, lined up against a much larger Ottoman fleet that included numerous ships of the line that could each bring to bear about 80 guns.

In addition to these were a number of well-armed Turkish frigates and corvettes. One British historian likened the disparity to "an assembly of lightly armed coastal cutters" confronting Nelson's Trafalgar fleet.

While outgunned and numerically disadvantaged at virtually every stage of the long campaign, the Greek fleet had the advantage of superior seamanship.

Greeks had continued to be active at sea during the centuries of Ottoman rule and they remained a source of nautical expertise for hire in other countries. Greek seafarers manned not only Greek-owned ships but often vessels of various other nationalities, including Ottoman ships.

For its crews, the Ottoman navy relied heavily on conscripted Christian subjects, foremost among them Greeks. When the revolution was declared, Greek seafarers deserted or were arrested and executed, further widening the disparity in seafaring abilities between the two sides.

Full-scale naval battles were few and the logistically inferior Greek fleet often resorted to guerrilla tactics, including fireships. Many nations used fireships but the classic tactic was to aim them at the target vessel and depend on the wind and tides.

Greek fireships were different. Consistent with the hands-on image of Greek shipping and the primacy of Greek seamanship, they were crewed, typically by about 20-30 men.

The captains and crew remained on board until the fireship was firmly attached by hooks to its target and, at the final moment, they scrambled into the escape boat towed behind them.

Enesel

A suezmax tanker built by Daehan Shipbuilding for Enesel has been named Miaoulis 21 after legendary captain Andreas Miaoulis (inset).

Small wonder that Kanaris — who was one of the most celebrated fireship commanders and went on to become a five-time prime minister of Greece — expected to die during the operations.

More than 100 fireships are thought to have been used during the expeditions and it has been claimed that more than 60% of these were successful.

The most celebrated instances saw Kanaris destroy the Turkish flagship off the island of Chios in 1822 and follow this a few months later by blowing up an Ottoman two-decker at Tenedos — incidents that made headlines internationally and have been immortalised in paintings by Konstantinos Volonakis, Nikiforos Lytras and Ivan Aivazovsky.

Such attacks had a secondary effect of terrorising Ottoman captains, crews and tacticians and appeared to inhibit the ambitions of the Ottoman navy in key phases of the war.

It was not until 1826 that the fleet was augmented with the first state-owned vessels. These were the American-built frigate *Hellas* and the paddle-steamer *Karteria*, built in England. *Karteria* was the first steam-powered warship used in combat anywhere and, although defective, still proved a scourge of the Ottoman fleet.

By early 1827, the national assembly had taken the decision to build upon these first vessels and form a proper national navy.

Many parallels can be drawn between the maritime feats and personalities of that era and the subsequent development of Greek shipping.

One obvious starting place is the use of many different flags by the Greeks of the early 19th century. While the use of so-called flags of convenience may seem a peculiarly 20th century innovation, with today's Greek-owned fleet trading under nearly 30 different national flags, Greeks' dependency on other colours goes back to before the country's independence.

Lacking a sovereign state to back their own colours, their ships were otherwise easy prey for privateers and pirates of all nationalities.

A key event in the development of the Greek Mediterranean sailing fleet was the Treaty of Kuçuk Kainardji, which ended the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-1774. This allowed Greeks to hoist the Russian flag on their vessels and to build larger ships than those previously permitted under Ottoman rules, paving the way for them to expand to the western Mediterranean, mainly transporting grain from the Black Sea and Egypt to French and Spanish ports.

Around the turn of the century, during his encircling of Cadiz, Rear Admiral Nelson is said to have seized a Greek ship attempting to run the blockade and to have demanded answers from its captain and owner, the young Andreas Miaoulis.

Asked why he was trying to run the blockade, legend has it that Miaoulis answered: "For my own gain."

When Nelson asked what he would do if the roles were reversed, Miaoulis is said to have replied: "I would hang you."

In most retellings, Nelson releases him because he is impressed by the young Greek risk-taker's bravery, or chutzpah. However, it is most likely that Nelson would have done so in any case to avoid any diplomatic incident with Britain's then-Russian allies.

Miaoulis' ship flew the Russian flag and he himself had Russian citizenship, no doubt as an insurance policy.

Today's Greek shipping industry has demonstrated its compliance culture on numerous occasions, but any tendency to be sceptical towards unilateral sanctions or commercial protectionism is consistent with its DNA.

Over the decades and centuries, Greek owners have often broken embargoes and most of the time they have ended up on the right side of history.

Unfettered maritime trade is a core belief for a seagoing business community whose horizons stretch beyond the boundaries of any single state.

Themis Vokos, the chairman and co-founder of Posidonia, the world-renowned biennial shipping exhibition, is a direct descendant of one of Miaoulis' brothers.

The revolutionary hero's family name was Vokos — but, in a common habit of the times, he attracted a nickname, usually attributed to the purchase of his first sailing vessel, *Miaoul*.

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More widely, the liberation struggle highlighted the maritime community's resilience and adaptability, as well as a willingness among individuals to co-operate in a patriotic cause, especially during moments of emergency.

All these remain traits of the country's maritime sector today.

The maritime heroes of 1821 met very different ends. Miaoulis emerged as the effective commander of the Greek fleet out of 11 different admirals put forward by Hydra, Spetses and Psara and became a national hero.

Yet in the immediate aftermath of the war, governor Kapodistrias antagonised the Hydriots, not least by rejecting Hydra's claim for wartime shipping losses.

Miaoulis found himself on a seven-man commission set up in Hydra in opposition. Kapodistrias ordered the loyal Kanaris to prepare a fleet in Poros to blockade the rebels but Miaoulis struck first, entering Poros harbour at night and seizing several of Kanaris' ships.

When threatened by the Russian admiral Ricord, an ally of the fledgling administration in Athens, Miaoulis carried out a threat to burn the vessels — which included the frigate *Hellas*, his own previous flagship.

Later, Miaoulis profoundly regretted his actions, although the tragic episode has not harmed his overall status as a hero of independence.

Another of the ships scuppered by Miaoulis in Poros was the corvette *Spetsai*. This was formerly the 400-tonne, 18-gun *Agamemnon*, built by Bouboulina in 1820. It raised one of the very first Greek revolutionary flags on its mast in spring 1821. One of the largest Greek vessels that fought in the war, it was sold to the Greek state after Bouboulina's death and renamed after her home island.

Bouboulina bankrupted herself in building and supplying her ships in the Greek cause and this may have contributed to her death.

She was killed in Spetses in 1825 during an altercation with the family of a woman who had eloped with Bouboulina's son George. The confrontation is said to have been sparked, in one way or another, by the gulf in the financial standing of the two families.

By the end of the war of independence, it was calculated that out of about 600 Greek vessels used during the campaign, just 50 remained in sound condition.

It would not be the last time in Greece's modern history that the merchant fleet would sustain such casualties and have to rebuild.

Laskarina Bouboulina and Konstantinos Kanaris have frequently been referenced in the names of Greek-owned vessels, such as tankers Bouboulina (top) and Delta Kanaris.

A number of cultural and charitable foundations established by shipowners or their families have played a role in the 1821-2021 celebrations.

Gianna Angelopoulos-Daskalaki, wife of shipping magnate Theodore Angelopoulos, was appointed to head the organising committee for the official 'Greece 2021' celebrations.

The Maria Tsakos Foundation — which includes an international centre for maritime research and tradition that is the brainchild of the founding Tsakos Group — planned its own series of festivities commemorating the revolution.

They began with events on Chios and Psara, islands that were devastated by the Ottomans in punishment for the uprising.

"There is an uninterrupted continuity of involvement by the Greeks with the sea, more than in any other country," said the foundation's president, Efthimios Mitropoulos, who served as secretary-general of the International Maritime Organization from 2003 to 2011.

Speaking after the foundation's ceremony in Psara in September, he said that Greeks' calling to the sea and to the maritime industries show no signs of abating.

"It continues to this day and I hope it will continue forever," he said.

"We have good entrepreneurs and I am extremely happy to see the new generation of shipowners coming up and showing how much they love the sea and know the subject."

> *"There is an uninterrupted continuity of involvement by the Greeks with the sea, more than in any other country... It continues to this day and I hope it will continue forever"*

Efthimios Mitropoulos
President
Maria Tsakos Foundation

Making leadership look easy

Costamare

Costamare's boxship Theseus: soaring containership earnings have paid for the company to buy dozens of bulkers this year.

Greek shipping remains as ready and resilient as ever in adapting to whatever the markets throw at it, but appears to have put political turbulence in its homeland well behind it, **Nigel Lowry** reports

Athens — or its conjoined port, Piraeus — may not top every ranking in surveys of the world's pre-eminent maritime centres.

Yet this is enough to put a wry smile on the face of Greeks and many others who acknowledge that actual ships are the main currency of shipping.

Greeks have more of them — or, to be strictly accurate, more shipping capacity — than any other nationality.

Difficult though it is to grasp, it has been that way since the 1970s.

There have been times over the 200 years of Greek independence that the industry has not been fully in sync with — or has even appeared bigger than — its country of origin.

From about the time of the revolution up to well into the second half of the 20th century, many dynamic Greeks felt they had to base themselves abroad in order to pursue their fortunes in shipping.

This was the case with Greeks who based themselves in the Danube and Black Sea ports of the 19th century and ended up controlling a huge slice of the grain trade. It was also true of the many who relocated to London when it was the unrivalled hub of world shipping trade as well as maritime services.

In addition, Greek shipping clustered in New York around the time of World War Two. However, the romance with the US ended amid a series of legal cases brought against leading Greek owners that sent the message that Washington was unfriendly to international operators.

A trickle of owners returning to Europe became a tide after a 1963 law raised taxes on foreign companies established in the US.

While many opted for London, incentives for shipping first introduced by the Greek junta in 1967 began a sea-change in favour of the homeland.

In spite of occasional jitters whenever an incoming Greek administration has appeared unsympathetic to the industry, since then, the growth of Greece-based shipping has been uninterrupted. Greek shipowners who do not nowadays manage their operation from Athens or Piraeus are rare indeed.

The most recent occasion when shipowners were motivated to look at alternatives was in 2015, when a hard-talking new left-wing government took power amid a debt crisis that threatened Greece's membership of the eurozone and forced the imposition of capital controls.

Even under those circumstances, there was a palpable reluctance to move elsewhere, despite much overt wooing from centres as diverse as London, Dubai, Vancouver and, more shyly, Cyprus.

Only a handful of major shipowners opted to establish some sort of footing overseas — mostly in Cyprus — in the form of smaller outposts that might be expanded if necessary, or joint ventures with entities already established there.

Since then, the Greek economy has been rescued and it is hard to recall a period of less anxiety about the framework for the industry at home.

The former left-wing Syriza administration — which eventually put aside its bombast and was deemed to have "got" shipping — has been replaced by an unashamedly pro-shipping government, led by Kyriakos Mitsotakis, which has been adopting industry ideas for fixing the Greek ship registry and turning the sector into a fount of new jobs for young Greeks.

On the international front, it broadly supports shipowners' positions, notably on legislation for decarbonising shipping.

During the worst years of the recent economic hardship in Greece, the shipping community shrank from public view as much as possible. Today, it seems a lot more comfortable in its own skin.

> *During the worst years of the recent economic hardship in Greece, the shipping community shrank from public view as much as possible. Today, it seems a lot more comfortable in its own skin*

The financial crisis prompted the Union of Greek Shipowners (UGS) to establish its own social welfare organisation, named 'Syn-Enosis', to better structure the industry's contributions to social needs.

Since the national economic picture has brightened, Syn-Enosis has continued its support for vulnerable pockets of Greek society but has also responded to recent disasters, including unprecedented Greek wildfires and, of course, the coronavirus pandemic.

Longevity and adaptability are qualities often attached to Greek shipowners and family-based shipping companies have provided a durable model that, in plenty of cases, has ridden cycles and spanned generations.

Largely freed of the need for corporate branding, such companies are generally fluid instruments that can upsize and downsize in response to market fluctuations and often change name as they pass into the hands of a new generation.

Another seemingly hereditary trait of the industry has been a readiness to seize the day when opportunities arise. While this can also mean selling ships, it is best illustrated in times of transition from bust to boom, as in the immediate aftermath of World War Two when Onassis — for example — purchased 56 secondhand vessels in a period of less than five years and was already starting to take delivery of an orderbook of at least 30 tankers contracted within a few years of the war's end.

It could be seen again in the expansion of the Greek-owned fleet as it emerged from the crisis of the 1980s, with ships that were bought for close to scrap value in many cases resold for multiples of those amounts in subsequent years.

Many Greek owners have not hesitated to load up with tonnage against a backdrop of this year's dry bulk recovery and container shipping boom, in most cases taking advantage before prices peaked.

Expanding with alacrity has not been confined to private ownerships and, in a number of cases, it has been Greek-led, publicly traded companies that have been most decisive.

Containership owner Costamare, after being 100% focused on the boxship sector for three decades, has gone back to its roots in dry bulk by snapping up a fleet of 37 bulkers in the space of less than three months. It is not yet clear if the company has stopped buying.

By August, the fleet comprised four kamsarmaxes, two panamaxes, 15 supramaxes and ultramaxes, and 16 handysizes. At that stage, Costamare had already clinched $389m in new finance to support its diversification.

The New York Stock Exchange-listed company has been earning soaring profits from the red-hot container market and, in part, the move for bulkers was prompted by crazy prices being asked for boxships. Bulker investments seemed a better bet.

Until June, when public note was first taken of the Costamare spree, the fastest pace set in the secondhand market had been that of a relative newbie, Castor Maritime. Led by Petros Panagiotidis of the well-known Panagiotidis shipping family, the Nasdaq-listed owner had a fleet of 27 bulkers and tankers by September 2021 — 21 of them acquired since the start of this year.

According to data compiled by Athens-based Allied Shipbroking, Greek owners racked up a five-fold increase in bulk carrier purchases during the first half of 2021, amid one of the busiest markets for buying and selling for many years.

> *We are determined to persevere for as long as it takes in order to achieve these important goals*

Theodore Veniamis
President
Union of Greek Shipowners

By September, Greek owners had spent more than $5bn on 290 secondhand and resale deals — close to one-quarter of all money invested in the market.

Greek buyers were identified behind 184 acquisitions out of a total of 715 bulkers that changed hands since the start of the year, but also 68 tankers — more than one-third of all tankers bought and sold in 2021 to date.

In addition, they had acquired 28 container vessels — a number second only to Switzerland, which reflects the containership spree of just one company, Mediterranean Shipping Co — and four gas carriers.

Among the most active in secondhand and newbuilding containerships have been George Youroukos of Technomar Shipping, who is also chairman of publicly listed boxship owner Global Ship Lease; the Capital Group of Evangelos Marinakis; containership specialist Danaos Corporation, which has returned to growth after several relatively quiet years; and the Navios Group.

According to Lloyd's List Intelligence data, Greek owners are steadily closing the gap on German owners, who have long been the largest players in the boxship charter owners' community.

A comparison of data on the two fleets currently shows German owners control a fleet of just under 800 boxships, with an aggregate capacity of close to 3m teu. That is a reduction from 906 vessels, of close to 3.3m teu, at the same stage of 2020. Meanwhile, Greek boxship owners have increased their fleet since last year, to about 480 vessels of more than 2m teu.

In spite of the increased interest in containerships, only about 30 Greek owners among some 600 separate companies have cellular tonnage — and half of those have fewer than 10 boxships.

Lloyd's List Intelligence data on the current Greek-owned fleet of 4,985 vessels underlines that the overwhelming focus of Greek shipping remains in the dry and wet bulk cargo trades.

Of a current Greek-owned fleet of 4,985 vessels, aggregating 342m dwt, more than 49% of the tonnage consists of dry bulk carriers, with another 42% accounted for by tankers.

Only 1,528 vessels of 62m dwt are currently under the Greek flag, according to the Lloyd's List Intelligence data, meaning the home registry only accounts for only some 18% of all Greek-owned tonnage.

A shake-up in manning regulations last year was intended to lure many Greek owners back to the flag, as well as attract a new crop of young Greeks to the seafaring profession, but the desired results have yet to manifest themselves. However, an ambitious recruitment advertising campaign has begun in order to achieve this.

In this year's annual report by the USG, its president, Theodore Veniamis, wrote that the ability to attract and recruit youth and expanding the country's marine education system are vital to preserve Greek marine know-how and to keep the country's leading place in global shipping.

"We are determined to persevere for as long as it takes in order to achieve these important goals," he said.

The industry's status as a national asset can be seen from the fact that even in a dreadful year, such as 2020, it contributed more than $13.8bn to Greece's foreign exchange earnings.

Yet, as the UGS emphasises, it is also a critical asset to Europe, representing as much as 58% of the EU-controlled fleet.

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Prime movers answer the call

Exclusive Lloyd's List Intelligence data underlines that, despite the coronavirus shock, Greek shipping's contribution to serving the needs of global seaborne trade was undiminished in 2020 as it answered a surge in demand in Asia, **Nigel Lowry** reports

In 2020, Greek-owned ships performed more than 225,000 port calls, aggregating more than 12.5bn dwt, according to Lloyd's List Intelligence data.

This was slightly down on the number of port calls reported in 2019 — but an increase in terms of capacity from an aggregate of 11.9bn dwt the year before.

All metrics showed an increase in comparison with the fleet's activities in 2018, reflecting the expansion of the fleet since then but also how well the industry coped with the shock of the coronavirus outbreak early in the year.

Greece's own trade traditionally contributes a sliver of about 1% of the cargoes carried by Greek-controlled shipping and a map of the fleet's trading patterns over a year amounts to a finely lined equivalent to an inkblot test, laying bare the fleet's cross-trading identity.

Comprising hundreds of different ownerships and with a large exposure to the itinerant tramp and energy-transporting trades, the Greek-owned fleet tends to follow the cargoes and is fine-tuned to the fluctuating needs of global trade and economies all over the world.

The geographical spread of its trading activities, as revealed in Lloyd's List Intelligence port-call data, is always fulsome — and last year was no exception.

Greek owners' responsiveness to the needs of the global economy has meant that Asia has been an increasingly powerful magnet for Greek shipping — and this was especially true in 2020.

Many Asian economies either recovered faster than their western counterparts from the coronavirus pandemic — or handled it better to begin with.

Last year, the region soaked up a record 38.9% share of Greek tonnage in terms of worldwide port calls, a remarkable increase from 35.1% in 2019.

Lloyd's List Intelligence recorded a total of 57,357 separate Greek vessel calls, aggregating nearly 4.9bn dwt, across the Far East, Indian subcontinent and Japan. That is up from 3.9bn dwt just two years earlier.

Importance of China

Amid the turbulence, it was a year that underlined the supreme importance of China for the bulk shipping markets.

While overall analysts found that the dry bulk shipping industry transported 1.3% fewer tonnes in 2020 than in 2019, China cemented its position as the dominant player, with Chinese imports rising to 48.5% of the market, according to BIMCO.

Meanwhile, China also entrenched its position as the world's leading oil importer. Its imports of crude oil surged by 7.3% in 2020, reaching an annual record of more than 540m tonnes.

Reflecting this growth, shipping traffic in Chinese ports rose from 16bn dwt to more than 18.5bn dwt last year, Lloyd's List Intelligence data shows.

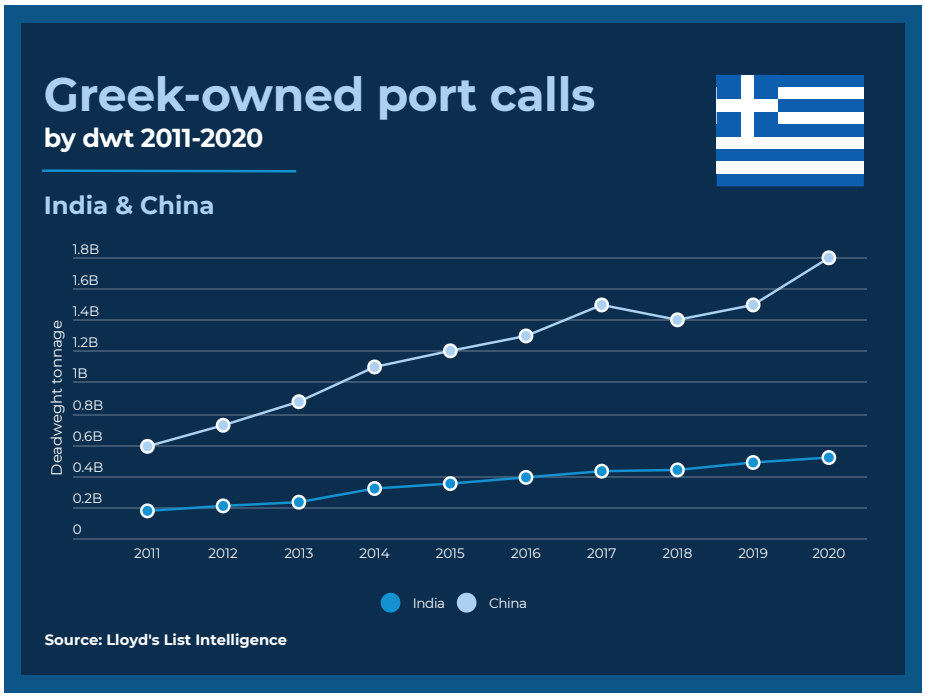
Within this, Greek vessels racked up 17,224 calls, representing capacity of nearly 1.8bn dwt. Rising from less than 1.5bn dwt in 2019, it was the sharpest increase for at least a decade.

More recent jitters over the state of the Chinese economy, with warnings over the consequences of a sharp pullback in steel production and an over-reliance by the tanker market on Chinese imports, will inevitably be of concern to Greek owners.

Few are more exposed to market fluctuations — but, at the same time, few are more equitably spread in terms of global operating.

Greek calls in India, for example, continued their steady rise and set a new record of 6,368 calls totalling 520m dwt, compared with 5,931 calls of 482m dwt the year before.

The steepest growth in Greek calls in terms of capacity was in the Asean region of Southeast Asia — including Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam — where the fleet made an additional 378m dwt worth of visits, or an increase of 28.2%.



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In addition to economic growth, the data may also point to the importance of certain destinations in the region for effecting crew changes.

As trading with Asia absorbed a larger share of Greek-owned tonnage, so the share of Greek shipping operating to most other destinations dipped in 2020.

European ports represented about 17% of Greek-owned calls in terms of capacity, down from 18.6% in 2019.

The share of Greek shipping calling in the Middle East — a major destination for tankers, especially — dipped from 10.1% in 2019 to 9.7% last year.

Australasian port calls accounted for 4.6% of Greek capacity calls, down from 5.3% the previous year.

There were some exceptions, though. In terms of capacity, Greek-owned tonnage increased by 6% in Africa, which maintained its solid 9.3% share of Greek calls.

The share of Greek tonnage calling in the Americas fell from 21.4% a year earlier to 20.5% in 2020.

However, the importance of trade with South America's Atlantic coast remained stable, according to Lloyd's List Intelligence's figures, with close to 16,000 calls of more than 1.1bn dwt.

A recent phenomenon has been that South America has surpassed the US and Canada as a destination for Greek tonnage and this was again the case in 2020, as Greek port calls in South America aggregated more than 1.2bn dwt, versus 893m dwt in North American ports.

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Dry bulk carriers

In mapping the trading activities of the Greek-owned fleet through the capacity calling in ports around the world, the dry bulk fleet represents the most important segment, with 42% of the aggregate tonnage recorded in port visits — although just 31% of the number of calls.

For bulkers, Asia dramatically enhanced its status as the most important market and accounted for 49% of Greek trade in terms of tonnage calls in 2020 — a staggering increase from its 44.5% share of Greek tonnage the previous year.

More specifically, the China Sea and Asean sub-regions remained the top destinations for Greek bulker tonnage, with growth of 23% and 25%, respectively.

Greek-owned dry bulk capacity calling in China topped 1bn dwt for the first time, nearing 1.2bn dwt from 11,000 port calls.

That lifted the Greek share of all bulker traffic in Chinese ports to 12.8%, from 12.3% in 2019.

The country's dry bulk trade is still dominated by Chinese owners, whose ships represented more than half of the bulker calls last year by number — and 41% by capacity.

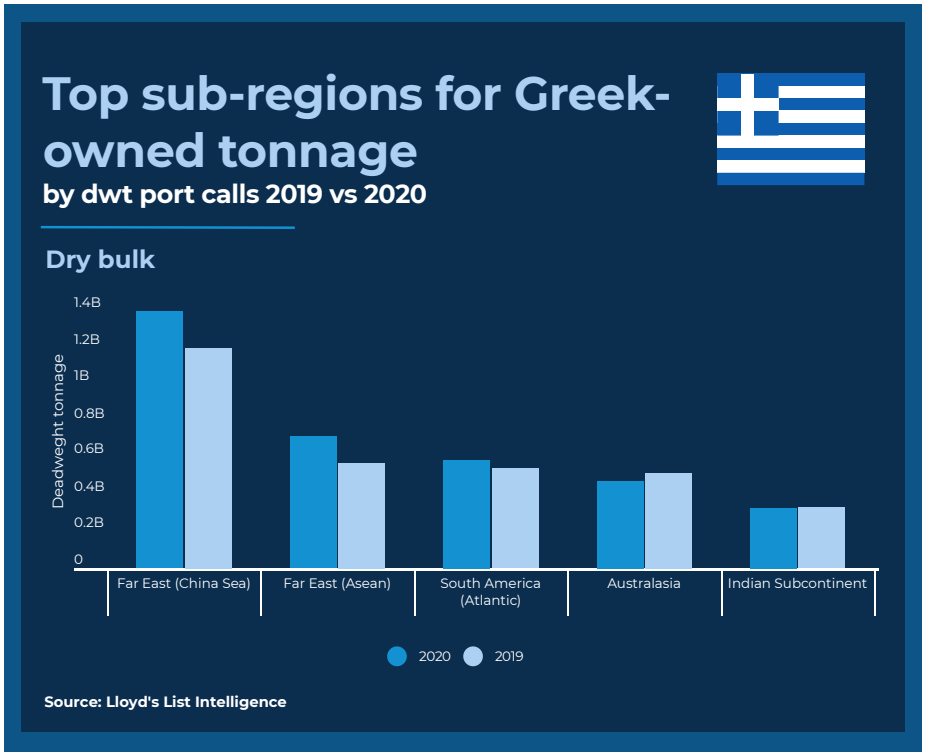
South America's Atlantic coastline further fortified its place as the third-ranked sub-region for Greek-owned dry bulk traffic, with an increased number of calls last year. Greek tonnage calling in the region amounted to more than 590m dwt, an increase of 8.6%.

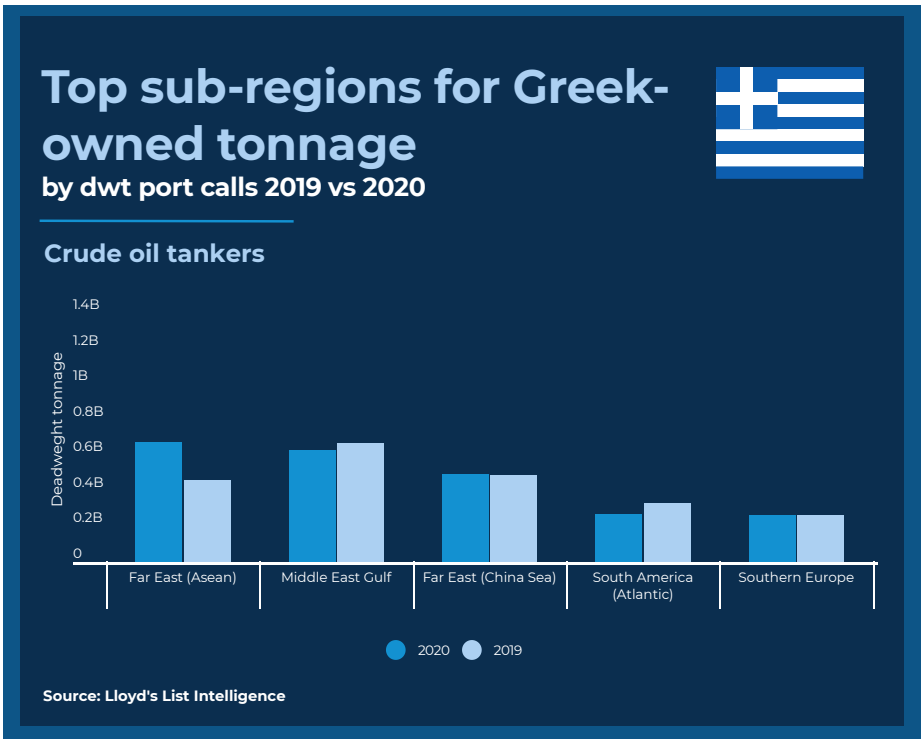
A significant share of the cargo carried by Greek bulkers for Asia comes from Australasia, which clung onto fourth place among sub-regions.

This is despite a diplomatic spat between China and Australia that has had an impact on dry bulk trade, reflected in a reduction in appearances by Greek bulkers in Australasian ports. Greek bulker tonnage calling in the region declined by 8.4% in comparison with 2019.

India again makes up the last of the top five sub-regions for Greek bulker trade. Unlike China, where domestic owners dominate, Greek owners have traditionally enjoyed a very large share of transporting the subcontinent's dry bulk imports.

Last year, this remained virtually unchanged, at 24.6% of all bulker traffic in Indian ports — compared with a 9.4% share taken by India's own bulker owners.





Crude oil tankers

Greek owners have risen to a dominant position in the crude oil tanker industry and that is reflected in the fact that of 91,610 tanker calls recorded by Lloyd's List Intelligence worldwide last year, representing an aggregate of nearly 15.2bn dwt, more than 26% of that activity in terms of capacity belonged to Greek-owned tankers.

In 2020, the increased importance of Asia for Greek and world shipping was mirrored in the movements of Greek-owned oil tankers.

The segment saw an increase in tonnage calling in Asian ports from 1.15bn dwt to 1.4bn dwt, with the result that the share of Asia in tonnage calls of Greek crude carriers rose dramatically, from 29.6% to 35.2%.

In an equally striking development, the Asean countries leapfrogged both the Middle East Gulf and the China Sea as the biggest sub-region for calls by Greek-owned oil tanker tonnage.

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The shift — although slightly less dramatic — can also be seen in the trading of the world tanker fleet.

This was despite Greek crude tonnage entering Chinese ports growing by 19.6% in 2020.

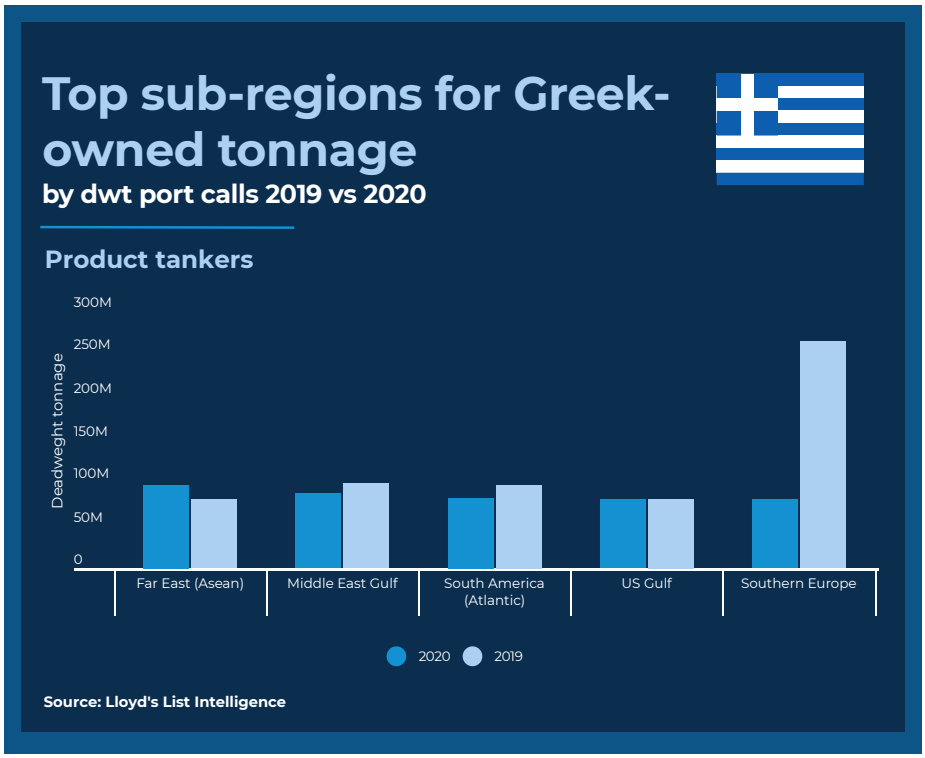
Yet Greek tanker tonnage calling in the Asean region last year increased by an extraordinary 47% to an aggregate of 677m dwt worth of port visits as the number of calls in some other key regions dipped somewhat.

It will be interesting to see how the level of crude oil tanker activity in the Asean regions settles as the effects of the coronavirus pandemic gradually diminish.

The Atlantic coast of South America kept its place as the fourth-most important region of call for Greek crude oil tonnage in 2020, despite a reduction in both the number of visits and tonnage, which may reflect in part a backing away from Venezuelan cargoes in the second half of the year due to US sanctions.

The Greek fleet remains an important mover of European oil imports and this is reflected in southern Europe rounding out the top five sub-regions for the fleet. Southern Europe saw 2,109 port calls of an aggregate 265m dwt by Greek oil tankers — which was identical to the previous year.

Greek tonnage calling in Black Sea ports — a traditionally important destination for aframaxes, in particular — slumped by more than 39% last year, however.



> *The fallout from the coronavirus pandemic may have nudged product tankers towards certain Asean countries*

INSADCO Photography/Alamy Stock Photo

The Greek-owned fleet tends to follow the cargoes and is fine-tuned to the fluctuating needs of global trade and economies all over the world.

Product tankers

Repeating the pattern seen in trading of crude oil tankers, the Asean region emerged as the most important sub-region for Greek-owned product tankers. Port calls increased by 18% to 1,174 and aggregate tonnage in those calls rose by 20.6% to 96.7m dwt.

The shift was arguably even more striking than in the crude tanker sector, taking into consideration the traditional focus of Greek product tanker trading more on the Atlantic Basin, as well as the fact that the Asean region — ranked fourth in 2019 — had to hurdle the Persian Gulf, the Atlantic coast of South America and the US Gulf to get to top spot among Lloyd's List Intelligence's sub-regions.

As was the case with the bigger oil tankers, the fallout from the coronavirus pandemic may have nudged product tankers towards certain Asean countries, while other main destinations for Greek tankers suffered a reduction in traffic.

US sanctions may have also played a role in the fall in product tanker tonnage calling in South America.

Europe remains an important destination for the Greek-owned products fleet and it accounted for an increased share of 25.2% of the global footprint in terms of tonnage calls.

That was largely on the back of southern European ports. The sub-region held on to its fifth place among Greek product tanker destinations — and, in fact, saw an increase of about 6.8% in Greek tonnage arrivals in 2020.

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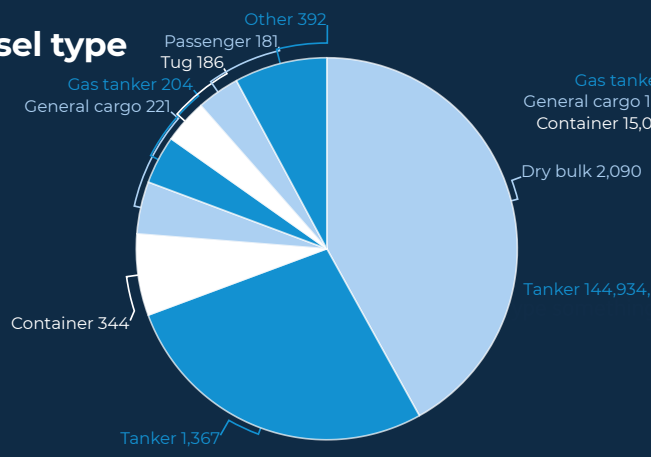
Greece

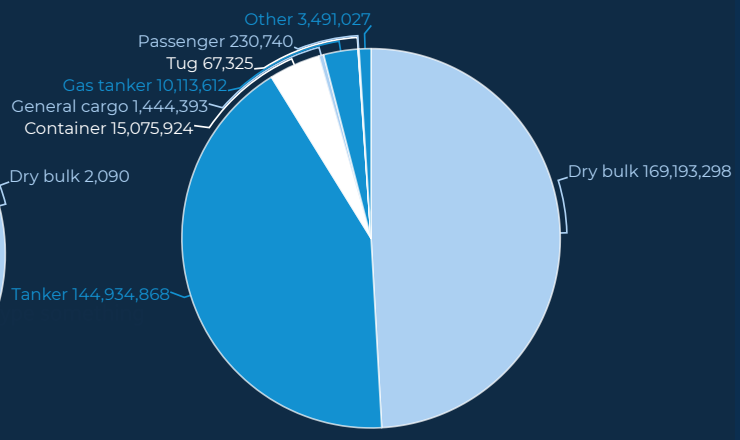
The numbers behind the world's largest shipowning nation

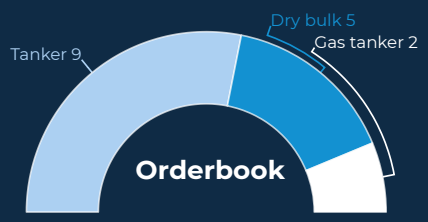
Owned fleet

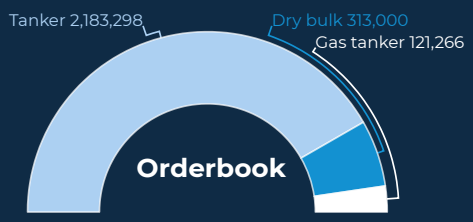
Vessel type



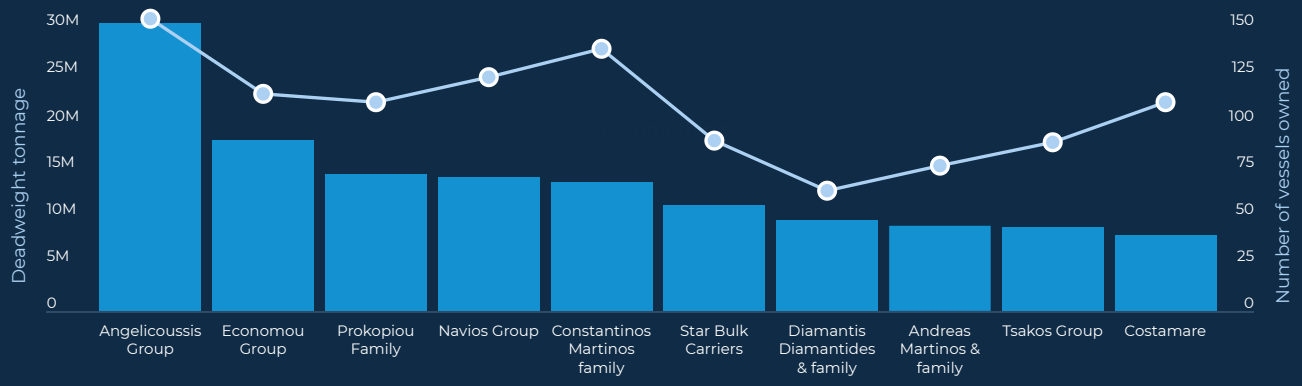
Deadweight tonnage







Top 10 Greek shipping companies



Source: Lloyd's List Intelligence (Aug, 2021)

Greece

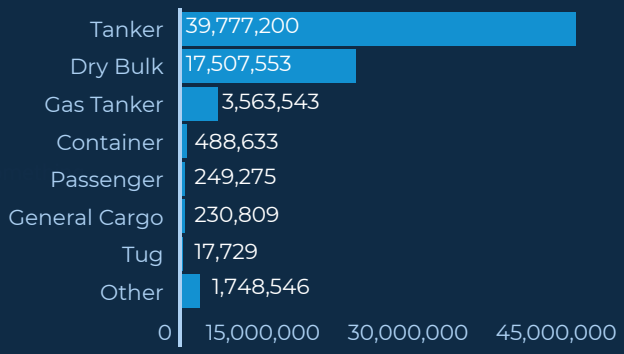
Home to the largest concentration of shipowners and shipmanagement companies worldwide

Piraeus

Largest European container port in the Mediterranean

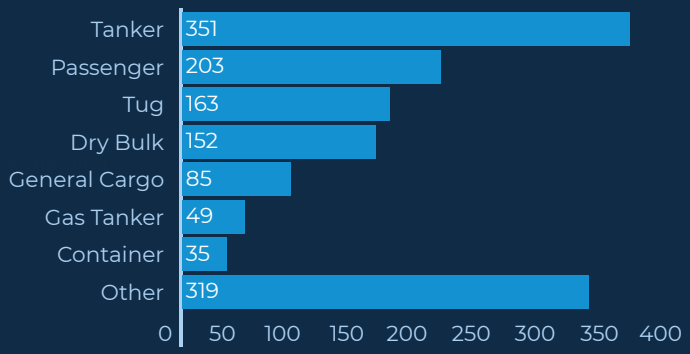
Greek-flagged fleet

Deadweight tonnage



Greek-flagged fleet

Vessel type



Source: Lloyd's List Intelligence (Aug, 2021)

New temple of maritime tech?

The Greek capital has a number of advantages that are fuelling its emergence as a hub for companies at the cutting edge of digital technology solutions for shipping, **Nigel Lowry** reports

Vaiviriga/Alamy Stock Photo

Athens has developed very rapidly and can now tick all the boxes for the fundamental requirements of a technology start-up for the maritime industry, says Roberto Coustas.

Fittingly for any development grounded in the digital revolution, the emergence of Athens as a centre to be reckoned with when it comes to maritime technology has been a quiet one.

Yet in a relatively short space of time, a number of Greece-based companies have made a name for themselves at the forefront of creating and marketing digital solutions for today's shipping industry.

A number of important factors behind this development appeared to converge in July this year, when DeepSea Technologies announced it had secured €5m ($5.8m) in fresh funding from new and existing investors.

Central Athens-based DeepSea, co-founded by chief executive Roberto Coustas and chief technology officer Konstantinos Kyriakopoulos, specialises in vessel performance monitoring and optimisation solutions combining software, hardware and artificial intelligence.

The company says the funding will enable further research, design and development of its products, as well as accelerating its international commercial expansion — particularly in Asian markets.

Beyond that, however, executives believe the company's success is indicative of factors that have enabled Greece to start nurturing a serious presence in the field of digital technology for shipping.

"It is becoming apparent that for maritime technology, this is a hub that everyone will need to be a part of," says Mr Coustas.

In his view, Athens has developed very rapidly and can now tick all the boxes for the fundamental requirements of a technology start-up for the maritime industry.

> *For maritime technology, this is a hub that everyone will need to be a part of... There is nowhere else with as many companies as Greece — and they are all densely located in Athens*
>
> **Roberto Coustas**
> Chief executive and co-founder
> DeepSea Technologies

As he explains, these are "access to a substantial market, second is a good cost base for developing solutions, and you need access to capital".

In terms of proximity to an important market of potential customers, Athens is "incomparable", Mr Coustas points out.

"There is nowhere else with as many companies as Greece — and they are all densely located in Athens."

This brings benefits not only in customer access but also in strengthening access to market knowledge.

"Many of the people who work at DeepSea have family and friends who work in shipping and the pool of knowledge spreads," Mr Coustas says.

On costs, the point is made that salaries are lower in Greece than in some more vaunted technology-providing countries.

Mr Coustas reckons a back-end developer may cost just 40% of a developer in the US, for example.

Meanwhile, since the nation's debt crisis a few years ago, "things are changing, regulatory barriers are coming down and Greece is becoming more of a general business centre.

"There is a lot more venture capital and investment funds and so much more access to capital here than there used to be," he says.

Mr Kyriakopoulos goes even further: "Absolutely, it is the natural location for the global hub of maritime technology.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"You have a large diverse maritime ecosystem combined with a very advanced technical industry and there is also a culture of innovation.

"Another factor is that Greece is a fun place to live — and it's becoming easier to convince people to move here," he says.

Both consider "an extra ingredient" is the sheer amount of knowledge and interest in shipping in Greece that provides a constant, beneficial cycling of information about the practical realities that products have to address, as well as a plentiful pool of young people who are attracted to work in the maritime sector.

DeepSea's new funding round came from an impressive trio of investors.

It was led by Nabtesco Technology Ventures, in collaboration with Emerald Technology Ventures, with participation from The Signal Group and existing investor ETF Partners.

Nabtesco group is the Japanese leader in shipping automation, while Emerald is a globally recognised climate tech venture capital firm. ETF Partners is Europe's leading sustainability-focused venture capital fund.

The Signal Group is another core player in the new crop of Greece-based innovative firms focused on the industry.

Established in 2014 by Ioannis Martinos, the group has the distinction of deriving from one of the country's major shipping franchises, Thenamaris. It is directly involved in shipmanagement itself through Signal Maritime, which offers commercial management for pools of aframax and medium-range tankers.

In the technology sphere, it is best known for developing Signal Ocean Platform, a next-generation AI-powered tool that processes ship location data and commercial deal information to help shipping executives make better market decisions.

> *You have a large diverse maritime ecosystem combined with a very advanced technical industry and there is also a culture of innovation*

Konstantinos Kyriakopoulos
Chief technology officer and co-founder
DeepSea Technologies

However, earlier this year, it also launched Signal Ventures, with the aim of engaging with innovative start-ups and others that want to build and scale-up their products in maritime technology.

"We are hoping to create synergies in data, product integrations and customer adoption," says Nikolas Pyrgiotis, vice-president of technology ventures.

"A tech ecosystem affects its participants, so we are also excited to be now offering solutions not only to end-users, but also to other developers via application programming interfaces, contributing to a type of shared 'operating system' the industry can leverage to build effective technology faster," Mr Pyrgiotis says.

There are overlaps between the emergence of Greece as a leading centre for maritime digital technology and recent advances in maritime engineering, where Greek companies have also begun to gain international attention.

In June this year, Erma First, the maritime-focused environmental engineering group best known for being a major manufacturer of ballast water equipment, acquired Germany-based marine water specialist RWO, a market leader in bilge water separation systems.

> *The massive buying force of Greek shipping companies is a critical factor in the establishment and then expansion of Greek firms in this space*

Eleni Polychronopoulou
Executive vice-president, EPE
President, Hemexpo

Two years ago, Erma First — which is a spin-off from long-established Environmental Protection Engineering — acquired a controlling interest in Metis Cyberspace Technologies, a leading specialist in electronic engineering, IoT, cloud computing and AI that is engaged in a similar market segment to DeepSea Technologies.

"The massive buying force of Greek shipping companies is a critical factor in the establishment and then expansion of Greek firms in this space," says Eleni Polychronopoulou, executive vice-president of EPE and president of the Hellenic Marine Equipment Manufacturers and Exporters Organisation (Hemexpo).

"Let us not forget that in a radius of 30 km, decisions are taken for 5,000 vessels and this makes Athens and Piraeus the biggest market in the world."

According to Ms Polychronopoulou, the fact that new environmental regulations are being applied to existing ships — and not only to newbuildings — has made technology an issue for others outside Asia.

"When repair work in Greece was minimised, we had to seek solutions for survival outside this context. A turn to an international approach, providing our goods and services to the global market, was the only way out," she says.

"We do have to compete with traditionally strong opponents, from countries that have shipyards and shiprepair yards and established maritime clusters. This allows a testing bed for new products and services.

"Also, we have to face protectionism in some countries. But there are notable examples of Greek companies that have great potential and hopefully this trend will continue to grow."

Piraeus Port Authority

The Piraeus container terminal and hinterland: in 2016, the sale of a majority stake in the port to Cosco Group was completed.

Location is key to competing in international logistics

Greece's shipping and ports are seen as key drivers for a larger role for the country as an international freight hub, **Nigel Lowry** reports

Arguably, Greece's pre-eminent status as a shipowning nation can be traced to the physical contours of the country, with its long coastline and island archipelago that prompted generations of entrepreneurs to focus on the sea, against a relatively restricted range of land-based opportunities.

Its natural location, combined with the presence of such a powerful shipping community, also underpins the country's potential as an international logistics hub.

That potential emerges strongly from a recent report by accountancy and consultancy group EY. It shows that while international advances have been made in the four years since the group first published a survey on the subject, "progress has been driven primarily by developments in the shipping and the maritime logistics industries, as well as in road infrastructure.

"More work will be needed with regard to rail and air freight transport, hinterland logistics, the third-party logistics market (3PL), customs services and, above all, the interconnectivity of these distinct nodes of the Greek transport and logistics industry (T&L)," EY concludes.

Part of the progress made in recent years has been to overcome much of the country's chronic governmental red-tape problems of old.

The EY report suggests that part of today's challenge for the sector is for logistics businesses themselves to grasp the international potential of Greece's position and look outward from the domestic market.

The market consists of more than 100 third-party logistics providers competing for a total avenue revenue that reached €368m ($427m) in 2020 — a fall back to 2018's levels that has been attributed to the coronavirus pandemic.

Another recent study of the sector, carried out by the ICAP Group, showed that from 1998 to 2008, logistics business in Greece grew steadily, with an average annual growth rate of 19.7%, before slumping for several years due to the effects of the global financial crisis and Greece's national economic meltdown.

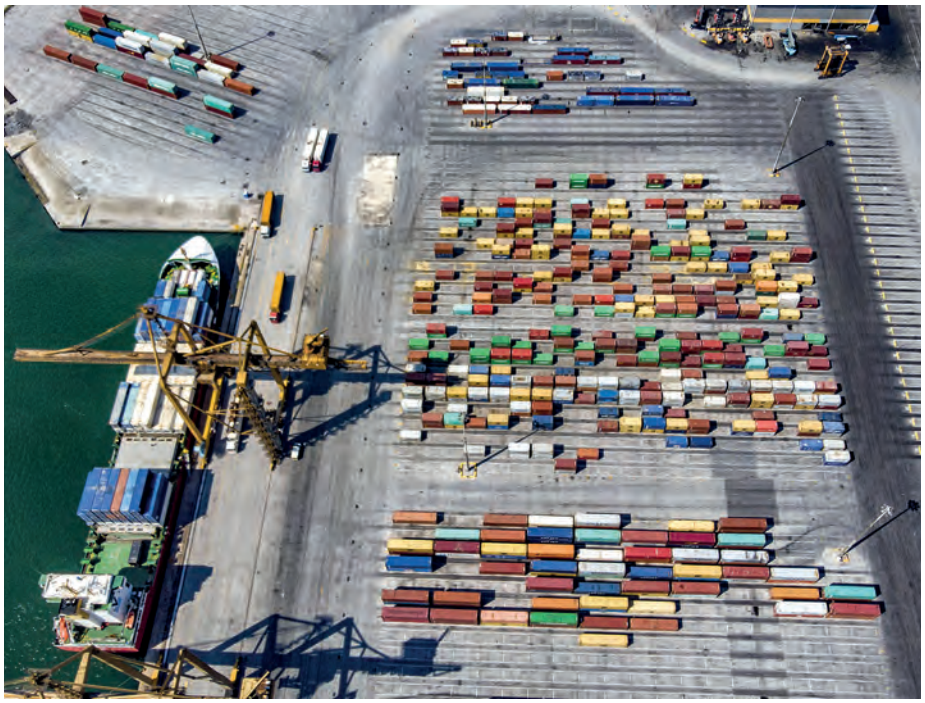
From 2014 up until last year, growth resumed at an average annual clip of 2.1%, but it is sobering that even by its latter-day peak of 2019, annual turnover has still not quite reached the levels attained prior to 2011.

It is no surprise that analysts cite the country's geographical location as its top competitive advantage in efforts to unleash its potential as a freight hub — and, in particular, its situation on the trade route between Asia and Europe, which gives its ports an edge over those of other European countries.

EY ranks the savings in time and costs that this can offer to freight coming from and to China as Greece's top attraction.

Yet also of key importance are the huge home-grown shipping industry, the large number of ports the country can offer, and the ambitious intermodal logistics centres that are being developed at Thriasio Pedio and at the Gonos camp in Thessaloniki.

The consultancy considers privatisation and public-private partnerships "key drivers" if Greece is to compete successfully as the pre-eminent southern logistics gateway for Europe.



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The sale of 67% of the Thessaloniki port authority to an international consortium was also approved in 2018.

> *The EY report makes it clear that Greece has lost time unnecessarily in developing its potential as an international freight hub and faces mounting competition from other countries, some of which have already taken advantage*

Structural change

While the privatisation of Greek airports has proved beneficial for the development of air freight in recent years, most of the heavy lifting is expected to be done by the country's seaports, which are in the middle of structural change.

Under pressure from Greece's creditors, the state shareholdings in all the country's leading ports were transferred to the Hellenic Asset Development Fund (HRADF), the national privatisation agency, a decade ago — but the programme took years to get going.

In 2016, however, the sale of a majority stake in the port of Piraeus to Cosco Group was completed — and, two years later, the sale of 67% of the Thessaloniki port authority to an international consortium was also approved.

HRADF holds another 10 important regional ports in its portfolio and the programme has gathered steam since last year.

Tenders have been launched for the ports of Alexandroupolis, Igoumenitsa, Kavala and, just recently, for Heraklion in Crete; these are now at various stages.

The ports are considered the main drivers of a greater role in international freight movements for Greece.

The potential for growth can be seen in the leap the country has made in just the past decade, from 69th place globally in terms of connectivity to the global shipping network to 20th place today, according to the Liner Shipping Connectivity Index. That also places the country as first in the Mediterranean for connectivity.

The EY report makes it clear that Greece has lost time unnecessarily in developing its potential as an international freight hub and faces mounting competition from other countries, some of which have already taken advantage.

It notes that with global trade continuing to pivot towards the Far East, the emergence of new freight hubs outside Europe is also likely.

Despite "important steps" towards boosting Greece's competitiveness as an international hub, "there is still a long way to go", EY concludes.

"Positioning Greece as an international freight centre has been an objective of the Greek state, as well as all relevant stakeholders, for several years now," the report maintains.

"It is a realistic objective, offering substantial opportunities to all those involved in the sector — and clear and measurable benefits to the country's economy and Greek society as a whole."

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Glimpse of a greener future

Greek ferries are sailing into an uncertain, but likely greener, future.

The country's ferry industry is grappling with an urgent need to renew an ageing fleet while bearing the losses wrought by the coronavirus pandemic – but at last there is a glimmer of hope in funding for the sector, **Nigel Lowry** reports

July and August are always the peak months for Greece's ferry operations, and earnings in the space of a few short weeks have to carry businesses for the rest of the year.

In 2021, the season may also have marked the moment when the future of the industry — hitherto clouded by the density of the challenges in front of it — just about began to come into focus.

In July, prime minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and development minister Antonis Georgiadis received the news in a teleconference with EU commissioner for cohesion and reforms Elisa Ferreira that the Greek Partnership Agreement with the EU for 2021 to 2027 had been approved.

Greece is the first country to reach such an agreement, which is aimed at "future-proofing" EU member countries, with a focus on green and digital projects.

Under the agreement, Greece will receive a total of €26.2bn ($30.4bn) in support over the period, of which €21bn will come from the EU and almost €5.3bn from national funds.

Some of that will be channelled towards "a more holistic approach to the fisheries, aquaculture and maritime sectors", according to the EU.

By August, shipping minister Ioannis Plakiotakis was announcing that Greece plans to spend €1bn on upgrading 44 ports and 47 shipping routes around the country in an effort that will include providing grants to ferry lines to help them modernise their fleets.

He noted independent reports that ports on 77 Greek islands are considered substandard and badly in need of maintenance or expansion.

The money will be drawn both from domestic coffers and from the EU's structural funds. For example, the EU will provide a €175m tranche to upgrade 33 island ports, with state funds chipping in €200m over the next four years.

Another €370m in EU funds has been earmarked for Greece's domestic island network to improve ferry links — and €300m will be distributed for operators connecting islands with the mainland.

In a departure from the country's previous policy for signing annual public service contracts with operators to maintain services to smaller and remote islands that would otherwise be financially unviable, grants will be tied to longer contracts of four to seven years' duration.

"It is a good start, but much more will be needed," says Hellenic Chamber of Shipping president George Pateras, who is spearheading efforts to co-ordinate and source funding for a generational overhaul of the country's ferry sector.

"The coastal ferry network is vital for Greece. The islands are home to more than 14% of the country's population. It is extremely important that we ensure greater continuity and that contracts with operators enable them to be sure of serving islands for longer periods," Mr Pateras says.

"For an operator, that security is what is needed if a company is to invest in a relatively costly green ship.

"For the islands, that guarantee of future connections with the mainland will encourage investment in businesses and create jobs. Hopefully it will eventually mean increased demand so that gradually services may be weaned off public service contracts altogether."

An analysis undertaken for the Chamber last year, with the support of the Association of Passenger Shipping Companies and the help of consultancy PwC, underlined the severity of the challenges facing the industry — even before the full impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the sector was known.

At that time, three-quarters of the fleet of 105 ro-pax vessels was already more than 20 years of age, with the average for conventional ferries as much as 28.

Fully half of the conventional ro-pax vessels were more than 30 years old and more than a dozen topped 40 years of age. High-speed vessels were, on average, newer — but nearly 80% of these were aged 21-30 years.

Recognising the severity of the looming crisis, in 2016, Greece withdrew an age limit of 30 years set for passenger vessels that had been introduced as recently as 2013.

Replacing this, vessels of more than 30 years of age are required to undergo additional annual inspections.

According to the study, renewal "cannot be further postponed". Even assuming an average replacement age of 40 years, 13 ferries required "immediate" replacement, with another 24 to be phased out by 2030, when moves to replace a further 25 will need to be initiated.

The analysis estimates that at least €4.5bn will be needed, based on preliminary estimates of two of the tranches of renewal — although the overall figure is likely to be much higher.

While some of the youngest vessels in the fleet could be candidates for retrofitting, it is estimated that the vast majority will have to be replaced through constructing new 'green' ferries of energy-efficient design.

> *[The EU funding] is a good start, but much more will be needed... The coastal ferry network is vital for Greece. The islands are home to more than 14% of the country's population*

George Pateras
President
Hellenic Chamber of Shipping

According to Mr Pateras, the latest round of discussions with European Commission representatives has underlined that "they have a great interest" in the project.

"They understand how important it is to have a modern, green fleet for our domestic transport network. As almost the entire fleet needs replacing very soon, it would be foolish to replace ships with traditional engineering when it can be done with green technologies."

The main focus is on battery power for shorter hauls between islands and on hydrogen fuel cells or hydrogen engines for main lines.

To advance the project, the Chamber is seeking funding of €25m from the EU Recovery and Resilience Fund for Greece to construct a proof-of-concept hybrid vessel using both batteries and hydrogen, but missed out in a first round of allocations.

"We are still investigating funding. Perhaps it will be privately funded, or perhaps EU-funded, but we need to go forward," says Mr Pateras.

"And we have to take an integrated, cross-disciplinary approach," he says.

"For example, it makes no sense to go forward with funding cold-ironing projects and upgrading ports unless tailored to the new breed of vessels they are going to serve."

Attica Group's Blue Star Naxos in the port of Paros island.

In order to ensure the ferry network is more efficient, the Hellenic Institute of Transport has begun a new project to model the future needs of the system, based on passenger and cargo requirements — albeit fluctuating — on individual routes and determining the capacity of vessels required for each destination.

Last year's coronavirus outbreak only made the future for the nation's ferry operators even more complicated. In 2020, passenger traffic slumped by 52%, although freight traffic slipped by only 8%.

Company losses for the first half of 2021 increased in comparison with last year, as operators also had to shoulder increased fuel costs.

Although the summer saw a surge in traffic compared with 2020, the sector is headed for its second consecutive year of heavy losses.

Interunity Group has come a long way from being a traditional type of Greece-based shipmanagement outfit and is looking to evolve further in future, **Nigel Lowry** reports

Interunity

An Interunity-managed product tanker: the group has an involvement in about 70 ships.

Providing a lot more than tonnage

To Interunity Group, there is a distinction to be drawn between being a shipping company — which it aspires to be — and a tonnage provider, a category into which most traditional Greek shipowners fall.

"Many Greeks are very good at it, but life can be more challenging as a tonnage provider. The main tool you have at your disposal is your entry point," argues Interunity's George Mangos, the group's co-principal, together with brother Christos.

"We have been a tonnage provider but we wanted to migrate to being a shipping company, where we participate in the freight and other aspects of the business.

"As a shipping company, at least you have more tools and you can take positions at any point in the market cycle. You can make money when the market is going up — or the market is going down," he says.

Interunity started out in the early 1980s as a third-party manager. Among initial activities, a family involvement with Naftomar Shipping & Trading, a long-established name in the world of liquefied petroleum gas shipping, led to a contract for managing LPG carriers. In the 2000s, another key contract saw Interunity manage tankers for Hellenic Petroleum.

"Third-party anything is a less-forgiving environment and you have to work very hard for your clients, so I think that legacy is important," Mr Mangos says.

For more than a decade, the group has had close ties with institutional investors whose identity remains shielded but have clearly had an influence over Interunity's latter-day course.

"They are very good at what they do — and we have learned a great deal from them," he says.

"Institutional money is very particular. You have to report to a high standard and you have to add value, and there is a dogged focus on achieving returns. The size of the fleet does not matter so much, as it does for some traditional shipowners."

Since 2010, the group has been co-investing with the banks and funds with which it works closest.

"We started as a service provider and evolved into becoming an operating partner," Mr Mangos confirms.

"In shipping, you have to be very disciplined. You have to be ready to walk away from investment opportunities and not execute.

"The institutions we work with have been very good at that and it has become part of our DNA now."

The group currently has an involvement in a fleet of about 70 ships, including vessels in which it has an ownership participation, but also those that are under technical or commercial management.

There is a bias towards product and chemical tankers, but the fleet also includes dry bulk carriers, multipurpose vessels, containerships and LPG carriers.

Mr Mangos advises that not too much significance should be attached to the number of ships.

"It is very fluid," he says. During 2020, for example, there was a turnover of about 30 vessels entering or existing the fleet.

"It is not about expansion for the sake of expansion."

Interunity Management Corporation (IMC) currently has an eclectic list of about 30 vessels under technical management.

Last year, there was a significant development in the group's commercial management activities when it unveiled a new joint venture with Lars Ebbesen, who is best known as co-founder of US-based commercial tanker manager Sokana three decades ago.

Sokana has gone through a number of incarnations, most recently under the control of Navig8 Chemicals, but always with Mr Ebbesen as the common thread.

> *Third-party anything is a less-forgiving environment and you have to work very hard for your clients, so I think legacy is important*
>
> **George Mangos**
> Co-principal
> Interunity Group

The new joint venture rebooted Sokana, bringing it under the Interunity Group.

Since last year, the fleet has grown to an aggregate of more than 1m dwt, comprising 35 product and chemical tankers, ranging from 13,000 dwt to 50,000 dwt — although the fleet also includes one larger long-range tanker.

The move is said to have been a response to investment funds seeking to increase spot market exposure and hence more active commercial management after the expiry of longer period charters on a number of the tankers.

The product and chemical tanker market is "more complex" than dry cargo, says Mr Mangos.

"In the parcel space, you can really add value, whether the market is high or low, whereas it is much harder to do that in dry [cargo]."

Despite the hot containership market and the very robust recovery in dry bulk this year, the Mangos brothers have a measured view of current prospects for shipping.

"I think our outlook is cautiously optimistic, but there are very significant reefs that everyone has to navigate around. It does not feel like a time for unbridled optimism," says George Mangos.

Christos Mangos, chief executive of IMC.

"As long as there is volatility, there are opportunities. But whatever you do, you should be mindful of the downside. Things do go wrong all the time."

Underlining Interunity's outlier status as a group within Greece's maritime community is the fact that it also includes Burlington Asset Services, a specialist risk management service provider to institutions with an interest in the industry.

BAS's service spans "asset monitoring, debt portfolio advisory, debt portfolio management, portfolio restructuring and beyond", according to its website.

In addition to equity investments in assets, the group has begun to co-invest in debt. Examples of cases providing debt investment opportunities include financing the buyer in case of the sale of an asset, or partnering an institution investing in non-performing loans.

As to the group's future, Christos Mangos, who is chief executive of IMC, emphasises the need to remain agile.

"We have a roadmap for some big changes of direction over the next years but I am sure that we will look back afterwards and see that things did not happen as we planned. You have to be ready to change and discard the ideas you had in your head."

Pushed for more detail on what Interunity has in mind, he says: "We will certainly be diversifying within shipping but we have started to evolve outside shipping as well. Greek shipowners have classically done this," he points out.

Greece follows Cypriot class act

Invented in Cyprus, the 'Adopt a Ship' concept is spreading rapidly in Greek schools, **Nigel Lowry** reports

Cyprus Chamber of Shipping

Kitack Lim and Violeta Bulc take selfies with an Adopt a Ship class in Cyprus.

With a shared language and religion, and a common mantle as traditional maritime nations, it is no surprise when Greece and Cyprus embrace similar initiatives in the shipping sphere.

One example that comes readily to mind is that Cyprus was the first country to emulate the Greek shipping community's 1982 establishment of the Hellenic Marine Environment Protection Association (Helmepa) as a voluntary anti-pollution body. The Cypriot sibling, Cymepa, was launched in 1993.

Now the favour has been returned, with Greece implementing an educational initiative that has been working well in Cypriot schools for years.

The 'Adopt a Ship' concept was invented by the Cyprus Shipping Chamber in 2006 and implemented with Cymepa's help.

The aim is to provide young children with a real-world learning experience about shipping through pairing classes with specific vessels and enabling direct communication between children and crew.

The programme has succeeded in teaching pupils about the everyday activities of vessels and made them far more aware of the role played by shipping. By all accounts, it has also been a hit with the children.

An important moment for the programme came in 2017, when International Maritime Organization secretary-general Kitack Lim and then-EU commissioner Violeta Bulc enthusiastically endorsed Adopt a Ship after participating in a class while on a visit to Cyprus. Both expressed the hope that the idea could be rolled out internationally.

The very next year, Cymepa chairman George Tsavliris introduced the scheme to Irene Notias, managing director of Prime's Bunkersplus Services, a bunkers-buying management service company based in Greece.

Ms Notias was already involved in helping bridge the gulf between the shipping industry and young people, having launched Project Connect, a non-profit organisation that arranges internships for shipping students. She was inspired and Project Connect became the operator for a Greek version of Adopt a Ship in the country's elementary schools.

The programme rapidly won the endorsement of a number of shipping organisations and has been approved by the Hellenic ministry of education and religious affairs.

Commencing in 2019, it quickly expanded from seven classrooms in the shipping hotspots of Athens, Piraeus, Spetses and Hydra, and six shipping companies in the first year, to 57 classes at private and public schools all around the country last year.

"It was not very difficult to find shipowners who were interested right away," says Ms Notias, paying tribute to the original half-dozen.

The following year, another owner enrolled all nine of his company's vessels — and, since then, many more major industry names have offered ships for the programme.

More than 1,400 Greek school pupils aged from nine to 12 have so far participated and the scheme is now expanding to 13- to 14-year-olds on demand from schools.

"There is a huge appetite among kids," Ms Notias says.

With applications from 70 schools for the coming semester, she expects that Adopt a Ship will soon be engaging pupils in 100 classes.

"It is a well-thought-out programme that is simple to participate in without distracting the captain from his daily duties," she says.

Project Connect/Katerina Nomikou

Irene Notias: Adopt a Ship programme is "a no-brainer, a win-win for everybody".

Feedback suggests that ships' masters are as engaged in communicating with children back in Greece as the kids are enthralled by interacting with captains of vessels on distant voyages.

Since the coronavirus outbreak last year, Ms Notias believes that if anything, the programme has proved even more valuable.

"The kids have shown real empathy for the crews and they have been sending cards with their wishes and prayers to the ships during the pandemic," she says.

The programme is "a no-brainer, a win-win for everybody", according to Ms Notias.

At international level, IMO goodwill ambassador George Hoyt has been appointed global co-ordinator, while similar programmes have been launched in the Philippines, Poland and India.

Values, heritage and knowledge find Greek favour for Wallem

One Asian business has positioned itself as a trusted partner to Greek shipowners with interests in Asia, meeting owners' pandemic challenges

As a family-owned operation with a rich maritime history, Wallem draws comparison with such operators in Greek shipping.

The company — which was established in 1903 and still bears the name of its founder, Norwegian shipbroker Haakon Wallem — combines a future-oriented outlook with a deep appreciation for tradition.

According to interim chief executive John-Kaare Aune, Wallem's heritage and ideals align with those of Hellenic shipowners.

"Although Wallem is an Asian shipmanagement and agency company, its roots are very much European," he says.

"Therefore, as well as having an in-depth knowledge of the local market, we share the values and understand the needs of Greek owners."

Serving as a bridge between two markets is key to Wallem's relationship with Greek shipping companies, particularly at a time when owners are more dependent on third-party services than ever before.

"The greatest challenge for any shipowner currently is movement," Mr Aune says.

"Quarantine and immigration rules in Asia are making it extremely difficult for companies to handle tasks such as crew change and repairs, so they are increasingly relying on our local presence and technical expertise."

With 2021 having been a busy year for ship sales and purchases, Wallem has also seen growing demand among Hellenic shipowners for support with pre-purchase inspection and handover/takeovers.

"Greek owners have been very active players in the S&P market, but not being able to send their own people on board has been a challenge for them," Mr Aune says.

"It is a challenging task to buy and take over a vessel without first inspecting the vessel yourself, so our work in supporting our partners, ensuring that everything is in order and that handovers go smoothly, has proved critical."

> *"We share the values and understand the needs of Greek owners"*
>
> **John-Kaare Aune**
> Interim chief executive

> *"Owners receive a level of service only a large company can provide... they also benefit from a personal touch"*
>
> **Ioannis Stefanou**
> Technical director

Being one of the largest and oldest shipmanagement companies in Southeast Asia, and prioritising approachability and communication, Wallem offers Greek shipowners the best of both worlds, according to technical director Ioannis Stefanou.

"Behind every Wallem superintendent performing a task on board a vessel, there is an extensive network of experts supporting and supervising them," he says.

"Owners therefore receive a level of service only a large company can provide – and, since they can contact [interim chief executive] John or me whenever they need to, they also benefit from a personal touch."

Mr Stefanou says the quality of communication from Wallem to its clients helps establish trust between the two parties.

"Despite speaking perfect English, our Greek shipowning clients appreciate the fact they can communicate with me, or our Greek superintendent in Asia, in their native tongue," he says.

"Seemingly small factors like this have a big impact on trust levels and help to set Wallem apart from the competition."

Wallem receives requests from Greek owners whose vessels are not under Wallem's management but require support while operating in Asia.

"In addition to our core business of full shipmanagement and agency, we provide ad hoc services including third-party inspections, audits and repairs," says Mr Stefanou.

"While we can never replace the unrivalled experience of Greek shipping companies, we can add value in many areas."

Mr Aune emphasises that ad hoc support is part of Wallem's strategy for offering the best possible service to Greek shipowners based on their individual requirements.

"We place great importance on listening to owners and understanding what matters to them," he says.

"Rather than having clients select a service from a list, we tailor our products to their needs and provide bespoke support. This is another aspect that sets Wallem apart and makes us a great fit for Greek owners."

Sponsored by Wallem

The 2020 event was a hybrid, broadcast online but still featuring physical presentations of the iconic Greek Shipping Awards trophies.

Aiming for togetherness while recognising the exceptional

After a year's break when it went virtual, the Lloyd's List Greek Shipping Awards is expected to make an in-person return as the world's largest shipping industry awards event, **Nigel Lowry** reports

Each December, the Greek shipping industry and its partners turn their attention to the Lloyd's List Greek Shipping Awards — and 2021 will be no different.

Yearly since 2004, the event has been the largest of its kind in the maritime world, used to attracting audiences of 1,000 guests or more.

That was until last year, when the organisers were forced to recreate the event virtually and hold it online for the first time because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The 2020 awards unfolded excitingly before an even larger, worldwide online audience — and the event has now been viewed by more than 5,000 people on YouTube.

The Greek Shipping Awards has always combined the anticipation and excitement that only the most credible awards events can generate, with a major annual social occasion that provides the opportunity for friends and business acquaintances to meet up towards the end of the year and take stock.

This year, the event's role in bringing together the maritime community will be even more precious, given the rarity of opportunities for such major occasions since the coronavirus outbreak.

At the time of writing, Greece has reopened for events, with guest limits calculated on the basis of distancing and a proportion of venue capacity in normal times — so the aim is to hold the 2021 awards as a substantial in-person event.

Whatever the final details, the intention will be — as usual — to deliver the best possible awards event, one that lives up to the status of the world's largest shipowning and shipmanagement nation.

Grappling with the effects of the coronavirus pandemic has once again shown the depths of Greek shipping's professionalism, adaptability and durability and its contribution to ensuring the transportation around the world of vital commodities and goods.

Awards categories and sponsors 2021

Dry Cargo Company of the Year
sponsored by Marichem Marigases
Tanker Company of the Year
sponsored by Bureau Veritas
Passenger Line of the Year
sponsored by SWS
Shipbroker of the Year
sponsored by The Tsakos Group
Shipping Financier of the Year
sponsored by Tototheo Maritime
Technical Achievement Award
sponsored by DNV GL
The Safety Award
sponsored by SeaJets
Ship of the Year
sponsored by ABS
Piraeus International Centre Award
sponsored by SRH Marine Group
International Personality of the Year
sponsored by Capital Ship Management Corp
Seafarer of the Year
sponsored by Safe Bulkers Inc
Award for Achievement in Education or Training
sponsored by Panama Maritime Authority
Lloyd's List Intelligence Big Data Award*
sponsor to be announced
The Sustainability Award
sponsored by Lloyd's Register
The Next Generation Shipping Award
sponsored by IRI/The Marshall Islands Registry
Lloyd's List/Propeller Club Lifetime Achievement Award
sponsored by Shipping Deputy Ministry to the President, Republic of Cyprus
Greek Shipping Newsmaker of the Year
sponsored by ExxonMobil
Greek Shipping Personality of the Year
sponsored by Eurobank

Many of the industry's service partners have also risen to the challenges of digital and remote provision of services, while joining with shipping companies in facing the arguably even greater challenge of decarbonising the industry.

Those are sure to be among the themes running through the stories of many award candidates this year, in what is expected to be a highly competitive occasion in most categories.

However, it has also been an extraordinary 12 months in the markets, and Greek shipowners have been among the fastest to react to new realities and opportunities. A number of shipping groups have shown remarkable growth, while a wide array of service providers will have strong stories, with their own initiatives and innovations to present.

Champagne toast

Strong support for this year's awards is led by overall Event Sponsor ClassNK, with China Classification Society once again offering the champagne toast to Greek shipping's health.

They are backed up by a roster of prestigious Greek and international awards sponsors, with a noticeably strong contingent of supporters from Cyprus. This includes Tototheo Maritime, sponsor of the Shipping Financier of the Year category; Safe Bulkers, sponsor of Seafarer of the Year; and the Shipping Deputy Ministry to the President of Cyprus, sponsor of the Lifetime Achievement Award.

Once again, a prestigious and highly knowledgeable panel of judges from across the industry will assess all nominations and have the responsibility of deciding the winners of this year's awards.

They will be revealed on Friday, December 3 in Athens — hopefully in front of a large audience.

In one or two cases, 2020 trophies were delivered straight to the winner's offices.

Judging panel 2021

In alphabetical order:
John Cotzias
President of the Hellenic Shipbrokers' Association
Irene Daifas
President of the Piraeus Marine Club
Leonidas Demetriades-Eugenides
President of the Eugenides Foundation
Haralambos Fafalios
Chairman of the Greek Shipping Co-operation Committee
Stavros Hatzigrigoris
Chairman of the Marine Technical Managers' Association
Nigel Lowry
Athens correspondent, Lloyd's List
George D. Pateras
President of the Hellenic Chamber of Shipping
Elpi Petraki
President of Wista Hellas
Capt Manolis Tsikalakis
General Secretary of the Panhellenic Seamen's Federation
Nicholas Vouyoukas
President of the Association of Banking and Financial Executives of Hellenic Shipping

Ready to set a new course

Cyprus shipping deputy minister Vassilios Demetriades promises that an upcoming strategy will establish 'a positive agenda' for the country's shipping sector, **Nigel Lowry** reports

Shipping Deputy Ministry, Republic of Cyprus

Appointed shipping deputy minister in July 2020, Vassilios Demetriades reports directly to the president of the republic.

Maritime Cyprus, the flagship showcase for the island's shipping industry that is normally held biennially, has been blown off course by fall-out from the coronavirus pandemic.

Yet what may prove the flagship initiative of Vassilios Demetriades' tenure as shipping deputy minister — a position that reports directly to the president of the republic — remains very much on schedule.

This year's Maritime Cyprus conference was due to take place from October 10 to 13, but in September, the event was postponed and put back to October 2022.

"It was a very difficult decision. We spent more than a year planning the conference," Mr Demetriades says.

An improved epidemiological situation in Cyprus had encouraged the organisers — who include representatives of the Shipping Deputy Ministry, the Cyprus Chamber of Shipping and the Cyprus Union of Shipowners — to hope until late in the day that an in-person event might go ahead, perhaps with 700-800 people instead of the traditional attendance of 1,000 or more.

However, measures in Cyprus to limit transmission of Covid-19 would have limited capacity to barely more than half those numbers.

"The whole idea is to bring together the global shipping community and build a network for discussion — so we were never going to do a virtual or hybrid conference," Mr Demetriades explains.

"It was a pity to organise such an event with only 100 or 200 people from abroad. We were looking forward to welcoming people from the Far East and elsewhere — so, OK, we decided to postpone until October next year."

What is going ahead, however, is the presentation of a new long-term strategic vision for Cyprus Shipping that has been honed with widespread industry consultation over the past six months.

> *"What is important is not to make shipping pay, but to make the shipping industry change"*
>
> **Vassilios Demetriades**
> Shipping deputy minister
> Republic of Cyprus

The conference offered "an opportunity in front of the global shipping community" to launch the strategy document.

Yet its importance is underlined by the fact that plans have been confirmed for it to be launched on October 12 at a press conference headed by the country's president, Nicos Anastasiades.

Ahead of time, Mr Demetriades will not reveal too many details, but many of the values that the strategy is likely to reflect are clear.

The project has been branded 'SEA' — standing for sustainable, extrovert and adaptable.

However, the outcome will have been partly shaped by an open consultation process that was split into four phases – devoted, respectively, to: environmental sustainability; digital transformation; global challenges, such as conditions for seafarers and piracy; and more local or regional maritime issues.

The Shipping Deputy Ministry opened a dedicated internet portal to gather as many outside views and comments as possible.

Mr Demetriades wants to avoid overhyping the new strategy, but he is happy at least to mention some of the key traits — especially in how it will depart from many similar such exercises.

It is all about substance rather than spin, he says.

"It is quite different from what you would normally see. Not so many words, but many actions."

In fact, the strategy will contain no fewer than 35 "sustainable actions promoting a positive agenda for shipping".

Designed to take Cyprus up to 2030, each action will have a start and a completion date and a new unit will be created within the deputy ministry charged with implementation.

"It's setting a vision but it's not just a lot of talk," Mr Demetriades emphasises.

He purposely avoided the usual step of hiring outside consultants, wanting to make the policy formulation process "a journey" for all the deputy ministry staff. "It's our own baby and everyone needs to believe in it and be able to implement it," he says.

The strategy is "not just a selling point or a tool to promote Cyprus shipping, but to make it change the way we want and to send a message to the shipping industry that we have to change, to be more extrovert and proactive".

The initiative is aimed as much at "changing the mindset" as setting a course as a maritime nation, he says.

"It has the potential to make Cyprus shipping more safe and secure, more sustainable, more extrovert, and certainly more digital."

Mr Demetriades is clear that while the strategy that will be revealed in October is primarily a blueprint for Cyprus' maritime sector, there is a huge overlap with what he would like to see at a European and global level.

Prior to his appointment as shipping deputy minister in July 2020, he served for five years as policy officer in the Directorate General of Mobility and Transport of the European Commission, dealing with EU maritime transport strategy, and has been focused on EU affairs in one way or another since at least 2004.

As you might expect, he is savvier about the machinery of Brussels and appears readier to positively engage with EU shipping positions than many maritime officials.

"Whatever is proposed by Brussels regionally or the International Maritime Organization globally should take into account that we are in a transitional period. You need to create the conditions to help the industry change," he says.

"What is important is not to make shipping pay, but to make the shipping industry change. It is important to change the mindset.

Vitalij Sova/Alamy Stock Photo

A new long-term strategic vision for Cyprus Shipping has been honed with widespread industry consultation over the past six months.

> *[The strategy is] not just a selling point or a tool to promote Cyprus shipping, but to make it change the way we want and to send a message to the shipping industry that we have to change, to be more extrovert and proactive*

"We need to look at how we can save the environment but also how we can remain competitive and continue to safeguard the shipping industry as an industry of strategic importance globally.

"Climate change is a global issue — and shipping is a global sector by nature," he argues.

"So at the local level, we have been formulating something that can be incorporated into a global solution — and that is the goal at regional level, too. Even if you are successful locally, it will not have the global results that we need."

Cyprus has traditionally found allies in southern European member countries — notably Greece and Malta — that share the belief that shipping is essentially global in its identity and should be bound by global rules.

"But I sense the landscape is changing," Mr Demetriades says.

"A number of countries, not only in the south, are sharing the same approach."

However, the challenge of shipping's "green transformation" requires that shipping officials can no longer formulate policy in isolation but need to bridge the gap with environment officials setting countries' climate change agendas, he says.

At the same time, law-makers should be concerned about whether their proposals "can actually be absorbed by the shipping world".

The aim should be to produce legislation that is "more realistic and more scaleable and adjustable to what we face as a shipping sector, both globally and regionally".

Flag is 'passionate about keeping high standards'

The Cyprus flag is deserving of greater support from owners for many reasons, say some of its leading users, **Nigel Lowry** reports

Mykhailo Polenok/Alamy Stock Photo

At the end of 2020, the Cyprus fleet stood at 1,747 vessels of 24.4m gt,

Cypriot shipowners have sung the praises of the country's flag administration — but also voiced regrets that the flag has slipped out of the list of the largest 10 flags in recent years.

At the end of 2020, the Cyprus-flagged fleet stood at 1,747 vessels of 24.4m gt, including provisional and parallel registrations, in addition to permanently registered vessels.

That represented a 2% increase in the number of vessels — and a 3.2% jump in tonnage compared with two years earlier — but some way below the fleet's 2000 peak of 2,728 ships, aggregating 28.4m gt.

Dry bulk carriers account for easily the largest section of the fleet in terms of tonnage. At end-2020, there were 214 bulkers under the flag, followed by 122 containerships of 3.2m gt.

By contrast, there were just 51 oil tankers, of an aggregate 1.7m gt — and 24 product and chemical tankers, amounting to about 250,000 gt.

The flag also had 74 general cargoships of 416,425 gt, a smattering of gas carriers and a wide variety of smaller and specialised vessels.

As a flag, Cyprus was "committed, reliable over many decades, as well as very proactive and passionate about maintaining high standards", said Nicole Mylona, chief executive of Transmed Shipping, in a recent webinar discussion about the country's shipping industry, organised by Capital Link.

"These are among the things that make Cyprus an exceptionally good flag and an excellent choice.

"Just over the past year, shipping was greatly impacted by issues connected with coronavirus and Cyprus was daring enough to be at the forefront of taking initiatives to effect crew changes and provide vaccinations and the like," she added.

> *"Committed, reliable, proactive and passionate about high standards: these things make Cyprus an exceptionally good flag"*

One of the reasons often blamed for limiting the potential of the ship registry is a long-running politically motivated embargo against the flag that prevents its ships calling at Turkish ports.

However, the apparent widespread fear of using the flag because of this embargo was unjustified in most cases, argued shipowner Polys Hajioannou, chief executive of US-listed dry bulk owner Safe Bulkers and vice-president of the Cyprus Union of Shipowners.

"We have 48 out of our 50 ships under the Cyprus flag and I have not seen that we are earning less freight by not going to Turkey. I think I am fixing as well as my fellow owners are doing," he said.

Mr Hajioannou appealed to Greek shipowners and German owners especially to do more to support the flag.

"We need more ships under the national flag and for me it is unacceptable that when in Greece we have 5,000 ships — and fewer than 700 under the Greek flag — there is not more support for the Cyprus flag."

He estimated that, after subtracting Cyprus-born, Greece-based owners, only about 100-150 Greek-owned vessels are currently registered in Cyprus.

Mr Hajioannou acknowledged that while certain categories of vessel, such as oil tankers and ultramax bulkers, may have more cause to take the Turkish embargo into account, the majority of other ships "do not really need to trade with Turkey".

Increasing the size of the fleet was important for Cyprus, as a strong registry increased recognition from international financiers, ports and other entities on which the fleet depends, he said.

In terms of quality and fees, the flag was "very, very attractive for shipowners", said Mr Hajioannou.

One of the most noteworthy additions to Cyprus' shipping cluster is marine insurer American Hellenic Hull, **Nigel Lowry** reports

American Hellenic Hull

American Hellenic Hull chief executive Ilias Tsakiris, a former seafarer turned insurer, on the bridge of Liberty ship Hellas Liberty in Piraeus.

Sustainability driver in hull insurance

Only five years since its launch and approval by Cyprus regulators, American Hellenic Hull Insurance Company seems firmly established as a leading hull insurer, with an insured fleet of 3,200 vessels.

Reflecting its roots, about half of these derive from the Greek and Cypriot shipping markets, with the other half of the fleet managed from other maritime centres around the world.

The company's upward trajectory has been acknowledged in various ways, not least by the election last year of chief executive Ilias Tsakiris to the prestigious Ocean Hull Committee of the International Union of Marine Insurance (IUMI).

Mr Tsakiris — a former mariner himself, with seagoing experience — previously led the Hellenic Hull Mutual before its manager, Hellenic Hull Management, joined hands with P&I insurer the American Club to establish the new entity.

He sees his presence at IUMI as enhancing the visibility of the maritime clusters of both Cyprus and Greece.

One of the reasons it has taken so long for a major hull insurer to emerge from the region is that it has been primarily a shipowning community and services have been underfunded in the past — but that is changing, he says.

"Especially in Greece and Cyprus, two countries with a long tradition at sea, there has been a lack of high-level education in the marine insurance industry," says Mr Tsakiris.

American Hellenic is working to fill the gap and is co-operating on education initiatives with the Insurance Association of Cyprus and the Cyprus Chamber of Shipping.

Education and training are fundamental issues of shipping's sustainability, he argues.

"We envision an industry with high technical skills and it is imperative to staff the industry with well-trained, educated personnel."

Since 2019, American Hellenic has a memorandum of co-operation with the World Maritime University, and it recently became the key funder of scholarships for the postgraduate programme in marine insurance law and practice.

The company has also become a driver for sustainability within its sector, with co-operations with UNEPFI Principles for Sustainable Insurance, Sustainable Blue Economy, UN Global Compact, Net Zero Insurance Alliance, Ship Recycling Transparency Initiative and others.

"Sustainability is not just a trend or a catchphrase," Mr Tsakiris says.

"We believe it is also an intelligent way of doing business.

"The shipping industry is being challenged to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. Everyone agrees that decarbonisation is an urgent necessity but so many questions remain and there is a need for an international roadmap to provide a framework for shipping to undertake this dramatic transition effectively."

As a service provider to a large number of shipping enterprises of various sizes and resources, spread across the globe, the company is anxious that a two-speed shipping market is not created in terms of decarbonisation.

"For the sake of the planet, everyone needs to adapt — but we should bear in mind, as an industry, that we have companies with extensive research and development departments of their own, as well as many highly reputable companies that do not have access to such facilities," Mr Tsakiris says.

"There is an urgent need for funding for an international R&D programme that will assist all stakeholders in the maritime adventure."

As if to emphasise that addressing new realties is never smooth and that this has implications for marine insurers, American Hellenic calculates that last year, 8.6% of all its claims were related to damage to the engine and equipment of vessels deriving from new fuels mandated under the new sulphur cap on the industry.

"Fuel to power shipping in the next years and decades is obviously a huge concern to insurers, as it is to the shipping industry as a whole," says Mr Tsakiris.

"But there will be tectonic changes from the use of new technologies, too."

Some of these — so far, at least — can be entered mainly in the benefit column.

"For example, drones: now they are being used to monitor marine pollution, illegal activities, transporting items for the ships and conducting remote ship inspections, saving time and money," says Mr Tsakiris.

"Among the negatives of this evolution in our industry are cyber-attacks, which are a growing risk as shipping company processes become ever more digitalised."

ELEPAP - Rehabilitation for the Disabled, is the first charitable, non profit organization in Greece.
For over 80 years, we have been providing rehabilitation services to children with physical disabilities and developmental difficulties.
ELEPAP provides to infants, children and adolescents, and at times, adults, Therapeutic programs, Education and Medical observation.
ELEPAP operates through its 6 branches all over Greece, while it has provided rehabilitation services to over 100,000 children with disabilities since 1937.

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ELEPAP - Kononos 16 Athens 11634
Tel: 210 7228360 - 210 7233860 - 210 7212780 Fax: 210 7228380
epikoinonia@elepap.gr

www.elepap.gr

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