

Grimaldi remains optimistic

Full speed on motorways of the seas

It may not be possible for many shipping companies to look ahead with optimism to the coming months – but the Grimaldi group is an exception. This old-established family-owned company has defied difficult market conditions and remained profitable for the last few years (see ITJ 43-44/2012, pages 23-24). The group even plans to improve its performance this year. Antje Hanna Veregge spoke to commercial director Dr Guido Grimaldi at Fruit Logistica in Berlin.

«We're especially optimistic about the opportunities for short sea traffic in Europe, where we want to further expand our market share,» said Dr Guido Grimaldi, the corporate commercial director in charge of truck and trailer activities of the Grimaldi Group.

The group is a pioneer in this field in the context of the motorways of the seas project initiated by the European Commission. These motorways are part of the Trans-European Transport Network (Ten T) and are supposed to lead to a

shift of freight from Europe's congested roads to the seas. By subsidising the floating infrastructure on European waters the EU is aiming to promote structural change in its member states.

Connecting the Med and north Europe

This will enable the EU to have a more sustainable and more efficient transport industry rather than banking on pure road transport. The background is clear. According to the EU Commission, congested transport infrastructure costs its



Photo: Veregge

Dr Guido Grimaldi, corporate commercial director for Grimaldi's truck and trailer activities.

member states approximately 1% of their combined total GDP annually. The future of intra-European freight transport is in intermodal transport, says the com-

mission. The prospects for the Grimaldi group are thus good. The group's subsidiaries Finnlines and Minoan Lines are part of a large network that connects Mediterranean countries with northern Europe as well as with countries on the Baltic, with regular departures of ro-ro/ro-pax ships or pure ro-ro freighters.

From the roads to the seas

«Our short sea shipping market share in Greece is already around 70%,» Grimaldi said, «but we aim to continue to increase our market share in Europe. Under the current market conditions this will only be possible if we manage to change the modal split in European countries.»

Countries such as Spain and Italy especially continue to rely mainly on road transport for their freight operations. Grimaldi sees great potential for freight transport by the motorways of the seas in the Baltic region too. Rostock and Travemünde (both Germany) are important hubs for the Finnish market, while St Petersburg (Russia) and Gdynia (Poland) are important hubs for Russia and Eastern Europe.

Grimaldi provided the example of the transportation of goods from Barcelona to Helsinki by ro-ro ships, with transshipment in Rostock or Travemünde, to illustrate that it would cost only half of the cost of road transport – despite the fact that most of the transport would still be carried out by road. This is where the Grimaldi Group aims to act, to achieve an intermodal shift here by offering shorter transit times and regular departures. The Barcelona–Helsinki route takes a mere 52 hours – 24 hours for Barcelona–Travemünde and another 28 hours for Travemünde–Helsinki.

Using Travemünde or Rostock as a hub, Grimaldi also wants to attract cargo from Turkey, Bulgaria and Poland, bringing the freight to Finland via the German centres. This connection is important to improve business, Grimaldi said, which is an important goal for 2013.

Equipped for success

To achieve this the Grimaldi group concentrates on large ships. «In this way we benefit from economies of scale, we can work more economically and therefore offer better rates,» Grimaldi explained. Last November the group introduced the *Eurocargo Catania* and the *Eurocargo Brindisi*, two new ro-ro vessels with capacities of around 240 semi-trailers each, on the route from Catania (Sicily) to Brindisi (Apulia) as well as to Ravenna (northern Italy).

Guido Grimaldi is optimistic that this year will be a good one for the company – despite the difficult economic conditions. «The crisis has fortunately not affected us too much so far. I'm completely convinced that with our larger ships, innovative ideas, but above all thanks to our outstanding team, we're well equipped to operate successfully this year.»

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The Grimaldi group in figures

The Grimaldi Group achieved a turnover of around EUR 3 billion in 2012. Minoan Lines was responsible for about EUR 250 million and Finnlines for EUR 650 million thereof, whilst Grimaldi Lines posted sales of about EUR 2.1 billion. The group operates 120 ships, all of which it owns, and employs approximately 11,000 people worldwide.