

Grimaldi concerned about security in the Port of Patras

The Grimaldi Group has raised concerns about security and safety in Greece's Ionian Sea port of Patras, after a young Afghan was killed during an affray among immigrants trying to find a passage to Italy.

"In Greece unfortunately, access to ports is not properly controlled," said Paul Kyprianou, External Relations Manager at Grimaldi after the Italian ro-pax operator sent a letter of complaint to the Patras Port Authority.

Grimaldi, owner of Crete-based Minoan Lines, has called on the Patras Port Authority to take immediate measures to "re-enforce the international rules on safety" as an increasing number of illegal stowaways have been found clinging to the axels under trucks being loaded on the company's ferries in Patras bound for Italy.

Speaking to the media, Kyprianou said Grimaldi "has reached its limits" and are calling on the government ministries to react. "The instances of stowaways in the company's ships is creating dangers and problems for the company with the Italian authorities. The phenomenon in the last few weeks is intense and has resulted in this letter of complaint," said Kyprianou.

He said Grimaldi has hired a private company at Patras in order to check vehicles before they board a ship, but adds "this is not enough". The situation in Patras hides multiple dangers. Kyprianou said: "We are not the only ones that have a problem. Other companies, businessmen in the city, the workers and the inhabitants are also affected. It is a matter of political decision. There are obligations related to the ISPS [International Ship and Port facility Security] Code that Patras needs to abide by." He insists the letter is not a threat, but is a statement regarding an important matter that worries the company which has been heavily investing in Greece.

On 5th May a young Afghan lost his life during a fight among migrants milling around the periphery of the port and a make-shift living area in two empty factories. Six shots were fired by a 27-year-old Afghan and one struck and killed a younger Afghan man. Local residents have also complained about the several armed groups of up to 30 migrants and refugees who nightly prowl along the boundary fence of the port planning to jump the fence in the darkness and attempt to board vessels which sail for Italy around midnight. Most are caught and returned to squalor of the factories to plan their next attempt to board a ro-pax.

Locals say that in the summer there are up to 5,000 migrants and refugees in Patras looking for ways of getting to Europe. Government officials say the migrants are organised and the port authorities stretched. "The only thing we can do is remove them from the port," said Michalis Kostakis, President of the union of port personnel in the region.