



Elisabeth Cosmatos

With more than 25 years of experience in project cargo handling, Elisabeth Cosmatos looks at the sector's current state as well as collaborating with ports

INES NASTALI

In June, Cosmatos Group managing director Elisabeth Cosmatos was elected the president of The Heavy Lift Group, an international association for specialized heavy-transport companies. She is the first woman to hold this position and has been part of the executive committee for more than six years. Cosmatos brings to the role as group president more than 25 years of experience in shipping, forwarding, and logistics.

These 25 years, Cosmatos has spent working for the family business.

In its 50th year, the Thessaloniki-based Cosmatos Group today consists of four sister companies — Cosmatos Shipping Services SA, Fairplay Forwarding SA, Hub Logistics SA, as well as Vigor Trading SA, its commodity wholesalers branch.

With a background in maritime business and law, and international trade and transport, Cosmatos counts her participation in founding third-party logistics facility Hub Logistics as a personal milestone.

For this, she oversaw its development from scratch into a bonded storage operation that is fully covered by dangerous goods permits. In addition, it holds an authorized economic operator certification to handle customs for clients.

The Greek national has led numerous multimodal project cargo and heavy-lift transports in a number of sectors during those past two decades.

They range from oil and gas and renewable energy, to yachting, military operations, marine equipment, and port and terminals.

#### Back to the beginnings

Cosmatos remembers her first project cargo task as a good experience to gain expertise but not as a happy one.

"In 1998, we were involved in defense logistics during the Kosovo war, which included sleeping in military camps, fresh after university," she said to *PE&H* on the sidelines of a busy London International Shipping Week in September. For this, the company transported vehicles, armored equipment, and construction machinery.

From this defining moment in her career, she moved on to coordinate the transport of generators, transformer, windmills, blades, as well as refinery and power plant equipment.

She sees the strength of her company in the full-service package it offers, from the factory to the end destination, delivered over land and sea routes, from European and Asian manufacturing sites into Greek destinations and vice versa.

Even more so than merchant shipping services, project cargo relies on timely delivery owing to the chain of operations that continues on land.

Hence, Cosmatos is proud of the network of partners she and her team have spun over the past decades.

"When a delay occurs that will impact the whole transport, I prefer to use contractors who I know and trust," she said.

#### Working together

With demand being back to pre-COVID-19 times, she appreciates the collaboration with ports and is always happy to see new equipment, such as more cranes and other infrastructure, that helps to handle heavy-lift cargo installed in ports.

Access to good project equipment is especially important as there is no specialized infrastructure in ports for breakbulk. Therefore, what Cosmatos needs for a project is subcontracted, from the vessels, trailers, and lifts to other equipment.

"There is always room for improvement," she said. Two things come to mind. "We rely on the port's stevedores and if we don't have enough manpower, we might be delayed," she lists one of her recent concerns. Second, "what we are lacking are drafts in port," Cosmatos said. She would like to see drafts exceeding 11 meters, which sometimes is a struggle in the predominantly Greek ports that her company operates in.

That said, the challenges she faces are being recognized by project cargo managers from around the world as she knows from her work with The Heavy Lift Group.

The specialized nature of her sector calls for creativity and accuracy. "You need to make sure you know the exact dimensions of your cargo and forecast what could go wrong, so you can avoid problems," she said.

For the stevedores, she therefore sometimes translates instructions to ensure the expensive equipment they will handle gets hooked up exactly as the manufacturer demands it and thus, does not get damaged in the process.

One of the company's recent projects this summer — a carryover from the pandemic — was the delivery of a hydrogen plant from the Port of Thessaloniki to the UK. This project was first planned in 2019 with execution envisioned for 2021 but COVID-19 restrictions prevented this.

The project included 963 metric tons of cargo with some having to be moved through Thessaloniki city center and onward to the port.

There, the cargo was loaded onboard Ocean7's heavy-lift vessel *Atlantic Dawn*,

destined for a hydrogen plant designed by Technip Energies NV at Esso Petroleum Co. Ltd.'s refinery in Fawley, UK.

"At the outset, it was clear that this project was going to create unique challenges, simply given the dimensions of the critical loads."

Additionally, there

were roadworks taking place on the route, which included the installation of a new bridge, and those were outside of Cosmatos's control.

"We hold toolbox meetings with all people involved in the operations before we get started," she said. Ports, clearly having recognized the importance of breakbulk operations as a business opportunity, are also involved in those.

For her, doing the homework helps to keep prices competitive and customers happy. For the company, this also means a reduced risk of liability and of its insurance cover, ensuring the company can look ahead to at least another 50 years of transporting heavy-duty cargo. ■

"We rely on the port's choice of stevedores and if we don't have enough manpower, we might be delayed"

INTERVIEW ELISABETH COSMATOS

Photo: Cosmatos Group

PE&H