

Italian owners call on Rome to step up piracy fight

Pressure builds for legalised use of armed guards as fears grow that hijackings will deter young from pursuing a career at sea

ITALIAN shipowners, proud of their country and heritage, still come together to support each other in hard times, with today's piracy epidemic in the Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean highlighting this community spirit.

The shipowning community is working together with the Italian government to bring about a decree that will allow Italian-flagged merchant ships to have armed guards onboard when transiting these pirate-infested waters.

Although first raised over a year ago, the Italian shipowners' association Confitarma has stepped up pressure on its government since the start of this year after a handful of Italian-owned and flagged vessels were attacked and two were hijacked.

Dry bulk and tanker owner Giuseppe Bottiglieri describes it as a "terrible situation" and many in the industry believe that politicians need to pay more attention to this situation.

With an estimated three Italian-flagged vessels transiting this danger zone every day, there appears to be unanimous support from Italian shipowners towards

allowing armed guards onboard, especially as statistics show that with such personnel onboard the chances of being hijacked are wiped out.

Time will tell whether the decree will come into affect but in the interim period, some members of the Italian community think the government should also increase its participation in naval escorts in the Gulf of Aden and Somalia.

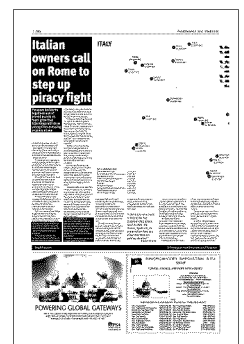
"If they are defending their soil it is a duty of nations to protect their flag states. Why do they have a navy? To do work. I think it is very much a duty of the big European flag states, such as Italy, UK, France, Spain etc, to protect their fleet in a place that they are getting attacked," says Grimaldi Group managing director Emanuele Grimaldi.

Another concern stemming from the growing numbers of vessels being hijacked by pirates is that it could deter young people from starting a career at sea; a global issue affecting not only Italy but many other maritime countries.

Like many of his peers, Ugo Salerno, chief executive of Italian

class society Rina, says the shipping industry is not helped by the fact that when this business comes into the view of the general public and international press it is when disasters happen, such as piracy.

"Nobody thinks of the beautiful vessels we bring to sea, of what we eat, what we wear, what we drive and how it is coming to us by sea. If there were no vessels our world would stop. We should be more proactive in informing the public opinion of the importance of the industry; how environmentally friendly it is and how many opportunities it gives to people who are working within in it," he tells Lloyd's List.



“Crew is fundamental, of paramount importance. Owners must be very careful in enrolling the right seafarers, making sure they really are properly trained and all money put into improving quality of crew is not a cost but an investment.”

With unemployment among the younger generation in Italy

running as high as 28% and considering the reasonable wages, travel opportunities and managerial or technical work experience gained from time at sea, there is a significant justification for the government to invest money into marketing the merchant fleet as an attractive career option, he says.

The Italian-owned fleet has grown to 21.3m gt from 13.7m gt in 2006, according to Lloyd's List Intelligence data, with companies investing around \$18bn over the last four years to renew their vessels with newbuildings and modern tonnage. More vessels

creates need for more seafarers, and as is the way in Italy, companies like to keep it in the family with Italian crew onboard their ships.

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Emanuele Grimaldi

“Our assets are worth millions of dollars and are in the hands of the crew so we need good crew, qualified crew and we have to give them good salaries,” says Mariella Bottiglieri, the eldest daughter of Mr Bottiglieri and chartering manager of the family company.

Her father says that in association with Confitarma, Italian shipowners are donating money into a national fund that finances maritime academies but is also pushing Rome to sponsor the opportunities available for young people if they train to become officers onboard ships.

Confitarma president Paolo d'Amico, also president of d'Amico Società di Navigazione, adds that maintaining a steady flow of Italian officers is a necessity for the country.

“Do not forget that our officers will become our managers in the

future. We need them,” says Mr d'Amico.

As well as offering English language lessons for onshore and offshore staff, the Grimaldi Group also invites maritime schools and colleges into its headquarters for lessons on the company's simulator navigation systems. The best cadets are often selected to work for the group when they finish their course, Dr Grimaldi says.

However, when tackling the deficit of seafarers, the Italian government also needs to look to protect the country's shipbuilding industry, says Mr Salerno.

“Are governments really interested in the maritime industry? In areas of the world where shipbuilding is a very important industry, such as China or South Korea, I think the maritime sector is well considered, as it was in Japan years ago,” he adds. “Maybe the maritime industry does not get enough attention from the government. In Europe, if you look to the cruise industry, Germany is doing a very good job and France as well. They are supporting their shipyards, maybe more than Italy is doing.

“But we need it. In the cruise

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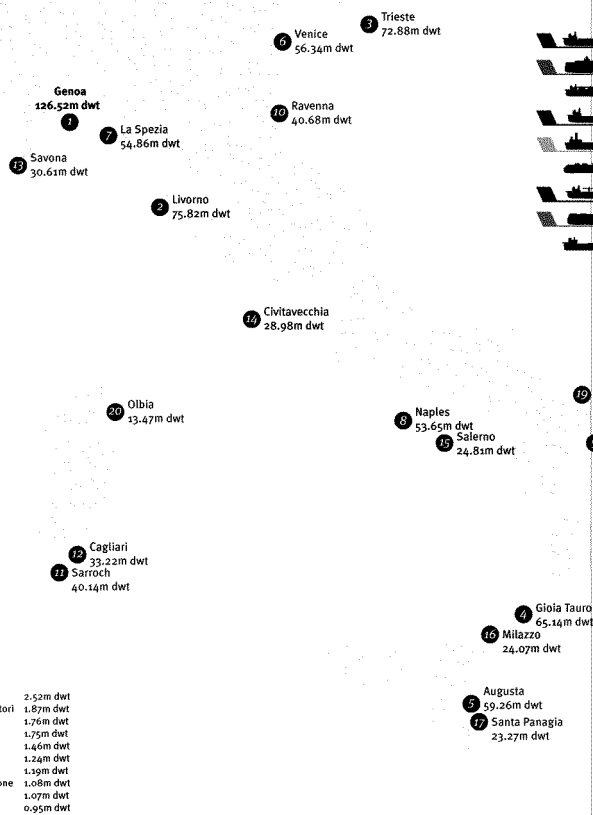
Mariella Bottiglieri

industry we have enormous value of experience, knowledge and general know how. If we lose this we will never be able to recover it and it will be in favour of others. It will really be a waste, a disaster, if we lose this competence.”

The message from the Italian shipping community appears to be that they are ready and available to help the government provide jobs for unemployed young people, support Italy's dwindling shipbuilding industry and in return would like to see greater presence in tackling piracy and relaxing regulation that would allow owners to protect their vessels and crew. ■

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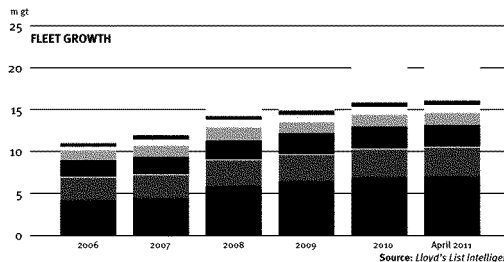
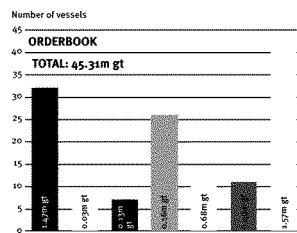
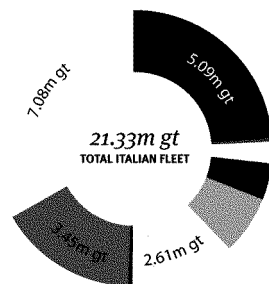


TOP 10 OWNERS BY DWT

Caffaro Mattioli Group	2.52m dwt
Rizzo Bottiglieri De Carlini-Armatori	1.87m dwt
G&A Montanari & Co	1.76m dwt
D'Amico Società di Navigazione	1.75m dwt
Grimaldi Group Napoli	1.46m dwt
Premside	1.24m dwt
Delulemar Shipping	1.19m dwt
Giuseppe Bottiglieri di Navigazione	1.08m dwt
Fratelli D'Amico Armatori	1.07m dwt
Vittorio Begazzi & Figli	0.95m dwt

Number of vessels

BULK	138
CONTAINER	6
GAS TANKER	45
GENERAL CARGO	135
OTHER	1,399
PASSENGER	403
REEFER	10
RO-RO	15
TANKER	362



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