We're not waiting for the future

by Przemysław Myszka and Przemysław Opłocki

The now-biennial event returned to the island of Sardinia for the get-together of the Grimaldi Group, its agents, partners, clients, friends, and the media. The conference part of it traditionally tackled the Naples-based shipping line's investments, after which three panel debates detailed the many factors shaping seaborne transportation – both globally and locally – with a particular focus on vehicle logistics.



Photos: Grimaldi Group

"Our world has become more unpredictable," stressed Emanuele Grimaldi, Managing Director of the Grimaldi Group, in his opening speech. He detailed, "Houthi attacks in the Red Sea. The crisis in the Strait of Hormuz. The continuing war in Ukraine and conflicts in the Middle East. Growing geopolitical tensions and the persistent threat of further barriers to trade. Together, these events have tested our industry and reminded us how much the world depends on keeping maritime routes open."

But, at the same time, Grimaldi noted, "Shipping has continued to connect economies, communities, and people. Our industry has adapted, our people have responded with courage, and our Group has continued to invest. That is why, despite the difficulties our industry has faced, my message today is one of confidence. The challenges are real, but so is our ability to overcome them together." The story of *Grande Torino*, one of Grimaldi's car carriers, was used to illustrate the current geopolitical climate shipping operates in. The vessel was stranded for over 100 days in the Persian Gulf, not only generating a considerable loss for the company but foremost exposing her crew to stress and the more than real danger of coming under fire – as so many ships trying to cross the Strait of Hormuz unfortunately did. Thankfully, *Grande Torino* eventually left the perilous region to deliver cargo and people safely ashore.

He then went on to share the Group's latest developments and listed some of the key investments on the horizon. Being in Sardinia, Grimaldi didn't fail to notice that his company was awarded in early autumn a new five-year public contract to provide sea service to the isle. "Over the years, we have become an important part of the mobility of the island, supporting the journeys of residents, the daily work of local businesses, and the holidays of many visitors. We know that for an island, reliable maritime connections are essential to economic opportunity and to everyday life," he underscored.

Afterwards, Grimaldi went through the Group's tonnage renewal programme. "We're not waiting for the future," he highlighted, "we're already designing what comes next." First, all 14 of the GG5G class (Grimaldi Green 5th Generation) hybrid ro-ros were delivered when *Eco Napoli* began sailing in March 2025. Second, 14 out of 17 ammonia-ready pure car and truck carriers (PCTCs) are already operating, with the last ones scheduled to enter service in 2027. By 2030, nine methanol-ready ferries are to be operating across the Mediterranean and the Baltic (four for Grimaldi Lines, a pair for Minoan Lines, and three for Finnlines in our corner of the world).

The Knud E. Hansen-designed GG5Gs, depending on the variant, offer 7,800 (Grimaldi) or 5,800 (Finnlines) lane metres of capacity. They are equipped with, among others, 5MWh lithium-ion battery systems for zero in-port emissions, air lubrication, and 350 m^2 of photovoltaic panels (peak power of 60kWp). The PCTCs also feature 5MWh packs, but their solar arrays span 2,500 m^2. Each offers 9,800 CEUs of capacity. The new ferries, Hansa Superstars as they'll be called in the Baltic, will



differ depending on their area of operations. The Med ones will have a higher passenger capacity than those Baltic, 2,500 vs 1,100, but less room for wheeled freight, 3,300 lane metres vs 5,100. That said, every ferry is to see her CO_2 emissions slashed by half ("otherwise we'll lose our jobs," noted Dario Bocchetti, Head of Energy Saving, R&D, and Ship Design at the Grimaldi Group, later during a panel). Beyond these, the Group is also working on two other, yet-to-be-revealed-in-detail, ship concepts – of a con-ro and a multipurpose vessel.

Regulations were another topic raised by Grimaldi. Specifically, he spoke of the Net-Zero Framework (NZF) of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the European Union Emissions Trading System (EU ETS), two topics I also raised later during the press conference. "In October 2025, adoption of the IMO Net-Zero Framework was postponed for one year. I remain confident it can be adopted when the IMO Marine Environment Protection Committee meets in extraordinary session on 4 December [2026]." On my part, I inquired whether he actually believes that NZF can be adopted in an effective way (emphasis on 'effective'). Grimaldi answered that the shipping business, through the International Chamber of Shipping he lately chaired, did everything to put forward a workable proposal that each and every shipping segment, cargo and passenger alike, agreed to (a universal GHG fee, a feebate-style reward system, and a global IMO-managed fund to accelerate fuel transition and support developing countries). IMO Members then decided not to proceed – either because some states are generally on the opposite page from the green agenda or, conversely, are too green and will never put their signatures under a proposal that is nothing but idealistically pristine. Grimaldi added that as an entrepreneur, he was – and still is – more concerned with having in place a practical mechanism than with politics or activism.

Grimaldi was even more vocal about the EU ETS, questioning the very legitimacy of the bloc's right to tax parts of a sea journey that fall outside its geographical mandate – say, of an Asia-to-Europe service, most of which takes place outside European waters. He didn't shy away from calling EU ETS madness, pointing to two things – the EU's blind stubbornness on taxing the greenest mode of transport as well as to the fact that EU ETS shipping revenues aren't reinvested into the sector. "The ETS is already adding an estimated €8 billion a year to the cost of maritime transport in Europe, a figure expected to approach €10 billion from 2027," Grimaldi said. He further stressed, "If their costs make maritime services less competitive than the road alternative, cargo may remain on the road instead of travelling by sea. That would be a reverse modal shift – and a contradiction. We cannot encourage cargo to move from road to sea, invest billions in cleaner ships, and then create conditions that push those journeys back onto Europe's roads." In the Baltic, Estonia asserts that the country is putting 100% of the EU ETS shipping stream back into the sector. Asked whether other EU Member States are doing the same,







particularly the ones the Group operates in (read: it serves their economies), Grimaldi just shrugged helplessly.

The subsequent three panels went through a plethora of themes. As is his custom, Ugo Salerno, Executive Chairman, RINA, talked about the benefits of employing modular nuclear engines for shipping, as well as energy efficiency ("the best fuel is the one you don't burn"). This time, however, he also brought forth remote inspections, tying the topic to regulations. As things stand today, these are prescriptive, meaning that rules allow only this-and-that to be checked remotely. Salerno retorted that remote inspections and regulations alike should be goal-oriented. For the former, it means that they're preferable to manual supervision if they increase safety. For the latter, they ensure that, e.g., shipping's energy transition isn't narrowed to certain (prescribed) technologies. If the industry is to green itself, the principle of technological openness must be upheld, Salerno underscored.

In general, energy efficiency dominated the discussion. Per Håvard Siljan Hjukse, EVP Propulsion & Handling, Kongsberg Maritime, shared that it isn't as straightforward as it sounds. Different solutions offer different outcomes, which, in addition, do not simply add another fuel reduction atop others. Energy-efficiency measures are also connected to how other ship systems function, let alone the way a vessel operates in changing conditions. The human aspect was also raised, though from somewhat contradictory angles. Maximo Q. Mejia, Jr., President, World Maritime University, pointed to the challenge of training people for a transition that is only now taking place in shipping (although the sector continues to struggle with attracting and retaining talent). On the other hand, noted Hjukse, autonomous shipping is an energy-efficiency measure in itself – a vessel without a crew has no need for structures like on-board accommodation, or providing services such as food delivery and storage, etc. Eco-designing newbuilds is largely self-explanatory, noticed Ricardo Batista, Head, Climate Action and Clean Air, IMO, but older tonnage also needs compliance options – or at least clarity on the cost of non-compliance with future global GHG-cutting rules.

The second panel of the XXVII Euromed Convention had a very regional focus, with representatives of Italian seaports (from the North Tyrrhenian, Ligurian, and Sardinian seas), their Greek colleague (Igoumenitsa), of Spanish shipping, a Maltese minister (for sustainable mobility), and one of Grimaldi's sons, Eugenio, in charge of the Group's Short Sea North/South Lines chapter. They mainly went through whether their respective Mediterranean economies/regions had suffered from the multiple crises – and apparently not so much. Particularly Italian container and liquid bulk trades kept going strong. Ana Núñez Velasco, Director General, Spanish Merchant Navy, commented by pointing to the EU ETS driving business out of Algeciras to non-EU seaports like Tanger Med. In the light of this, Chris Bonett from Malta wondered aloud whether EU's decarbonisation policy isn't playing into the hands of other regions' competitiveness – to the extent that European companies are more willing to invest in North African port capacity over strengthening the position of their home economies.

The closing discussion went under the 'think like a plumber' motto, as recounted anecdotally by Alessandro Furnò, Global Head of After Sales, Purchasing & Supply Chain, Leapmotor International. According to him, the transport and logistics industry now faces a period of supply chain desynchronisation, characterised by goods repeatedly stuck at chokepoints. Modern logistics is no longer only about killing the idle time and getting things running anew – but also thinking how one part of the supply chain can make operations easier for others in line. Frank Schnelle, Executive Director, ECG – The Association of European Vehicle Logistics, and Luigi Pacella Grimaldi, Automotive Intercontinental Director at the Grimaldi Group, put the spotlight on the car industry as an example of what it means when an entire sector changes virtually overnight. Today, it's Europe that sees more cars imported than exported, a trend by and large fuelled by the electric vehicle manufacturing boom in China. For seaborne car carrying, it's a harvest festival – hundreds of thousands of e-cars in need of transportation from Asia. On the land side, this creates its own set of challenges, Schnelle highlighted, including car imports requiring twice the storage space as exports for the same volume. Another, he furthered, is trying to ship cars in containers – a cargo flow not yet effectively integrated with existing transport networks of finished vehicle logistics, not to mention that cars get more easily damaged when containerised vs when shipped aboard a specialised PCTC. Finally, Le Anh Thien Thu, Global Logistics Director, VinFast, was also on the closing panel, showcasing Vietnam's ambitions of becoming a car manufacturing hot spot.

Handout of the Grimaldi Excellence Awards 2026 topped the conference. These were presented to "partners, shipping, and logistics industry players, as well as bodies that have distinguished themselves through strong partnerships with the Grimaldi Group, built on shared values and a common vision for growth and sustainability." Apart from that, the ceremony highlighted the changing landscape of production and logistics, with many of the awards going to Chinese companies, including what became the Group's biggest overseas office, Grimaldi China in Shanghai. "The ability to work together as a system is now a strategic asset, also in light of the epochal changes we are experiencing. With the Grimaldi Excellence Awards, we celebrate this valuable network of expertise and professionalism, united by a shared vision for the future of transport," underlined Emanuele Grimaldi. ■