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Mary Papaschinopoulou and Neofytos Kourtesis are co-founders of MarDiplo. Photo: Harry Papachristou

## Shipowners can no longer rely on global rules, warn Greek troubleshooters

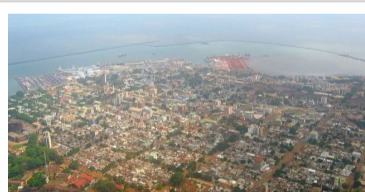
Chaotic world appears to be calling out for the services of MarDiplo co-founders

27 March 2025 18:30 GMT *UPDATED* 28 March 2025 7:31 GMT

By [Harry Papachristou](#) in Athens

When TradeWinds first reported about MarDiplo — the Athens-based company describing itself as a corporate diplomacy firm for the maritime sector — it was trying to carve out a niche for itself as a troubleshooter in festering disputes.

More than one year later, founders and operatives Mary Papaschinopoulou and Neofytos Kourtesis are more sure-footed about their business.



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With 10 cases resolved in tough spots across the world — predominantly in Asia, the Middle East and Africa — word has spread.

If at first, it was protection and indemnity clubs turning to them, now shipowners are knocking at their door.

An increasingly chaotic world seems to be calling out for the exact services the two Greeks have to offer.

MarDiplo cut its teeth on operational problems and protracted disputes in complex jurisdictions, which are becoming increasingly commonplace.

Talking to TradeWinds at her Athens office, globe-trotting negotiator Papaschinopoulou said: “When we started MarDiplo, I never thought the day would come when almost every norm we knew would be under fire — not just

from pirates and criminals but from state actors themselves.

“Rules alone are not the solution any more to resolve disputes — the alternative method is case-by-case diplomatic interaction, which saves reputation, time and money.”

Some cases are easier than others.

In a seafarer repatriation case to South East Asia during Covid-19, it sufficed to plug into Papaschinopoulou’s network to get a solution.

In others, more work has been required.

To retrieve a bank guarantee stuck in a maritime dispute that was more than 25 years old, she spent a whole month in the field, cultivating contacts and decision-makers until she got a breakthrough.

She said such cases cannot be resolved with a transactional mindset in a single, two-hour appointment between 9 am and 11 am.

“You have to be part negotiator, part diplomat — inserting yourself respectfully into an intricate web of relations in each country.

“Every case is different — it’s all about generating leverage and building a construct and a narrative to convince people it’s in their interest to settle outside costly formal procedures.”

MarDiplo insists that everything in their lobbying is above board and that trusted relationships and talking with officials in different countries, rather than down to them, can go a long way.

In a recent note issued to praise a MarDiplo success in a North African country, P&I insurer Skuld commended its “professionalism” and “cultural awareness”.

Kourtesis, the shipowning nous behind MarDiplo, said the firm worked out a “legally sound and pragmatic solution”.

“To our knowledge, this is the first time that a bank guarantee was released without a protocol of agreement and a court decision,” he said.

The most common problem at the root of the cases they encounter is inertia over getting a deal done.

However, even small claims that are left unsolved accumulate costs over the years, he explained.

“You can crash your car 10 times and fix it every single time, but if you fail to close the underlying case, your insurance premia pile up,” Kourtesis said.

MarDiplo’s approach has even started drawing the International Maritime Organization’s attention.

The company is to work with the United Nations body’s maritime law institute in Malta.



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Papaschinopoulou will deliver a lecture on maritime corporate diplomacy, followed by a specialised seminar on alternative dispute resolution and negotiation skills for administrators and diplomats.

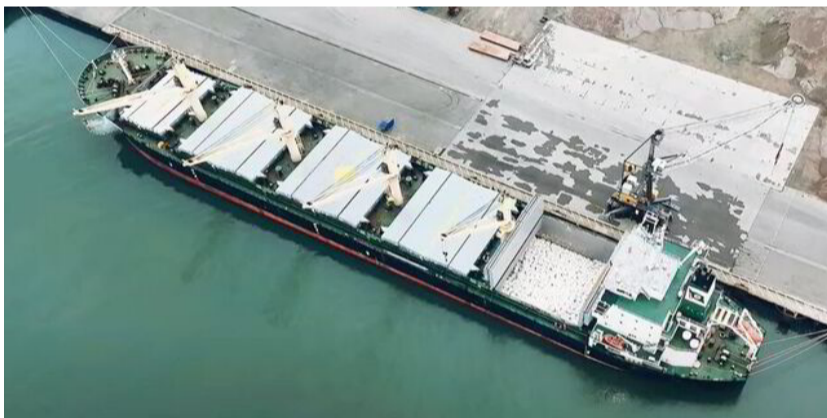
As the rules-based order slides, public officials are becoming aware of how important the “blue economy” becomes and that they need to learn how to deal with its players, she said.

“Government, ministries and organisations interact with maritime industry stakeholders every day but they inevitably operate in a different world — they simply cannot know how the industry is ticking and how to engage and negotiate with them.” [\(Copyright\)](#)

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