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GREECE

The phoenix rising from its ashes

Widespread reforms initiated during Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis' first four years in office turned Greece into an economic success story. His second term promises even more

The European Union's southernmost country is back on its feet, after a decade-long financial crisis that necessitated painful austerity measures and across-the-board reforms. Unlike some of the bloc's members that faced recession in 2023, Greece's gross domestic product rose by 2.2% in 2023 and the EU expects it to increase by 2.3% this year and next. "The Greek economy is growing at a rate three-times higher than the European average; inflation is 20% lower than the eurozone average; unemployment has decreased to below 10%; and we've created over 400,000 jobs in the last few years, proving that our economy is growing despite multiple global crises," states Minister of Development and Investments Kostas Skrekas. "From the black sheep of Europe, Greece has transformed and is now an example to be followed."

Greece has also improved its fiscal position, notes Nikolaos Bakatselos, president of the American-Hellenic Chamber of Commerce (AmCham Greece): "It attained a primary surplus in 2022 for the first time and reduced its fiscal deficit to 1.6% of GDP. In addition, 2023 yielded a strong reelection of Prime Minister Mitsotakis' government, with a clear mandate for continuing reforms."

Credit ratings agencies are impressed too, with both Standard & Poor's and Fitch returning the country to investment grade status last year. According to Marinos Giannopoulos, CEO of the investment and trade agency Enterprise Greece: "It's an extraordinary transformation. With the emergence of Greece 2.0, we have an economy that's open and competitive. Our focus has shifted toward international markets and, with investment grade status, we're opening more doors for investments in our country."

KOSTAS SKREKAS
MINISTER OF DEVELOPMENT AND INVESTMENTS

"From the black sheep of Europe, Greece has transformed and is now an example to be followed."

Both exports and foreign direct investments are soaring: between 2019 and 2022, its international sales doubled, while FDI inflows rose by 52% with a significant influx of multinationals. Among Greece's diverse export strengths are a pharmaceutical sector that manufactures 10% of Europe's generics and an agri-food sector that benefits from the country's incredible Mediterranean produce. However, "We want to expand our manufacturing base, as well as to revive some sectors that were phasing out, like shipyards," the minister asserts. Leading the way in that respect is New York-based ONEX Shipyards and Technologies Group, which purchased two of Greece's largest yards in 2019 and announced this year that it is investing $550 million on their modernization.

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The modern suspension bridge to Evia or Euboea, Greece's second-largest island

Another prominent area attracting US and other international investors is tourism and real estate, which accounts for 30% of the nation's GDP. "In the last five years, over 150 hotels have been built, we're witnessing a surge in luxury offerings and the $9.3 billion The Ellinikon development project is set to transform Athens," Giannopoulos states. While Greece used to be dependent on the aforementioned traditional industries, its economy has diversified, reveals Skrekas: "We want to maintain and secure our momentum to achieve sustainable growth. For this purpose, we have turned Greece into a digital hub, a logistics hub and an energy hub for Southeast Europe, and the government has prioritized reducing Greece's carbon footprint."

The country is at the forefront of its region in digital technologies. Investors have installed 18 data centers to date, the most in Southern Europe, and more are being developed. Among those are billion-dollar investments from Microsoft, Google and Amazon, making Greece one of the few countries outside North America to host all three tech giants. "A decade ago, the concept of assimilating big investors like this was foreign to us. Today, we understand what large-scale investments entail and have the capability to efficiently facilitate them. We've gained the expertise to manage any substantial project that comes our way," declares Giannopoulos. "Underscoring Greece's attractiveness to big investors, Pfizer has established a global Center for Digital Innovation in Thessaloniki, where it initially aimed to employ 200 people, but the number now exceeds 1,000."

MARINOS GIANNOPOULOS
CEO, ENTERPRISE GREECE

"With investment grade status, we're opening more doors for investments in our country."

One of the main benefits of Greece for tech firms, as well as other industries, is the massive investment the public and private sector have made and continues to make in nationwide digital infrastructure and international connectivity. The country is also investing in transportation and logistics infrastructure, says Giannopoulos: "Greece is strategically positioned to offer easy access from and to the Middle East, the Balkans and Europe. Currently, our facilities are being upgraded, with the $240-million development of Thriasio Logistics Centre near Athens being a notable example."

When it comes to energy, Greece has established itself as Southeastern Europe's hub for gas,

Kostas Skrekas
Minister of Development and Investments

Marinos Giannopoulos
CEO
Enterprise Greece

thanks to the development of liquefied natural gas terminals at Revithoussa and Alexandropoulos, as well as pipeline links with other European nations. Its ambition is to capitalize on its copious sun and wind resources to become a hub for green energy as well, asserts Skrekas: "Greece's electricity demand is 50% covered by renewables. We want 80% to be covered by 2030 and our aim is to transform Greece from a net electricity importer to a net exporter. Therefore, we're going to invest over $10 billion by 2030 on upgrading our grid and expanding interconnections with neighboring countries."

The state's ability to invest so much into national infrastructure has been bolstered by its allocation of $39 billion in grants and loans from the EU's post-COVID Recovery and Resilience Facility, which is being targeted toward Greece's green transition and digitalization. The government is also leveraging investment incentives to support private-sector projects that can accelerate the establishment of a sustainable, digital and innovative economy. These include a fast-track process for large investments, tax subsidies and cash grants.

During Prime Minister Mitsotakis' second term in office, his administration wants to make it more attractive and even easier to do business in Greece, says Giannopoulos: "The reforms from the government's first term are a testament to what it wants to do. With the bar set high, we're striving to implement more reforms in areas such as tax incentives, tax reforms and reducing bureaucratic obstacles. Our goal is to transition from 'red tape to red carpet' and our efforts are geared to constant improvement, not solely for investors, but for Greek citizens as well."

According to AmCham Greece's Bakatselos, 2023's reelection of Mitsotakis' reforming government highlights a notable shift in the population's mindset: "After an unforgettable crisis, Greeks now exhibit a growth-oriented perspective that is untethered from past events. Anyone considering investing in Greece, the broader region or within the EU should get here today. It's an exceptional destination."

Survey shows strong investor optimism

40% of respondents to the 2023 EY Attractiveness Survey Greece planned to invest or expand in the country within the next year

Greek society made substantial sacrifices during the country's financial crisis, states Georgios Papadimitriou, country managing partner of EY in Greece, which provides leading assurance, tax, strategy and transactions, and consulting services from its offices in Athens, Patras and Thessaloniki.

"It was a painful transition period with a lot of reforms. A few years ago, for example, unemployment was at 28%; this meant that in almost every household, there was a family member who didn't have a job. Today, we're in a totally different reality and unemployment has reset at nearly pre-crisis levels," he relates. Many Greek companies were forced to close too, Papadimitriou says: "However, the ones that survived came out of the crisis standing tall and have shown greater resilience than their European or global peers to the recent turbulence caused by geopolitical instability, the pandemic, inflation, the energy crisis and other challenges."

Georgios Papadimitriou
Country Managing Partner, EY in Greece

Those companies have since been joined by numerous new players in the market, with EY's extensive annual Attractiveness Surveys, through which the firm has been monitoring the mood of private-sector investors for more than two decades, suggesting Greece is now a more appealing country to invest in.

"All in all, we're getting positive feedback through our surveys. One of the key takeaways from recent ones is that a growing majority of respondents say that Greece's attractiveness as an investment destination is steadily improving," Papadimitriou reveals. "In 2023, 40% of investors surveyed said they plan to invest or expand in Greece within the next year and 69% said they expect the country's attractiveness to further improve in the next two years. This high a percentage would not have been remarkable to see straight after the crisis, when it was natural for investors to expect improvement, but to have almost seven out of 10 investors thinking that there is still additional potential now is important."

This rising confidence is reflected in the level of foreign direct investment (FDI) flowing into the nation. "According to our data, FDI projects announced in Greece in the past three years alone make for 35% of the entire FDI total of the last 23 years. This is remarkable, exponential growth in investment activity," he asserts. "Based on our most recent Attractiveness Survey Greece, the US accounted for 40% of new greenfield investment projects in 2023, up from 23% in 2021, with half of those projects being related to software or information technology services."

Papadimitriou explains that the government has taken many steps within the last two years that aim to ensure healthy FDI inflows continue: "These include the establishment of a formal framework for accelerating and simplifying so-called 'strategic' or 'emblematic' investments, a specialized process on land development and permitting for those investments and several new financial incentives for investors in Greece."

Despite the progress made in advancing the nation's investment climate since the financial crisis, the 2023 EY Attractiveness Survey Greece shows that investors consider some improvements are still needed. "These mainly revolve around three priorities: improving the education system and workforce skills, reforming taxation and further increasing support for high-tech sectors and innovation," he notes, adding that the government is making plans to help address these concerns.

Papadimitriou would encourage US businesses and individuals to consider the country as a destination: "The US and Greece share common values and vision; we've always been on the same side of history and the relationship between the two countries is the best it has ever been at the moment. EY would be happy to provide any type of support to either US citizens seeking to move to Greece for a job or US investors who would like to assess growth opportunities in our country. We're on standby to assist both employees and companies alike."

GEORGIOS PAPADIMITRIOU
COUNTRY MANAGING PARTNER
EY IN GREECE

"FDI projects announced in Greece in the past three years alone make for 35% of the entire FDI total of the last 23 years. This is remarkable, exponential growth in investment activity."

Complete turnaround in investor confidence

Through reforms that boosted competitiveness and an effective strategy for sustainable growth, Greece has restored its credibility

Foreign investors have "turned from doubters to believers in Greece," says Marios Psaltis, country managing director of PwC Greece. "As a leading international professional services firm with a strong presence in the market, our teams have been involved in most transactions and investments made, which puts us in a unique position to assess how the nation is perceived as an investment destination. We've experienced first hand the turnaround in its image and we're definitely seeing a rising interest in long-term investments in the country."

A combination of factors have contributed to this, including the country recording one of the eurozone's highest economic growth rates in recent years. Since the worst years of the crisis, "Greece has managed to drastically reduce its public deficit, restructure its public debt, implement product and labor market reforms, recapitalize its banking sector and gradually restore its credibility in international markets," explains Psaltis.

"What's also important is the stable political environment, which acts as a positive multiplier in economic activity. Greece has a government in its second term that implements investment-friendly and socially responsible policies, underpinning the improvement in the level of trust within Greek society. All these developments allow us to be optimistic about having entered a virtuous cycle of gross domestic product growth, reduction in debt-to-GDP ratio, reduction of tax rates and improvement in real wages."

Marios Psaltis
Country Managing Director, PwC Greece

Panayotis Bernitsas
Managing Partner
Bernitsas Law

MARIOS PSALTIS
COUNTRY MANAGING DIRECTOR
PWC GREECE

"The EU recovery funds provide the finance required to support the transformation of the Greek economy."

Despite lowering tax rates, revenues have risen, thanks to a focus on effective tax collections and transparency, he notes: "Tax policies are directed toward not just a gradual reduction of the burden, but also a simplification of the system and strengthening of the audit mechanisms to combat evasion." A similar approach is being taken to enhance Greece's legal and regulatory systems. "Recent reforms include the simplification of laws, streamlining of processes and improving governance in public-sector companies. The area where work still needs to be done is the judicial system, where we need to speed up decisions taken by the courts," comments Psaltis.

PwC has been involved in a number of the reforms that have taken place, he says: "In line with our purpose, we strived to build trust in society and solve important problems in the public and private sector during the financial crisis and in the recovery phase. For example, our strong technical expertise contributed significantly in the restructuring of the banking sector, reduction of non-performing loans and strengthening of tax audits."

More recently, PwC assisted in the effort to manage the COVID crisis and advised in the preparation of the national plan for Greece's absorption of $39 billion in grants and loans it is receiving from the European Union's post-COVID Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), much of which is being invested into infrastructure and further reforms. "During its economic crisis, Greece lost almost 25% of its GDP as a consequence of the dramatic squeeze in public spending. The unavailability of equity and debt finance, together with the high country risk that discouraged foreign investments, hindered the economy's ability to grow," states Psaltis. "The EU recovery funds provide the finance required to support the transformation of the Greek economy. The bet now is to make the best use of the funds in order to shift the economic model in a direction that addresses future challenges and promotes sustainable growth."

The majority of the funds are, therefore, being targeted at the country's digital and green transitions, as well as responses to climate change, education and health. Psaltis believes these are the right priorities. "Because of its geographic position and ample sun and wind, there are huge opportunities from the energy transition in Greece, while investments in digitalization can be the accelerator of transformation and growth," he asserts. "Greece is a great example of a country that suffered during the economic crisis but managed to restore confidence and trust, and achieved a remarkable turnaround through an effective strategy that supports business, generating new jobs, economic growth and prosperity for its people."

Although the sums coming from the RRF are vast, the government's goals for new infrastructure and modernizing existing assets are even larger. One way the gap is being addressed is privatization. According to Manolis Sigalas, senior vice president and managing director, Europe at the US-based project management firm Hill International that has acted as technical advisor for the Greek state or investors in privatizations: "Since 2011, Greece's far-reaching program has yielded proceeds in excess of $15 billion thus far, comprising transport infrastructure concessions; urban regeneration projects; real estate assets; utilities; and an array of other holdings." The program appears to be ramping up: last October, Dimitris Politis, CEO of the Hellenic Republic Asset Development Fund (HRADF), the body responsible for privatizations, announced that Greece hoped to raise over $5.5 billion from assets this year. That total includes the state's successful divesting of a 30% stake in Athens International Airport, which took place in February.

"HRADF's mission is not limited to selling state-owned assets, it is much wider. We're developing assets through partnerships with the private sector, utilizing our expertise and knowledge in running transparent tender procedures and introducing private investment, which is crucial for the country's growth," Politis stresses. "Almost 80% of the revenue from developing our assets is earmarked for reducing sovereign debt and our projects have a positive spillover effect on the economy, generating major investment in the further development of those assets. Prior to developing an asset, we consider all parameters, including the needs of the local communities, and we're introducing corporate governance and environmental and societal principles to all our tenders."

HRADF operates under the umbrella of Growthfund, a sovereign wealth fund that manages many of Greece's key state-owned enterprises. It is currently setting up a new fund that can act as co-investor with the private sector in major projects in areas like sustainability, innovation and energy, says its CEO Gregory Dimitriadis: "My priority is establishing the right governance to create long-term trust. It must be open and transparent for investors and the public."

PANAYOTIS BERNITSAS
MANAGING PARTNER, BERNITSAS LAW

"There's been huge progress with regards to good governance and transparency in Greece."

In the opinion of Panayotis Bernitsas, managing partner at one of the country's largest law firms, Bernitsas Law: "There's been huge progress with regards to good governance and transparency in Greece overall, driven by the many international companies that operate here, which imposed their modus operandi." While there is still red tape to be cut, "I think investors feel secure now. Investments are guaranteed in the constitution, the EU guarantees freedom of goods and capital transfer and Greece has ratified all international treaties that protect investments," he says. "Greece is outperforming many of its peers, it has a stable government, people are geared to adopting best practices and are very much anchored to Western values."

The Riviera Tower in The Ellinikon project will be the tallest building in Greece

Capital markets affirm Greece is back

Macro and micro advantages galvanize investor participation in the country's stock exchange

During 2023, Athens Stock Exchange's (ATHEX) main index shot up 39.1%, making it the second-best performer among the world's largest capital markets. Capping an excellent year for ATHEX, the average value of daily trading was 50.6% higher than in 2022. "This tells you there's embedded value in Greece," says Yianos Kontopoulos, CEO of the Athens Exchange Group. That value has macro and micro origins. The former concern Greece's fiscal management and banking sector reforms, and its growing economy that is not badly impacted by inflation, he states: "We also have a lot more deposits than loans in our system, deposits have been coming back in droves since 2019. This cushion means the economy can deal a bit better with high or persistent interest rates."

Vassiliki Lazarakou
Chair, Hellenic Capital Market Commission

Yianos Kontopoulos
CEO, Athens Exchange Group

YIANOS KONTOPOULOS
CEO, ATHENS EXCHANGE GROUP

"The portfolio investment from US-based investors was 13% of our total market capitalization in 2023."

On the micro side, Greece's leading listed companies are high quality. "They've gone through thick and thin in the past decade, done well, expanded in other markets and are distributing good yields to shareholders. When it comes to the listed universe in our capital market, the portfolio investment from US-based investors was 13% of our total market capitalization in 2023, with sectors of most interest to them being technology, 5G, energy and tourism," reveals Kontopoulos. About 60% of the market's recent performance, however, is tied to the country's banks, which had to be bailed out in exchange for shareholdings by the state's Hellenic Financial Stability Fund (HFSF) during the financial crisis.

The government has opted for ATHEX to divest some of its banking holdings now they are back in shape. In 2023, for instance, HFSF used the exchange as an avenue for selling a 22% share of National Bank of Greece for about $1.2 billion. "When you have those large transactions, new investors come in, they ask, what else do you have? It galvanizes interest and capital," he states. An even bigger deal came this March, when HFSF disposed of a 27% share of Piraeus Bank for nearly $1.5 billion. While in February, the privatization agency Hellenic Republic Asset Development Fund divested a 30% stake in Athens International Airport by listing the $2.7-billion company on ATHEX. Underlining local and international investors' confidence in Greece, these three offers were between eight and 12 times oversubscribed.

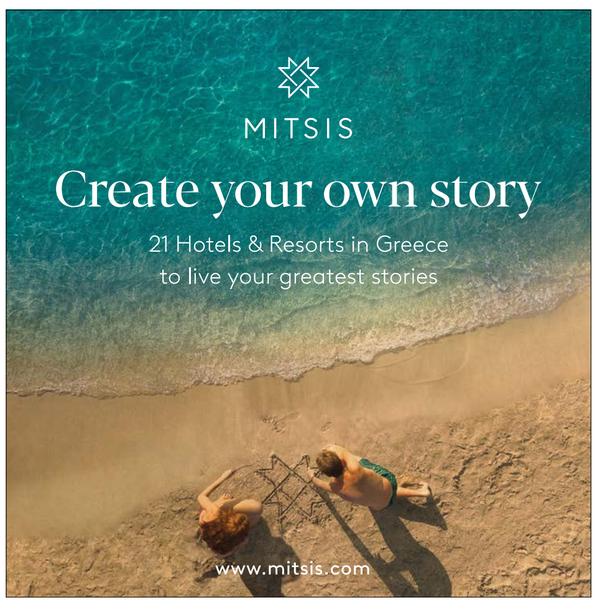
To further strengthen the exchange, the government is reducing taxes on transactions and for companies raising capital. Other incentives are in the pipeline, which are likely to include ones for investors in ATHEX's alternative market for growing firms. "Our goal as an exchange is to recover developed market status, which we lost in 2013. Right now, we're categorized as an emerging market, but hopefully we will be part of the developed market indices by 2025. That means our audience will change and it will have a tangible effect on the size of potential investments on our markets," he says.

To achieve that goal, ATHEX is collaborating with other stakeholders, including the Hellenic Capital Market Commission (HCMC), which regulates and supervises activities in the sector. "Our main concerns are the smooth operation of the market and the protection of investors' interests," states HCMC's chair, Vassiliki Lazarakou. Among recent initiatives to bolster performance in these areas, she highlights that fact that, "Following a proposal by HCMC, a new law on corporate governance was adopted in 2020 that is in alignment with international best practices and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development principles. All Greek listed companies now operate under this framework and the level of corporate governance and transparency has significantly risen. HCMC is monitoring compliance with the legislation and we proceed to audits and sanctions where necessary."

VASSILIKI LAZARAKOU
CHAIR, HELLENIC CAPITAL MARKET COMMISSION

"A new law on corporate governance was adopted in 2020 that is in alignment with international best practices."

HCMC has also taken actions to help grow the country's capital market. "For example, we've simplified the approval process for IPO prospectuses, rights issues and corporate bond listings. Prospectuses can now be submitted in English too," says Lazarakou. "We will continue our reforms, because HCMC is determined to contribute to a sound and efficient framework for the Greek capital market, which will facilitate the attraction of foreign direct investment, with a view to making Greece a regional financial center in Southeast Europe."



A smart, green city on the sea revamps Athens

Construction is rapidly progressing at The Ellinikon, the largest and most emblematic development in Greece's increasingly dynamic real estate market

Foreign investment into the Greek real estate market is expanding at a rapid pace. Over the first nine months of 2023, international inflows into the sector exceeded $1.7 billion, 30% more than in the previous year. Various factors are driving the market, one of which is the buoyant post-COVID recovery of tourism in the Mediterranean country.

"More and more people not only want to visit Greece on vacation, now they want to buy a home and spend a good amount of time here. That includes many people from the Middle East and the Greek diaspora from countries like the US," explains Odisseas Athanasiou, CEO of Lamda Development, a preeminent player in the real estate sector. "Another factor is that people have started to hear that there is a project happening in Greece that is going to change Athens. By 2026, we want to complete the 2.2-mile Athenian Riviera coastline of The Ellinikon project and when this happens, Greece will be on the map for its high rises, hotels, beaches and park."

Just 20 minutes from the Acropolis and close to the airport and Piraeus port, Lamda's vast urban-regeneration project covers 66.7 million square feet of land and will create a new 15-minute coastal city-within-a-city for Athens. The company already has 20-year track record of real estate development, investment and management in Greece. Over that time, it has amassed a diversified portfolio of investment assets with a gross value of around $3.5 billion, which includes The Ellinikon, the three largest malls in Greece, the premier designer outlet in Greece and prestigious marinas.

Odisseas Athanasiou
CEO
Lamda Development

ODISSEAS ATHANASIOU
CEO, LAMDA DEVELOPMENT

"The Ellinikon is the biggest project of its kind in Europe because of its size, but beyond its size, the project is striking in its diversity."

This portfolio has given the company prominent position in the market. "But The Ellinikon project has put us on a different trajectory," he states. "Right now, The Ellinikon is the biggest project of its kind in Europe because of its size, but beyond its size, the project is striking in its diversity. The investment is at least $9.3 billion, the buildings are being designed by world-famous architects and it will have a huge socio-economic impact. It will generate over 85,000 jobs, while the country's gross domestic product will increase by 2.5%."

The company is developing all of The Ellinikon's infrastructure and buildings from first principles, the CEO reveals: "We're creating the entire project from scratch and it will be one of the first cities in the world that is going to be green, sustainable and smart from scratch. We're calling it a paradigm city, because it will be a 15-minute city. You'll be able to get to anywhere in The Ellinikon within 15 minutes, either walking or cycling."

At the heart of the project is the 21.5-million-square-foot Ellinikon Park, a green oasis that will seamlessly link to a rejuvenated seafront with a 310-berth marina and an extensive white sandy beach that is comparable in quality to those on any Greek island. "We're creating one of the largest parks in the world, next to the sea and with amazing weather 10 months a year," Athanasiou enthuses.

By 2037, The Ellinikon will contain 8,000 homes. During phase one, which is well underway and expected to be completed by 2026, about 1,500 units will be made available to buyers. Demonstrating the demand for its homes, the first 314 units to be released were all pre-sold soon after they reached the market, for a total contract value of $1.3 billion. Those units are in three coastal-front properties that set the tone for the architectural standards of the whole development. Rising above the rest at 50-stories tall will be Foster + Partners' landmark Riviera Tower, Greece's first green residential skyscraper; The Cove Villas are high-end homes individually designed in collaboration between an architect and owner; and The Cove Residences is a state-of-the-art apartment complex.

Among the many retail, gastronomic and entertainment venues available to The Ellinikon's residents, visitors and workers in the new city will be The Ellinikon Mall, which will become the largest shopping center in Greece, and Riviera Galleria that is being designed by Kengo Kuma to be one of Europe's best boutique developments. As a result of big-name brands' faith in the project, 64% of units in the first of these and 46% in the second have already been agreed, almost three years before they are due to open.

The Ellinikon will also boast luxury beachfront hotels and residencies from the likes of Mandarin Oriental, a cutting-edge sports and wellness complex and an integrated resort casino operated by Hard Rock, which will be the first of its type in Europe.

The site's business district, on the other hand, will include diverse contemporary workspaces for all sizes of company, from Greece's tallest commercial tower to low-rise units. In addition, Lamda is developing an innovation hub, where businesses, digital nomads and students from The Ellinikon's schools and higher-education institutions can collaborate.

According to Athanasiou, "Our vision is to create venues and experiences that make Greeks' and visitors' lives better. We hope to inspire everything in Greece. For example, we want to be the Greek ambassador for climate change." To achieve that, The Ellinikon's major buildings will be LEED platinum and gold certified, the project will be powered by wind energy and the developer is working hard to ensure carbon neutrality in areas such as waste and water management. "It's possible to do things like this because we're designing everything from the beginning — it's much easier to create a sustainable and technologically smart environment when building from scratch," he says.

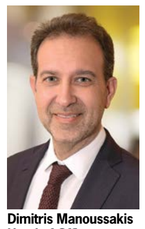
This year, the project has moved from technical studies and foundation work to construction. The next step is a first international marketing campaign for The Ellinikon. "The US is an important part of this, both in terms of the Greek diaspora and other potential investors," Athanasiou states. "We're passionate about this project, we're creating a paradigm way of living and invite everybody to experience it."

The Ellinikon project benefits from 2.2 miles of stunning Athenian coastline

Wide potential in real estate

The Ellinikon is the country's largest and most iconic real estate project, but there is plenty of other interesting activity in the sector, according to Dimitris Manoussakis, head of office at Savills Greece.

"Recent projects in Athens include the One&Only resort, an important hospitality and residential investment; the Piraeus Tower, a high-rise building in the middle of the port that will be offered as a mixed-use development; and the former Athens Hilton has been converted to a 6-star Conrad Hotel with luxury residential units," he says. "In other parts of the country, there are resort projects like Elounda Hills in Crete and the Costa Navarino hospitality development in the Peloponnese that continues its expansion."



Dimitris Manoussakis
Head of Office
Savills Greece

One of the world's leading property agents, Savills has provided advice or acted as core agent to almost every large Greek development since it established a presence in the country 25 years ago. "We offer a large spectrum of services from valuation and agency, to building project and property management. Because of our longstanding expertise from our involvement in The Ellinikon and major resort projects, we also advise new developments in Greece," explains Manoussakis.

The Greek real estate market is remarkably dynamic overall at the moment, he asserts: "Following a very successful 2022, the sector had an exceptional performance in 2023 and I believe 2024 will be another record year. The frontrunners in this are expected to be hospitality and logistics, followed by offices, while residential will be the next hit for Greek real estate."

In hospitality, Savills has noticed a trend toward foreign investors buying older properties for repositioning and Manoussakis predicts this will continue: "Athens is one of the most interesting places of opportunity and the one with the lowest mobility. It has a long way to go in terms of visitation and high-quality hotel product. Logistics is also an important sector as Greece has a strategic position in the Southeastern Mediterranean and the port of Piraeus is now among the top three ports in Europe."

Savills is confident the office sector will continue to be a safe haven for risk-averse investors, while the data center market is one that is gaining increasing attention from investors and hyperscalers such as Microsoft, Google and Amazon. The company is also seeing growing investor activity regarding residential projects, he reveals: "Athens and Thessaloniki have attracted interest from large institutional investors that are acquiring landmark and older buildings to convert them to modern residential units for sales or built-to-rent developments."

Markets for these units include young Greek professionals and international remote workers. "Athens is a place that digital nomads have started selecting, mainly due to the climate, lifestyle, quality of life, internet speed, telecoms infrastructure and flight connectivity," he notes.

DIMITRIS MANOUSSAKIS
HEAD OF OFFICE, SAVILLS GREECE

"Greece's real estate market lags others in Europe and is in need of fresh stock. It's a great opportunity for investors."

Over the years, Savills has grown its Greek operations significantly and it will carry on doing so as the market advances. "Our vision is to expand by offering new services that don't exist in the Greek market and to offer them with quality," asserts Manoussakis. "Greece's real estate market lags others in Europe and is in need of fresh stock. It's a great opportunity for investors, because they can achieve good returns."

Tourists flock to capital

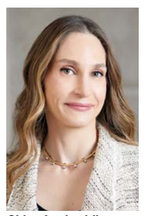
While Athens is increasingly on travelers' bucket lists thanks to its relaxed and trendy atmosphere, luxury tourism is also gaining speed

Last year, over 7 million tourists flew into Athens airport to visit the European capital, double the figure that arrived in 2014. Surveys suggest that the city's culture is now the main reason for choosing it as a destination, with a profusion of relaxed trendy bars and restaurants having opened in recent years. Many visitors, however, opt for a more lavish and stylish experience from a stay in Athens.

The Greek capital is now catching up with the rest of Europe in the luxury hospitality sector, but it has always had some stars in its firmament. One in particular strikes the visitor's attention, the iconic Hotel Grande Bretagne situated right on Syntagma square, which is considered to be the country's top luxury hotel. Celebrating its 150th anniversary this year, the historic and opulent venue in the heart of city is still a place of choice for visitors to Athens.

"Reaching 150 years of uninterrupted service is a remarkable feat for any organization and all of us feel proud to be guardians of a unique heritage," asserts Chloe Laskaridis, chairperson of Grande Bretagne's proprietor, Lampsa Hellenic Hotels. The listed but family-run company has two other equally luxurious accommodation options that are sited within a few minutes' walk of this landmark: the boutique King George Hotel and Athens Capital MGallery, she says: "The Grande Bretagne is, of course, the jewel in our crown, but we're equally proud of our other two city-center properties."

All three offer breathtaking views of the capital, fabulous rooms and suites and outstanding service, as will Lampsa's latest project, enthuses Laskaridis: "Our Elatos mountain resort is a fantastic, beautiful property only 2 hours from Athens. It's early days, but our plan is to turn it into a top-notch wellness facility that competes with leading Swiss and German ones. It will mostly act as a winter resort for our Grande Bretagne guests."

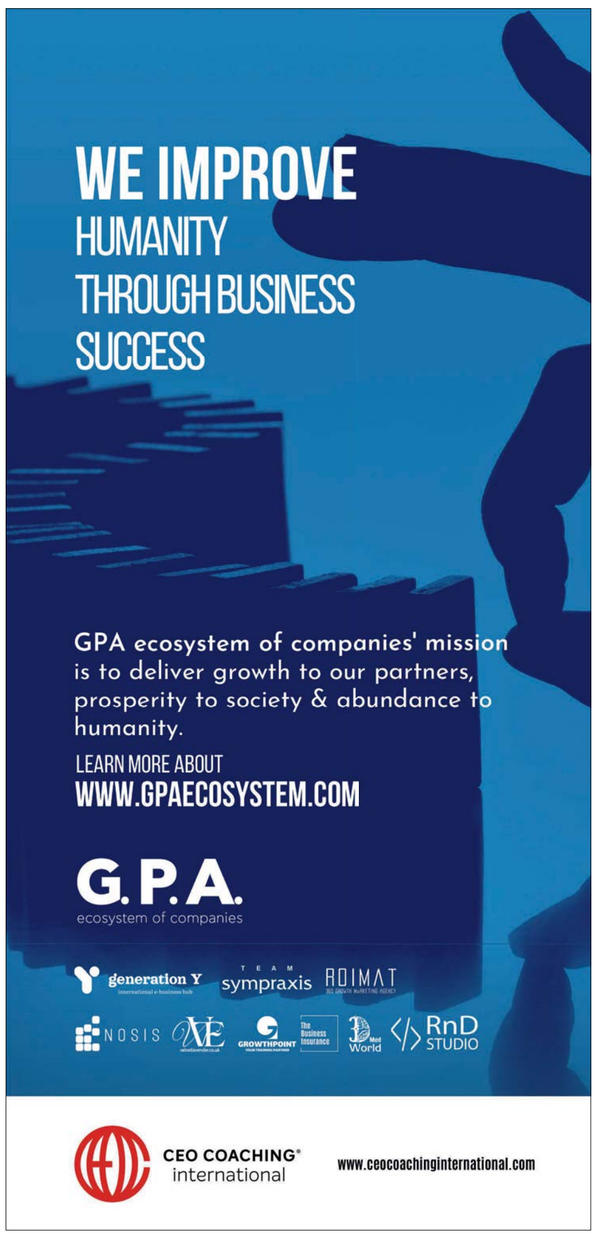


Chloe Laskaridis
Chairperson
Lampsa
Hellenic Hotels

The hotelier is dedicated to serving the ultra-luxury market. "As the oldest hospitality and tourism organization in Greece, Lampsa holds a unique and distinguished position in its hospitality sector. We stand for excellence," she states. Although the company owns and oversees its three Athenian hotels, day-to-day management is entrusted to Marriott and Accor, Laskaridis notes: "High-quality operators like this give you brand standards and strategies with which to operate your property, which can only be a good thing. It allows us to focus on constantly trying to improve our hotels."

In 2023, Lampsa's revenues recovered to above their pre-pandemic levels. "We were able to raise our rates to what we believe is a reasonable level for ultra-luxury hotels in a European capital, which wasn't the case before. Athens was seen as quite a cheap destination compared to others," she reveals. "The US is our number-one feeder market in all three properties now — Americans like to be taken care of, good service and larger rooms, which are easy for us to provide."

Another reason for the company's increasing revenues is that its hotels are open for all 12 months of the year and Athens' tourist season has lengthened beyond summer, Laskaridis says: "The mentality in Greece is changing. Until recently, we were very focused on a sun-and-sea model and felt that was the only thing we had to offer, yet this is not the case. We have fantastic cultural offerings, temples and historical sites, and Athens is now a booming city with a variety of year-round events and happenings, so it's easier to offer experiences. Post-COVID, having meaningful travel experiences is now key for visitors and we are seeing that throughout our properties. What's important is how everything makes our guests feel."



The Florida of Europe welcomes visitors all year round

With record numbers of visitors arriving in the country, Greece is focused on ensuring the future sustainability of its tourism sector

A view of the Acropolis from the rooftop of the mythical Hotel Grande Bretagne

This March, Greece was presented with the tourism industry's top accolade for its continent when it was named Europe's Leading Destination at the World Travel Awards 2024, while Athens picked up the prize for best European city-break location at the same event. The remarkable performance of the Greek tourism sector in 2023 indicates many vacationers agree with the judges. According to the Bank of Greece, the Mediterranean country welcomed 32.7 million tourists last year, about 18% more than in 2022, with the sector's revenues rising nearly 16% to around $22.4 billion.

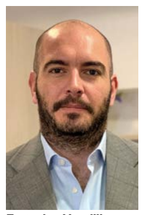
Minister of Tourism Olga Kefalogianni is delighted by the sector's post-COVID rebound: "2023 was a record year for Greek tourism. We managed to recover the losses from the pandemic in 2022 and this year we surpassed 2019 in terms of arrivals and revenue." Among the travelers flocking to the country last year were 1.4 million from the US, 29% more than in 2022. "We're pleased to see that the numbers are up and are very happy to welcome more Americans. Greece has everything that an American tourist is looking for, there's something to meet the needs and expectations of all our visitors," declares Kefalogianni.

2024 is likely to be another record-breaking year, with early bookings suggesting that tourist numbers could grow by up to 10%. Fully aware that this level of success brings with it huge challenges, Kefalogianni presented a new strategy for the sector last July. "It's built around sustainability," she says. "The new era for Greek tourism will be about balancing the positive effects of development with making sure local communities benefit from the gains, while at the same time protecting and preserving our natural and cultural environments, as well as Greece's authenticity."

For the minister, the most important aspect of the strategy is preventing summer tourism from becoming unsustainable: "We can't have everybody coming in July and August, so we're trying to extend the season. Greece is well known for its amazing summer island vacations, but it actually offers visitors great vacations throughout the year." Efforts toward promoting this are already paying off: winter flight connectivity has increased, tourist arrivals in December 2023 were 32% up on 2022 and major summer tourism operators started their seasons as early as March this year.

Alexandros Thanos is executive director of the Greek Tourism Confederation (SETE), an umbrella organization that represents enterprises and agencies throughout the industry's value chain. He is also confident that the nation has all the right ingredients to be a competitive year-round destination. Thanos asserts that Greece is not suffering from overtourism at the moment. "However, there are imbalances," he says. "For example, five of the country's 13 regions accounted for 90% of annual tourism revenues over a five month period."

Olga Kefalogianni
Minister of Tourism



Evgenios Vassilikos
CEO, Capital H

OLGA KEFALOGIANNI
MINISTER OF TOURISM

"Greek tourism will be about balancing the positive effects of development with making sure local communities benefit from the gains."

Kefalogianni's second priority is to diversify tourism away from current hotspots by stimulating development in the less-explored, but just as rewarding parts of the country. For example, while the Cyclades islands of Mykonos and Santorini are extremely popular, Greece's blue waters contain more than 6,000 other islands with incredible sandy beaches waiting to be discovered. As another illustration, while millions of tourists are attracted to Athens' Acropolis and vibrant culture, across the country are 17 other United Nations World Heritage sites and great city-break alternatives like Thessaloniki. "There's culture everywhere you go. The gastronomy is also excellent everywhere, both in high-end restaurants and in local tavernas," she asserts. "We have a lot to offer, but we need to promote it and improve our infrastructure."

Her ministry is working on projects to address the latter issue. "We're focusing significantly on yachting and maritime tourism, and are upgrading marina facilities. In addition, Greece has fantastic natural scenery, including really beautiful mountainous areas with ski resorts, so we're upgrading infrastructure in those destinations, many of which are on the mainland," she explains. Other priorities also cater to Greece's natural advantages, like its wealth of hot springs and abundance of high-quality Mediterranean food produce, she notes: "We're targeting infrastructure related to thermal baths, wellness tourism and everything connected to agricultural tourism, including gastronomy and wine."

Another key aspect of the new strategy is environmental sustainability. The impacts of climate change were highlighted in July 2023, when Greece was hit by forest fires, notes Kefalogianni: "The state made sure all travelers in the affected area were safely relocated within hours, demonstrating we have plans to deal with such crises. But now, more than ever, it's important to take preemptive action." Thanos agrees that there is a need for initiatives that will speed up the sustainable transition of Greek tourism businesses: "In this context, SETE, in collaboration with the Institute of the Greek Tourism Confederation and Marketing Greece, is planning a network of actions." These industry-wide plans will be rolled out this year, with the aim of giving SETE's members the necessary tools to evolve their sustainability.

The Ministry of Tourism is also taking action, says Kefalogianni: "For example, we're very interested in allocating funds for upgrading the sector's energy efficiency, and we're working with the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels (HCH) on a plan to have zero-emission hotels by 2030." By law, all Greece's 10,000-plus hotels and campsites are members of the HCH. "We help hotels deal with day-to-day issues but, most of all, our role is to create and implement a vision for the sector," explains its president, Alexandros Vassilikos. HCH has established various other initiatives to ensure the sector is sustainable and competitive, such as a hospitality educational program that is being taught in schools and an accelerator for tourism-related startups.

75% of the nation's hotels are small and family owned, he reveals: "This is a particularity of the Greek market, which used to be seen as a disadvantage, but is turning into a big advantage, as this gives a very nice note to Greek hospitality. Sustaining these smaller businesses also gives us the possibility to promote local production and agricultural produce. This is something we invest a lot on, because the success of tourism is not counted in euros or occupancies, but in the equilibrium it brings to local societies, bearing in mind the multiplier effects it gives to other industries."

Hotel proprietors are increasingly partnering with management companies to help them tackle challenges. One notable example is Capital H, part of Airotel Group that has 40 years' experience in the Greek hospitality sector. "We offer consulting services to existing hotels and new projects," explains Capital H's CEO, Evgenios Vassilikos. "We focus on the quality of our partnerships, rather than quantity of properties in our portfolio, as we want the services we offer to be of the highest quality in a market that is developing quickly."

EVGENIOS VASSILIKOS
CEO, CAPITAL H

"Greece has a very wide and unique touristic product that can be exploited all year round."

The CEO maintains that the country's tourism sector is at a crossroads. "We need to be very careful about our next steps if we want to continue to thrive. Do we want to become another destination where we see overtourism or can we make sure we get ahead of this and create a product that will be sustainable and appreciated by all?" he asks. "Greece is not only the Acropolis, sea and sun, and we've seen a shift away from that model start in the past few years. We've become a destination for business travelers, global meetings, gastronomy and wellness. Greece has a very wide and unique touristic product that can be exploited all year round — it's time to take advantage of this."

Passionate about hospitality standards

By embracing international management practices, Greek hotels have become the best service providers in the region

Guests ranked the quality of services they received from Greek hotels at 91% in 2023, according to the industry's Global Review Index benchmark — the best score received by any Mediterranean destination. This result marks the culmination of a turnaround for the country's hotels, which have been transformed into internationally competitive entities catering to every taste.

Until recently, "Greece was full of family-owned and run properties that were passionate about hospitality but didn't have the top-shelf standards tourists require these days," states Panos Paleologos, president of HotelBrain Group, which was a pioneer in the transformation process. Founded by Paleologos in 2000, it is now the leading hotel management company in Southeastern Europe and is on track to be managing about 9,000 rooms in Greece this year. "We were the first to introduce the hotel management business model to the Greek market, although we differentiated our model from the one established by hospitality brands abroad by adding hotels to our portfolio as white labels. That means we are able to help family-owned hotels establish and maintain international standards, while retaining their own individual brand," the entrepreneur explains.

Panos Paleologos
President
HotelBrain Group

The group has also become Greece's largest hotelier by properties and destinations. "When the Greek economic crisis happened in 2009, we came up with a business idea that would support hoteliers who didn't want to operate their hotel or have its financial responsibility: we would become a hotelier by leasing hotels," he reveals. "Currently we have 104 properties under lease and we anticipate we will be operating 110 properties by this summer."

HotelBrain's portfolio of hotels covers 39 city, beachfront and rural locations across Greece's mainland and islands, and they are incredibly varied, ranging from all-inclusive to boutique and from 3-star to 5-star luxury. The majority are small, family-owned locations, but it has also partnered with international brands like Radisson Hotel Group and Nikki Beach. "This diversification adds complexity to our business, but also makes it fascinating," says Paleologos. "Our philosophy is to do as much as we can centrally from our Athens headquarters, including supplies, accounting, payroll, sales, contracting, technical and legal work."

While these activities are highly centralized, separate management and marketing policies are designed for each property. "We operate all our hotels with dignity, honesty and passion. Each hotel stands by itself, but it must apply international hospitality standards, which we achieve through high-level supervision and training of our staff," he asserts. To address shortages in the Greek hospitality workforce, the group has launched HotelBrain Academy, Paleologos adds: "Our aim is to attract new talent to the sector, develop the skills of those already in it and to give them the right mindset and ethos to work in modern hospitality."

Radisson Blu Euphoria Resort in Mykonos projects Cycladic charm and luxury

The success of the group's approach has won it many awards, with a notable example coming in 2020, when it was named World's Leading Hotel Management Company at the World Travel Awards. It has also made HotelBrain a prominent supplier of management and development advisory services for investors in Greek hospitality. One piece of advice that Paleologos gives to all operators is to focus on experiences: "People are traveling again after COVID; they want new experiences and are striving for authenticity. They want to experience the country's cuisine, listen to its music, live like a local and we're trying to offer this opportunity by presenting our guests with activities that are only available at the destination they are visiting," he states. "Going forward, the sector must propose destinations that may be less popular but which provide outstanding authentic Greek experiences. Greece is a country with beautiful nature, character, heritage, and unique colors, aromas and sounds; it's among the best destinations Europe has to offer."

PANOS PALEOLOGOS
PRESIDENT, HOTELBRAIN GROUP

"People are traveling again after COVID; they want new experiences and are striving for authenticity."

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Thessaloniki's famous White Tower was constructed in the 15th century

The Thessaloniki International Exhibition and Congress Centre

A feast of culture and innovation

Known historically as the land of Alexander the Great, the Central Macedonia of today is overflowing with economic activities and talent

Central Macedonia, Greece's most popular non-island tourist destination, has a dynamic economy. In this interview, its governor, Apostolos Tzitzikostas, introduces the northern region.

Can you give us an overview of the region and the measures you have been taking to expand its economy?

Central Macedonia is Greece's largest region and its capital is Thessaloniki, the country's second-largest city. We have 2 million inhabitants, with 150,000 students and researchers spread across three universities, as well as colleges and research centers. Our administration has done a lot recently to upgrade the region's infrastructure, utilizing European and national funds of about $750 million for roads alone. This is important, because our highways not only connect cities within Greece, but also Greece with Southeast Europe and the Balkans, which is a competitive advantage. This is reflected in our exports increasing last year by 18% to reach $6.7 million — we're Greece's leading exporter of food and agricultural products. Other upgrades include Macedonia Airport and the Port of Thessaloniki, while many new projects are ready to be launched.

Last year, our gross domestic product increased by 9% and we've created 70,000 jobs in the last five years. Most are highly paid quality jobs in the innovation sector, which is one of the strongest pillars of our economy, alongside tourism and agri-food. Central Macedonia has been attracting major investments from companies in the innovation sector, including from global giants such as Pfizer, Cisco, Deloitte and others. According to official rankings, Central Macedonia is among the top-10 fastest growing regions in Europe in terms of innovation. Moreover, private investments in tourism infrastructure rose by 100% over the last year and our tourism revenues increased by 20%.

Apostolos Tzitzikostas
Governor, Central Macedonia Region

Kyriakos Pozrikidis
CEO, TIF-Helexpo

APOSTOLOS TZITZIKOSTAS
GOVERNOR, CENTRAL MACEDONIA REGION

"Central Macedonia is among the top-10 fastest-growing regions in Europe in terms of innovation."

What factors explain this surge in tourism?

Central Macedonia is the land of legends and history, sun and sea, the highest peaks of Greece like Mount Olympus, luxury modern accommodation, ski centers and the most beautiful shores of the Mediterranean. It's the place where Alexander the Great was born, raised and taught by Aristotle. Our region has unique advantages that allow us to support mainstream and alternative forms of tourism: archaeological, cultural and historical; rural and congress; medical and spa; and many more. Moreover, the region is where ancient Greek, Roman, Byzantium and Jewish heritage meet. We have spectacular ancient monuments and are building new ones to honor our heritage, such as a Holocaust museum. We're also upgrading Thessaloniki's 25 mile-long waterfront, Europe's longest.

How does Central Macedonia stand out as a center for innovation?

It's one of only four regions worldwide that has signed an official cooperation agreement with Europe's biggest research organization, CERN in Geneva. We work closely with them, with regular study visits for our students and researchers, while our local businesses are official equipment providers. Furthermore, we've financed innovation projects and investments with over $1 billion.

How important is the US to the region?

We've been working together on a number of projects, from investments in innovation to culture, tourism, education and many more. One of the most productive shared projects is with the film industry; already six major Hollywood movies have been filmed here. The US is our closest partner and my personal goal is to invest further in this relationship.

What is your vision for the region?

Our vision is to build the Central Macedonia of 2030, a modern, smart, green and human-centered region. This is my message to readers: Greece and Central Macedonia are open for business. We're creative, dynamic extroverts. Investing in Central Macedonia means investing in a future of great potential, capacity, capabilities and business opportunities in the fields of innovation, education, tourism, energy, logistics and many others. Central Macedonia is on course to become Greece's capital of extroversion and this is the moment to invest.

Greece's leading MICE venue

One major contributor to the region's economy is TIF-Helexpo, the national agency that organizes events at Greece's two most important exhibition and congress centers, one in Thessaloniki and the other in Athens. The Thessaloniki International Exhibition and Congress Centre has a multi-faceted economic impact, says TIF-Helexpo's CEO Kyriakos Pozrikidis: "For every dollar that goes to an exhibition's organizer, $7-$11 goes to its city. Hotels and restaurants are fully booked during our exhibitions, fairs and congresses, taxis are busy and construction is booming."

KYRIAKOS POZRIKIDIS
CEO, TIF-HELEXPO

"Thessaloniki represents the border between the European Union and the Middle East."

Covering almost 2 million square feet, the center opened its doors in 1926 with the first Thessaloniki International Fair (TIF), which is still its flagship event. "TIF attracts over 300,000 visitors each September. It's a show with three levels: business to consumer, business to business and business to government. It's where the government announces economic policy and is attended by foreign ministers and delegations," explains Pozrikidis.

Over the decades, the center's annual program has expanded, he says: "We hold over 20 large specialized exhibitions now covering sectors such as energy, technology and agriculture." These have an international audience. "Our venue is only a five-hour drive from five Balkan capitals, while Thessaloniki represents the border between the European Union and the Middle East," he disclosed.

TIF-Helexpo plans to transform its site into ConfEx Park, a smart and sustainable space that can host a wider range of modern events. "Our venue is in the heart of the city and we don't want to lose this advantage, but we need to reconstruct it. Among other things, we're looking to build three pavilions of around 550,000 square feet, a business center and hotel that will be operated by private investors, and a large park. It will be Europe's most bioclimatic venue," says Pozrikidis. "We're already an attractive destination and we will be even more attractive in the future."

Growth potential within Greece's MICE industry

While Greece has long been popular with tourists, in recent years it has positioned itself as a sought-after destination for the MICE industry too

Through its efforts to invest in infrastructure and enhance its reputation as a destination for business tourism, Greece is now attracting a significant number of corporate events. Athens alone hosted 109 conventions with 40,000 participants in 2022. Greek hospitality brand Divani Collection Hotels is planning to capitalize on this rising trend and on the country's consolidated reputation as business-friendly destination.

Divani Collection Hotels' CEO Spiros Divanis believes Greece's meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) industry is poised for exciting development: "Europe is a great source of business for the MICE industry and, as of yet, it has yet to fully explore Greece. It is now realizing that Athens, in particular, is a robust option and we are seeing multinationals set up headquarters in the Greek capital, which will attract even more MICE business as they host regular events," he says.

"We see good potential for growth, which is why we are participating in trade shows that focus on MICE events and conferences. Our Divani Caravel Hotel in Athens, for instance, is ideal as it features a world-class meetings and events space that spans 37,700 square feet."

Spiros Divanis
CEO, Divani Collection Hotels

A leading player in Greece's tourism industry since 1958, Divani Collection Hotels has grown significantly over the last 65 years, as the group now owns and operates seven properties across Athens, Larissa, Meteora and Corfu and has carved out a reputation for providing unrivalled comfort and outstanding service to its guests.

This has led to Divani earning numerous international awards over the years, including for its Divani Caravel Hotel, which was named the leading city hotel in Greece for the sixth consecutive year at the 2023 World Travel Awards. This recognition is particularly important as the chain has made the bold decision to concentrate on city destinations rather than resorts.

"We decided to focus more on city hotels and year-round hotels, with the exception of our hotel in Corfu, and we cater to the full spectrum of travelers," explains Divanis. "This covers everything from recreational and leisure tourists to large-scale conferences, corporate accounts and MICE business. We are the only Greek-managed operating hotel business specializing in city properties and we are proud to compete with the multinational brands."

Attracting a growing number of business guests is just one of many priorities for Divani Collection Hotels as the brand is determined to grow in the future. "The hotels we have are quite big and they have the potential to expand further. I believe we have a lot of room to grow from all sides of the equation, bringing better returns and increasing occupancy," states Divanis.

SPIROS DIVANIS
CEO, DIVANI COLLECTION HOTELS

"We are seeing multinationals set up headquarters in the Greek capital, which will attract even more MICE business."

The group also hopes to attract a growing number of visitors from the US, with the latest figures showing that Athens welcomed 1.4 million visitors from America in 2023. This comes as tourism in Athens reached a record last year, with more than 7 million non-resident international arrivals being recorded at Athens Airport.

"The location of our hotels is a very important driver when it comes to US visitors selecting a location to stay," adds Divanis. "Our Divani Palace Acropolis is in the footsteps of the Acropolis and just 110 yards from the new Acropolis Museum. Part of Themistocles' ancient wall is even exhibited in our basement, which is an all-time favorite among guests from the US.

The island of Rhodes was the world's most Googled travel destination in 2023

Mitsis Norida on Kos, an all-inclusive 5-star hotel on a Blue Flag-awarded beach

The South Aegean: Greece's #1 destination

The stunning island region that includes gems such as Rhodes, Santorini, Mykonos and Kos is striving to become a hub for sustainable tourism

Famous for its glorious beaches, blue seas, dramatic cliffs and white-painted villages, the South Aegean region has long been Greece's most popular tourist destination. Responsible for 40% of the country's income from tourism, in 2023 it welcomed over 6 million visitors to its 50 Cyclades and Dodecanese islands, each of which has distinct allures. As the region's governor, George Hatzimarkos, says: "The Aegean islands aren't just about sun and sea. For example, we've invested a lot in gastronomy, because we want visitors to experience our local foods and, by extension, our rich history, tradition and culture."

GEORGE HATZIMARKOS
GOVERNOR, SOUTH AEGEAN REGION

"We want visitors to experience our local foods and, by extension, our rich history, tradition and culture."

97% of the region's economy is based on tourism, he notes: "It's a mature destination and the whole population works very hard to be good at tourism. Our goal now is to set new levels in sustainability and we're quickly transforming the South Aegean into a sustainability hub. Indeed, it now boasts the world's first zero-waste and zero-carbon-footprint islands in Tilos and Halki, while a major 5-year program is underway to turn Rhodes into the first fully sustainable destination in a holistic project encompassing both environmental and societal aspects.

George Hatzimarkos
Governor, South Aegean Region

Stavros Mitsis
Managing Director Mitsis Group

The South Aegean's goals for sustainability are being boosted by the activities of Greece's largest privately owned hotel chain, Mitsis Group, which has a strong presence in the region and other parts of the country. The group aspires to be a role model for sustainable Greek tourism development, states its managing director, Stavros Mitsis: "Our ambition is to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030. We're also targeting to be zero organic and non-organic waste and plastic free by that date. In addition, we very much value our communities, both inside and outside the perimeters of our premises. We want them to grow, so we always try to offer them what they want, before they even realize they want it."

Mitsis Group opened its first hotel in 1976 on the vibrant island of Kos. It later expanded into the equally attractive Crete that lies on the southern border of the Aegean Sea and cosmopolitan Rhodes, the largest Dodecanese island. Those three destinations that are all home to outstanding beaches and fascinating remnants of past civilizations make up the bulk of the group's current hospitality portfolio. However, it also has properties in Athens, Piraeus Port and Kamena Vourla, a charming, peaceful seaside town north of the capital near Mount Parnassos.

Today, Mitsis Group offers a total of 21 4- and 5-star diverse hotels and resorts, plus 13 spas and thalassotherapy centers across those destinations, which include all-inclusive and family-friendly properties, as well as ones that are perfect for romantic getaways and corporate events. "Our main focus is providing the best possible locations, services and experiences that cater to each individual traveler's needs," Mitsis says.

In 2023, about 400,000 guests enjoyed Mitsis Group's hospitality. "The Greek tourism industry has, for the large part, remained unaffected by nearby conflicts in Ukraine and Palestine, and we had a record year, in spite of the macroeconomic and geopolitical situation," he reveals. "Over the past two years, we've also managed to strengthen our position in Kos, Rhodes and Crete, where we have a market share of about 5%-6%."

Untapping the potential in tourism

In order to evolve its business to meet travelers' changing demands and to help redefine the Greek travel market, Mitsis Group is currently investing in a number of groundbreaking projects in the South Aegean region. "We've bought two new hotels in Rhodes and now have three next to each other, which we're developing into one integrated resort with three different hotel offerings and a huge park of around 32,000 square feet," explains the managing director.

"In parallel, we've bought a golf-resort property at Afandou in Rhodes, which is about 370 acres in size. We're hoping to start developing a fully integrated resort there in 2025 that will have a port, tourist village, redesigned 18-hole golf course, boutique hotel and apartments by the port. This represents a major investment of around $550 million."

On Kos, the group has recently acquired two plots adjacent to ones it already owned, giving it a total land space of about 140 acres. "We're aiming to build an eco-friendly resort in this beautiful green spot, which will be focused on sustainability, farming and being close to nature," he says. "We're also investing in the Greek mainland. We recently renewed the lease agreement that we have on Kamena Vourla, where we're looking to exploit the thermal waters that area holds by creating one of the most important spas in Greece." These four projects will be landmarks for our group and the country, with no equivalents in the Mediterranean."

STAVROS MITSIS
MANAGING DIRECTOR, MITSIS GROUP

"Our main focus is providing the best possible locations, services and experiences that cater to each individual traveler's needs."

Among its other ongoing development initiatives, Mitsis Group is transforming a historic building in Athens into a luxury hospitality offering and it is investing nearly $70 million into a new destination on the glamorous island of Mykonos in the Cyclades, which will include a 5-star hotel and residences, plus spa, leisure and restaurants. In Mitsis' opinion, there is still substantial untapped potential in the nation's tourism sector: "Investing in Greek real estate is nothing but a good decision and one that will pay out in the long term. Although Greece has been opened to tourism since the 1960s, the sector remains at an elementary level — if you compare it to destinations like Las Vegas, Dubai, London or New York, we still have a long way to go and we are all looking toward this direction. Only 1% of the Greek coastline has been developed so far, so imagine what can be achieved!"

Promoting the beauty of the Ionian Islands

The region's new governor plans to improve infrastructure to ensure visitors can have a unique experience exploring all the islands in the Ionian Sea

Scattered off the western coastline of the Greek mainland, the Ionian Islands are comprised of several small and large islands, as well as a series of uninhabited islets. A stark contrast from the barren and rocky landscape found in the Cyclades, the region of Ionian Islands is characterized by its lush green nature and large bays with crystal clear turquoise waters.

Especially popular with tourists during the summer season, the larger islands of Corfu, Zakynthos, Kefalonia and Lefkada are well-developed and attract the most visitors. Ithaca, Paxi and Meganisi are somewhat quieter, while the secluded islands of Othoni, Erikousa, Mathraki, Antipaxi, Kalamos and Kastos have yet to be developed and remain lesser known to those outside the country.

Each island has its own unique charm and character but what unites them is the numerous fortresses, churches and monuments that showcase the area's rich history and stunning architecture, along with the picturesque environment.

"We take pride in our history and our vibrant culture, which continues to shape our lives. Influenced by the ancient Greeks, the Venetians, the French and the British, the Ionian Islands have developed a unique cultural and architectural identity, best reflected in the island of Corfu, the capital of the Ionian Islands, which is also included in the UNESCO World Heritage List," reveals Ioannis Trepeklis, governor of the region of Ionian Islands.

"We also have a distinct culinary identity that can be traced back centuries. The region has a variety of rich gastronomic options and it is the ideal destination for those interested in experiencing authentic Mediterranean cuisine."

What makes the cuisine so special in the Ionian Islands is that a large variety of products are grown in its agricultural areas, including pure olive oil, figs, honey, cheese and legumes. There is also more of an influence from Italy due to the long period of Venetian rule which can be seen in the variety of pasta dishes, while fresh fish and lamb feature heavily in numerous recipes.

"One of our goals is to promote the Ionian land's local products. What you see in the morning in the garden is on your plate by noon," outlines Trepeklis. "In recent years, there has been a significant percentage of tourists who chose the Ionian Islands for their excellent food. We have exceptional local products, including rich wine varieties, such as Robola, around 75% of which is exported to the US."

While the architecture and the cuisine help to showcase the region's diverse history, the natural beauty is another major draw for tourists. Visitors can explore caves in Kefalonia, waterfalls in Lefkada and exotic beaches on uninhabited islands. This makes day trips and island hopping extremely popular.

In a bid to encourage more tourists to explore numerous islands during a visit to the region, Trepeklis — who was elected as the new regional governor of the Ionian Islands in October last year — has identified a need to improve the transport infrastructure.

"Another goal is to create a transport network that connects ports, marinas and airports so that access to our islands is improved for all visitors. At the same time, we are collaborating with national airlines, such as Sky Express and Aegean Airlines, to enhance island interconnection, as well as with mainland Greece, by increasing flight frequency," explains governor Trepeklis.

Ioannis Trepeklis
Governor
Ionian Islands Region

"Moreover, we are working towards building a hydroplane network that will see flights from Corfu and Kefalonia to Patras, Paxi and Ioannina. The high frequency of flights will boost the dynamics of the Ionian Islands for the demanding tourist season.

"The expansion of the road network, as well as other infrastructure projects like additional ports and marinas, are also gaining momentum. However, this is all being done with a view to protecting the environment and maintaining a lasting green footprint. The aim is to utilize available funds from the government and the European Union in the coming years in order to further develop essential infrastructure projects, including more ports and marinas."

The hope is that improved infrastructure will ensure that visitors can explore not only the Ionian Islands' better-known destinations, but also its more secluded islands with greater ease. "Our main goals in the coming years are to improve the basic infrastructure on our islands, promote our brand name worldwide and develop projects and initiatives that benefit our local communities," outlines Trepeklis. "Our objective is to pave the way for numerous large-scale infrastructure projects and support private development, thereby not only strengthening the foundation of economic activity on our islands, but also improving the quality of life for our fellow citizens."

IOANNIS TREPEKLIS
GOVERNOR, IONIAN ISLANDS REGION

"Influenced by the ancient Greeks, the Venetians, the French and the British, the Ionian Islands have developed a unique cultural and architectural identity, best reflected in the island of Corfu."

Another major focus of Trepeklis is to ensure that the Ionian Islands are marketed worldwide. The region has long been popular with tourists from the UK as well as France, Spain and Germany, but has recently been expanding its marketing towards the US and Asia.

"The Ionian Islands take the lead as far as the government's tourism diversification strategy is concerned," concludes Trepeklis. "We have achieved the best results in recent years, attracting visitors from far-away markets, including the US. We continue to place special emphasis on the promotion of our islands on an international level by targeting markets outside Europe, such as the US, India, Australia and South Korea."

Connecting the Greek islands

Greece's ferry sector plays an essential role in the economy by transporting the population, tourists and goods around the country

Ferries are a vital component of Greece's transportation system. "The country's unique morphology includes 115 inhabited islands, most of which are not connected to the mainland via aerial routes. Therefore, ferry shipping serves a core infrastructure role, facilitating the day-to-day transportation of inhabitants and essential supplies, enabling the tourism experience and significantly contributing to the economy," explains Panos Dikaios, CEO of Attica Group, the nation's leader in ferry services.

Panos Dikaios
CEO, Attica Group

"Listed on the Athens Stock Exchange, we boast a fleet of 45 vessels under five brands: Superfast Ferries, Blue Star Ferries, ANEK Lines, Hellenic Seaways and Africa Morocco Link, serving 63 destinations in Greece, Italy, Spain and Morocco," says Dikaios. "Besides providing day-to-day connection to Greek islands, we have a pivotal role in connecting Greece with Italy, and Spain with Morocco. Annually, we transport over 6 million passengers, a million private vehicles and 423,000 freight units." It offers those customers not just high-quality transportation, but also first-class accommodation, dining and activity options.

The group has grown substantially in recent years, merging with Hellenic Seaways in 2018 and the Crete-based ANEK Lines last year. "We're always exploring new opportunities to grow in core and adjacent areas, aiming to serve a wider range of our customers' needs. We have expanded into the hospitality sector already, having acquired two Cycladic island hotels in Naxos and Tinos," he reveals.

Attica Group is also investing heavily in an environment-conscious upgrade of its fleet and further digitalizing its operations, notes Dikaios: "We're prioritizing investments towards decarbonization, fleet renewal and digitalization, and aim to lead the Greek ferry industry into the next era."

Attica Group's 10-year decarbonization roadmap is based on three pillars. "Firstly, we implement numerous technologies onboard our ships to improve efficiency, reduce fuel consumption and lower emissions," he states. "Secondly, we're prioritizing the selective retrofitting of vessels with greener technologies; and thirdly, were planning investments for the construction of newbuilding vessels that promote the transition to clean energy."

The group has proven competence in designing, building and launching innovative vessels. Since the 1990s, it has had over 30 constructed in shipyards worldwide, including Greece, which have involved investments of more than $2.1 billion. In 2022, for instance, it had three Aero catamarans built in Norway. "These represent significant innovation," the CEO declares. "Constructed from lightweight carbon fiber to reduce emissions and fuel consumption, they offer a completely new, more comfortable travel experience. As a result, they've contributed to a 20% increase in the number of visitors to the islands served."

Attica Group is Greece's biggest player in ferry transportation services

To accelerate its decarbonization, Attica Group is investing in more collaborations with providers of research, technology and alternative fuels. In December 2023, for example, it signed a memorandum of understanding valued at over $1 billion with Elefsis Shipyards. "This strategic partnership focuses on fleet maintenance, green retrofits and newbuilding constructions — we're contemplating a newbuilding, the first in Greece for 17 years," he says.

When it comes to digitalization, the group's primary focus is on a comprehensive digital customer experience project, which should be completed in early 2025. "It aims to provide customers with enhanced value throughout a multichannel and targeted digital journey, which addresses their personalized needs from trip planning to return," explains Dikaios. "Additionally, we're digitizing our fleet infrastructure, incorporating sensors and artificial intelligence to enable efficiencies and real-time analysis for quick, data-driven decisions."

Attica Group's dedication to improving its customers' experience and strengthening ties with local communities has made it one of Greece's love-brands. The group sets targets every three years to enhance its environmental, social and governance performance and Dikaios is particularly proud of the social impact it makes by supporting island communities through initiatives in education, sports, environment, health and civil society: "We're conscious of our key role within the wider ecosystem in which we operate and are committed to value creation for all our stakeholders."

PANOS DIKAIOS
CEO, ATTICA GROUP

"We're prioritizing investments towards decarbonization, fleet renewal and digitalization."

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- **45** modern vessels
- **63** destinations
- **6,487,000** passengers annually
- More than **17,000** sailings annually
- **2** island hotels
- **4** countries
- **$770** million combined turnover for 2022
- **1,039,000** private vehicles annually
- Circling the globe **97** times annually
- **2,300+** employees

5 BRANDS
SUPERFAST FERRIES, BLUE STAR FERRIES, HELLENIC SEAWAYS, ANEK LINES, AND AFRICA MOROCCO LINK

Crete: Sustainable and mindful tourism

Greece's largest island is evolving into a destination that offers greener, kinder and more immersive ultra-luxury experiences

Phāea currently has five ultra-luxury properties on the island of Crete

Situated at Greece's southern tip, "Crete holds a special allure for US travelers, as it offers a distinct, enriching experience, while complementing well-known destinations like Santorini and Mykonos. With its rich history and culture, stunning beaches and culinary delights, Crete encapsulates the essence of our country," says Agapi Sbokou, CEO of the ultra-luxury hospitality company Phāea.

Greece's largest island has been home to diverse civilizations over the millennia and it retains many physical and cultural reminders of its Minoan, Mycenean, Byzantine, Venetian and Ottoman heritage. Its natural environment is equally enticing. As well as its breathtaking coast, it has green valleys, forests, gorges and mountains that contain UNESCO Global Geoparks and Biosphere Reserves, which makes it an ideal location for year-round active and relaxing leisure activities.

AGAPI SBOKOU
CEO, PHĀEA

"Crete holds a special allure for US travelers, as it offers a distinct, enriching experience."

Crete has always attracted a variety of tourists and offers accommodation to suit all budgets, but it is its luxury and ultra-luxury offerings that have been advancing most in recent years. The quality of its ultra-luxury hospitality is exemplified by Phāea, a family-run leader of the sector, which operates properties that include the renowned Blue Palace; the beachside hideaway Cretan Malia Park; the peaceful Koutouloufari Village Holiday Club in a restored rural village; and Village Heights Resort, a tranquil mountain retreat.

Agapi Sbokou
CEO, Phāea

Costantza Sbokou
Chairwoman, Phāea

Agapi Sbokou explains the origins of the company's name: "Phāea, derived from a Homeric word meaning 'the light in the eyes of the people,' reflects our commitment to bringing happiness, liberation and joy to our guests." Her sister, Phāea's chairwoman Costantza Sbokou, elaborates on Phāea's philosophy: "We aim to showcase Greece in a new light by offering truly distinctive high-end experiences. We prioritize authenticity, steering clear of superficial luxury. Simultaneously, we're committed to transforming Greece's tourism industry in a more mindful and environmentally conscious direction."

In order to achieve this, Phāea is evolving its operations. "We're unifying our five existing hotels under the Phāea brand, transitioning to a cohesive identity," says the CEO. "This includes renovating existing properties to align with our vision and the transformation of Cretan Maila Park marked a significant milestone in this. We inherited a property in an area not typically associated with luxury tourism. We embarked on a holistic transformation focusing on sustainability and guest experience, and it now serves as a prototype for elevating Greek tourism, demonstrating how properties can be revitalized to offer unique, impactful experiences. It's our responsibility to push the boundaries of luxury hospitality and evolve alongside our guests toward kinder, more immersive travel."

COSTANTZA SBOKOU
CHAIRWOMAN, PHĀEA

"We're making substantial investments to elevate the country's luxury market."

Phāea also has new offerings in the pipeline. For example, in 2025 part of the Blue Palace will reopen as Rosewood Blue Palace, the first Greek resort for the global hospitality management company. "We're making substantial investments to elevate the country's luxury market. In May, we're unveiling the boutique Phāea Blue Palace, a member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World, which marks a strategic shift toward smaller luxury properties focusing on experiential travel," affirms Costantza Sbokou. "Additionally, we're initiating a new property in the south, coinciding with the relocation of Heraklion airport in 2027, and our expansion extends beyond Crete, with a new greenfield property planned for the island of Milos. In five years, we envision five new Phāea resorts across Greece."

At all of its properties, the company nurtures strong ties with local communities. Agapi Sbokou highlights one illustration of this: "The Phāea Farmers Initiative promotes environmental and economic sustainability by integrating agriculture into a circular economy model. We educate and empower local farmers to cultivate organic produce, which we purchase at market price plus a premium. This is then served in our restaurants, providing guests with a unique culinary experience." As the chairwoman notes, "Our dedication to sustainability has earned prestigious awards, including the TUI Care Foundation Sustainability Award, making us pioneers in Greece's hospitality industry."

Agapi Sbokou expects to welcome many more US travelers to Crete and to one of Phāea's properties in the future: "Our emphasis on experiential travel resonates with American visitors, offering authentic, immersive and sometimes transformative experiences. We anticipate a record year in 2025 and foresee continued growth in Crete's luxury tourism in the years ahead."

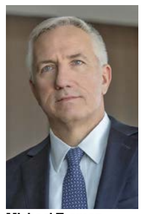
Telecoms infrastructure bolsters innovation

Rapid densification of new-generation telecommunications systems is catalyzing the expansion of Greece's technology sector

Over the last three years, 15% of the foreign investment into Greece has been directed at its technology sector, which now contributes 10% of its economy. That percentage is certain to ramp up, after recent announcements from giants like Microsoft, Google, Amazon, Cisco Systems, Applied Materials, JP Morgan and Meta about big investments into areas such as data centers, space, innovation hubs and the acquisition of Greek tech startups.

One factor attracting those enterprises and many more has been the efforts of public and private sector players in the country to advance its telecommunications infrastructure. "4G coverage in Greece is now about 100% and we're at 86% for 5G, which is above the EU average," reveals Konstantinos Masselos, president of the Hellenic Telecommunications and Post Commission (EETT), which acts as Greece's regulator and competition authority for the electronic communication and postal markets. EETT is currently focused on

Konstantinos Masselos
President, EETT



Michael Tsamaz
Chairman and CEO
OTE Group

KONSTANTINOS MASSELOS
PRESIDENT, EETT

"All the country's network operators have announced ambitious investment plans for the deployment of fiber-to-the-home."

boosting fiber-to-the-home (FTTH) connections. "We've presented different regulatory interventions to incentivize the deployment of networks," Masselos states. Those incentives are producing results, he adds: "All the country's network operators have announced ambitious investment plans for the deployment of FTTH."

Spearheading the way in national FTTH deployment is the country's largest technology company, Hellenic Telecommunications Organisation (OTE Group). "By the end of 2023, OTE Group had constructed more than 1.3 million FTTH lines, 28% of Greece's coverage. Together with the country's other telecoms providers, FTTH coverage is around 35% in total, which is lower than the EU average. However, the pace of Greece's progress is impressive, as we're adding almost 12% points every year, says Michael Tsamaz, OTE's chairman and CEO.

As he explains, "The Greek market is very competitive. There are three strong telco players, all part of international groups that are able to invest the required capital to develop networks for the gigabit society."

The former state-owned OTE is the preeminent example of this. It became a member of Deutsche Telekom group in 2008, since when the German giant has invested more than $5.5 billion into the company, as well as its infrastructure, technologies and services that are offered under its COSMOTE brand. "OTE's transformation has been nothing short of remarkable and became a Harvard Business School case study. We had a strong business plan, very much focused on customer experience," he states. "We were already market leaders in fixed and mobile telephony, broadband services, information and communication technology solutions and pay-TV, but we became a love brand for our customers, a leading digital telco in Greece and a digitalization paradigm in Europe. We're currently in phase C of our plan, which is to become a sustainable digital services provider with a special weight for the country."

With Deutsche Telekom's backing, OTE makes more than 60% of all investments into Greek telecommunications networks every year. "When it comes to mobile telephony, for instance, our COSMOTE 5G population coverage is above 90%, it exceeds 95% in many large cities and we will be the first in Greece to launch a 5G stand-alone network that will unravel the full potential of 5G technology," Tsamaz declares. "However, although Greece has recorded a digital leap in the last five years and services fully cover the current needs of customers, the country still lags the rest of the EU in key areas. We must accelerate Greece's transition to the digital age and OTE is playing a major role in this."

As an illustration, the group is one of two contractors constructing an EU-funded ultrafast broadband project that is developing next-generation access infrastructure for users in semi-urban

MICHAEL TSAMAZ
CHAIRMAN AND CEO, OTE GROUP

"We are actively contributing to shaping future 5G and 6G technologies, infrastructures and services."

and rural areas, which will deliver about 810,000 new FTTH connections. "In addition, in 2021 OTE announced a sharp increase in investments that will exceed $3.25 billion by 2027. Through this, we will bring FTTH to 3 million households and businesses, two-thirds of the country, and reach full coverage of COSMOTE 5G across Greece," he says.

In order to further help the country navigate toward digitalization, the group dedicates substantial sums to researching and developing innovative solutions and services. Recent outputs of that research include Payzy by COSMOTE, an application for payments and transactions via mobile; BOX, an online food delivery app; and COSMOTE Insurance, a digital insurance aggregator. OTE is also a central partner in EU-funded telecommunications R&D, having participated in over 120 collaborative projects since 2009.

OTE Group has constructed over 1.3 million fiber-to-the-home lines

"We are actively contributing to shaping future 5G and 6G technologies, infrastructures and services, with many of our research projects being aimed at sustainable development," notes Tsamaz.

KOSTIANTYN DOLZHENKO
CEO, INALAN

"Our strategy is simple: 'happy customer' and reliable connectivity at competitive prices."

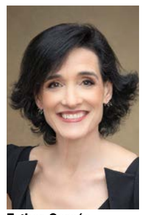
"At the moment, for instance, COSMOTE is participating in the EU 6G-Sandbox project by developing 6G experimental network infrastructure in Athens. Networks are the highways through which our digital world is connected, so it's vital to continue investing in new-generation networks."

The first company to focus on implementing FTTH network standards in Greece for both business and individual customers was Inalan, which entered the market in 2014. The independent full-fiber service provider is developing its own proprietary network in Athens and Thessaloniki, explains CEO Kostiantyn Dolzhenko: "Our FTTH project is unique for Greece and innovative for the EU. The idea is to build a new-generation wholesale and retail platform and our strategy is simple — we provide access to any kind of service for our customers and our focus is reliable connectivity at competitive prices. One main difference is that we offer symmetrical broadband connectivity at rates of up to 10Gbps, so customers have the same high level of speed for uploading and downloading."

Inalan's infrastructure is open access, enabling other companies to easily utilize its infrastructure, he adds: "Our aim is to provide retail services to customers and maybe to help other small ISPs grow in this underserved market." Although Inalan started as a small project, it has been expanding rapidly since 2022, when it received an injection of growth capital from Canada's Fiera Infrastructure, the leading global mid-market direct infrastructure investor.

With that support behind it, Inalan is now

Kostiantyn Dolzhenko
CEO, Inalan



Esther Garcés
CEO, Islalink

working to roll out its network to 1.6 million users. To reach that target, Inalan will leverage the expertise of another business in Fiera Infrastructure's diversified $3.9-billion investment portfolio: Islalink, which designs, builds and operates digital infrastructure. "Islalink is a specialist in fiber cables in the Mediterranean, being pioneers in the Canary and Balearic islands in Spain," states its CEO, Esther Garcés.

In 2023, Islalink inaugurated the IONIAN submarine cable linking Italy and Greece. The robust, multi-routed state-of-the-art fiber system multiplies the country's previous capacity for international data transfers over 70 times. "For Greece's digital market to develop, it is essential to build backbone connectivity to the other relevant data hubs in Europe," Garcés says. "IONIAN connects

ESTHER GARCÉS
CEO, ISLALINK

"We are convinced that Greece can be a regional telecoms and digital hub."

Athens and Thessaloniki to Milan and Rome in a very reliable way. We laid it mostly in deep waters for maximum security and the submarine infrastructure is complemented with two terrestrial fiber rings, extending the system to Milan, Rome, Athens and Thessaloniki. In total, it's more than 3,000 fiber infrastructures."

Islalink is now looking at further enhancing Greece's connectivity by constructing additional fiber connections to, for instance, Turkey or Bulgaria, she reveals. "We saw the underserved potential in Greece and decided to invest in this market. Along with our investors, we are convinced that Greece can be a regional telecoms and digital hub."

Powering up as a data center hub

Substantial investments from both hyperscalers and experienced local players have made Greece a regional gateway for data

Greece hosts more data centers than any other country in Southern Europe. 18 have been installed so far and the number keeps surging, with hyperscalers like Microsoft, Google and Digital Realty making huge investments in new facilities at the moment. The nation has many advantages as a data hub, including its growing telecommunications connectivity and relatively low costs, thanks to government incentives such as tax breaks and subsidies.

Christodoulos Protopapas
CEO, Hellas Sat

In addition, notes Christodoulos Protopapas, CEO of Hellas Sat, a significant local player in the data center market: "Given its strategic geographical position as a crossroads between the Middle East, Asia and Africa, Greece holds a pivotal role in the telecoms and data center industry, making it an optimal destination within the sector. The potential is substantial, due to the increasing global reliance on digital technologies and data-driven decision making across all sectors."

Hellas Sat is well poised to capture much of that potential. Set up in 2001 as the national satellite operator of Greece and Cyprus, since 2014 it has been majority owned by Arabsat, one of the world's largest satellite operators, with the Hellenic Aerospace Industry holding a minority shareholding. "Hellas Sat has the unique distinction of being the sole commercial satellite operator in Europe that is fully regulated by national legislation. It is licensed by both Greece and Cyprus, with the right to exclusive access and exploitation of the 39° East orbital position," adds Protopapas.

That positioning gives Hellas Sat's three — soon to be four — satellites expansive high-quality coverage over Europe, the Middle East and South Africa. "However, our vision extends beyond being just a satellite operator and our transformation into a holistic solutions provider is a strategic pivot Hellas Sat has been successfully navigating for the past decade," he says.

As a result, today the company offers its commercial and governmental clients an integrated suite of end-to-end solutions across satellite and ground-based data services. "We've broadened our portfolio to include uplink and colocation services from our state-of-the-art Tier 4 teleports in Cyprus and Athens. Hellas Sat is now diversifying its scope to expand in data center and cloud services, as well as hosting facilities, to meet the evolving needs of our customers with

Greece is home to 18 major data centers, with at least six more in development

CHRISTODOULOS PROTOPAPAS
CEO, HELLAS SAT

"We have established in Greece the Balkan's first Tier 4 data center, which is one of only a few in Europe."

cutting-edge solutions," he reveals. "We're venturing into groundbreaking services, including laser communications through space, and we have established in Greece the Balkan's first Tier 4 data center, which is one of only a few in Europe. It represents the pinnacle of data center infrastructure with the highest levels of reliability and operational sustainability, ensuring that our services remain uninterrupted and secure, and can cater to the most critical data needs."

Greece's telecommunications and data center sector is ripe with opportunities for collaboration between local and international companies that range from infrastructure development to innovative services, according to Protopapas: "For example, Hellas Sat's extensive expansion presents a prime opportunity for clients from the US and the Middle East to leverage our top-tier data centers as a strategic gateway to European telecoms operators. Our doors are open and ready to welcome new partnerships and customers that want to capitalize on the synergistic potential of our secure, state-of-the-art facilities."

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Greek entrepreneurs with no borders

A global mindset, innovation and sustainable growth strategies are the keys to success for frontrunning business service providers

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According to OECD, Greece has about 430,000 early-stage entrepreneurs

Greek entrepreneurialism is on a steep upward trajectory. According to the European Union's Innovation Scoreboard, the nation's overall innovative performance increased by 22.2% points between 2016 and 2023, compared to 8.5% across the bloc as a whole. And a substantial contributor to that growth was above EU-average scores for innovation levels in Greece's small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).

Anastasios Spanidis
President and CEO
GPA

Anastasios Spanidis, president and CEO of the Growth, Prosperity and Abundance (GPA) ecosystem of companies, is widely considered to be the role model for Greece's 21st-century entrepreneurs. 23 years ago, he co-founded the digital transformation specialist Generation Y from a garage. Under his leadership, that successful startup has mushroomed into GPA, a multinational group of nine companies with more than 350 staff that exports over 230 different business services to 50 countries and has offices in 10, including one in Austin, Texas.

Spanidis is also a strong supporter of other entrepreneurs, both as an investor and board member of numerous innovative companies and through his mentoring role at Enter Grow Go, a Greek business acceleration program established by Eurobank in partnership with Corallia Fund, the country's biggest startup incubator. He believes the future is bright for companies operating in the country: "For the first time in many years, we have a pro-business government paving the way for the private sector to produce and create wealth in a conducive environment, aiding companies to reach their goals and enabling them to contribute to societal prosperity. The economy is thriving and predictions indicate sustained growth for the next four to five years, coupled with major EU financing programs for Greece. Multinational companies returning to the country further contribute to a competitive economic environment."

However, the government needs to do more to ensure entrepreneurial innovators in the country can realize their full potential, he adds: "The narrative needs to shift from sustaining businesses to encouraging collaboration, co-creation and growth. Government initiatives should aim at providing opportunities for businesses to become larger, more innovative and globally competitive."

Spanidis himself has achieved all three of those things. "We started Generation Y from scratch from when I was 18. We pioneered digital transformation and innovation, gaining recognition for our global mindset. To better serve our clients that cover a quarter of the world, we evolved over time into GPA, which offers diverse services, aiming to be a one-stop shop for business-to-business solutions," he explains. "Our growth is attributed to acquiring the best companies in our target areas of activity."

Through those acquisitions, the group's specialisms have multiplied to include not just digital transformation, but also upskilling and reskilling training; financial and investment consulting; advertising; market research; environmental, social and governance initiatives; software development; insurance; augmented and virtual reality creation; performance marketing; lobbying and networking services; and more.

This comprehensive approach allows GPA to better understand and meet its clients' objectives holistically and cost effectively. Spanidis wants to go even further in this direction, he states: "Our goal is to expand to encompass over 50 companies within our service supply chain, focusing on top-notch talent, global experience and deep know-how in order to deliver sustained growth that is value-driven for our clients. GPA's mission is clear: to facilitate growth for our partners, ensuring prosperity for society and abundance for humanity."

A deep dive into innovation

The group has nearly 3,000 partner clients at the moment, a significant proportion of which are in the US. Generation Y, for example, has built up a prominent presence in that country since 2010, where it has executed sophisticated digital solutions for entities like the construction giant Pulte Homes and Johns Hopkins University. The distinguished executive coaching firm CEO Coaching International is another illustration, as a result of which engagement Spanidis was appointed as its vice president of European business development. Within this role, he helps connect former CEOs from world-class companies to the European market.

In his view, "The US, as Greece's closest ally and largest market, is undeniably vital for Greek businesses. But it's not a panacea or shortcut; it's an additional market and success there is contingent on leadership within your niche."

One thing that attracts Spanidis to the US is its focus on innovation, which he shares: "The US, in contrast to Europe's fragmented markets, fosters innovation, which is encapsulated in the saying: 'China industrializes, the US innovates and the EU regulates.' While regulations have their role, injecting more innovation into the mix is preferable."

To maximize its innovative potential, GPA continuously invests in upskilling and reskilling its staff and has a $4.6 million budget for research and development into new products and services that utilize advanced technologies and target real market needs.

ANASTASIOS SPANIDIS
PRESIDENT AND CEO, GPA

"GPA's mission is clear: to facilitate growth for our partners, ensuring prosperity for society and abundance for humanity."

"We believe that through innovation and change, better solutions emerge for our partners, contributing to ongoing improvement. Artificial intelligence, for example, is reshaping professional and everyday life, and embracing this change excites us. However, while technology evolves rapidly, we emphasize expertise and specialization, understanding that deep diving into technologies is essential," he declares.

Nurturing talent and co-creation

Convinced that one of the places innovation thrives is at the intersection of education and entrepreneurship, GPA has collaborated with the Business College of Athens on a new Master's degree in digital marketing. "We're aiming to inspire young minds to think big and make connections with those who have already achieved success. It's a commitment to invest in the next generation," states Spanidis.

"GPA has also created a work environment where risk-taking and experimentation are encouraged. Talent is a critical asset and the group's primary commitment is to its employees. Our aim is to craft career paths, supporting them in achieving the lives they dream of."

Ever since the financial crisis of 2008, when a notable proportion of Greece's talent left the country to seek opportunities elsewhere, many other Greek firms have faced challenges in attracting qualified staff. In Spanidis' opinion, much of that talent has returned and those still blaming the nation's so-called "brain drain" for problems they are having are wrong. "Talent availability issues today reflect a growing economy. Companies must adapt by offering competitive salaries and benefits, and they need to innovate in attracting, retaining and nurturing talent to drive sustainable growth. In addition, the global market has opened new avenues for talent acquisition and businesses in Greece should explore opportunities beyond domestic borders," he asserts.

The entrepreneur adds that adopting a global mindset is crucial for Greek companies in all aspects of their operations, giving their uptake of digital technologies as a further example: "In the next five years, companies that do not prioritize digital transformation will cease to exist. The global market is now accessible, allowing companies to work from anywhere for clients worldwide. Greece must seize the benefits of technologies faster, because miracles can happen when businesses embrace change."

Asked for his advise for foreign entrepreneurs considering moving to or partnering with companies in the increasingly pro-business country on the other hand, Spanidis gives an enthusiastic response: "Greece offers a splendid environment for wealth creation, enjoyment, family life or whatever one desires. It's a unique blend that is full of opportunities. The GPA ecosystem of companies stands ready to assist, irrespective of how audacious or grand the aspiration or idea may be — a commitment to thinking big is ingrained in our DNA, it's our purpose. Humanity is entering an era of collaboration and co-creation, let's explore how we can mutually contribute to success, fostering a better way of life for all."

From brain drain to brain regain

Incentives, great jobs and a nurturing startup ecosystem are persuading talented Greeks who left the country during the financial crisis to return

Greece suffered a severe brain drain during the financial crisis that crippled its economy. At an event held this March by BrainReGain — an initiative established by leading companies from the country's strongest productive sectors — Minister of National Economy and Finance Kostis Hatzidakis revealed that nearly 600,000 Greeks left. Most of them were searching for healthier employment prospects elsewhere, they were young and they were talented. Greece's population as a whole is highly educated, with over 60% holding a university degree, but around 90% of those who left were qualified to at least that level.

The exodus probably slowed down the country's economic reboot and has certainly caused many industries problems since its economy has started to boom. One example is infrastructure construction, as Manolis Sigalas, senior vice president and managing director, Europe at the global project management firm Hill International, explains: "We've gone from a crisis period when there were no projects and Greek engineers were fleeing abroad, to a time when everybody in the market is hiring and complaining that they can't find people." This issue has had limited impact on Hill International itself, he adds: "We've repatriated engineers who work with us internationally, which has been a key pillar of our strategy, and we have a portfolio of global-caliber projects, so it's easier for us to attract talent."

Other companies, trade bodies and the government have also implemented strategies to entice Greeks home. As a result, about 57% had returned by 2021 when the last official statistics were collated. Others have since followed, while a survey conducted by BrainReGain at the end of 2023 suggested that 50% of those still abroad wanted to go back, with 21% hoping to do that this year. "This 'brain regain' phenomenon is crucial; Greeks are returning and they're bringing valuable international experience and knowledge with them," states Marinos Giannopoulos, CEO of the investment and trade agency Enterprise Greece. "One of the most compelling incentives for these returning professionals is a 50% income tax reduction for five years. The opportunity to work for the global giants that have recently established themselves here, such as Google and Amazon, adds a further attractive dimension."

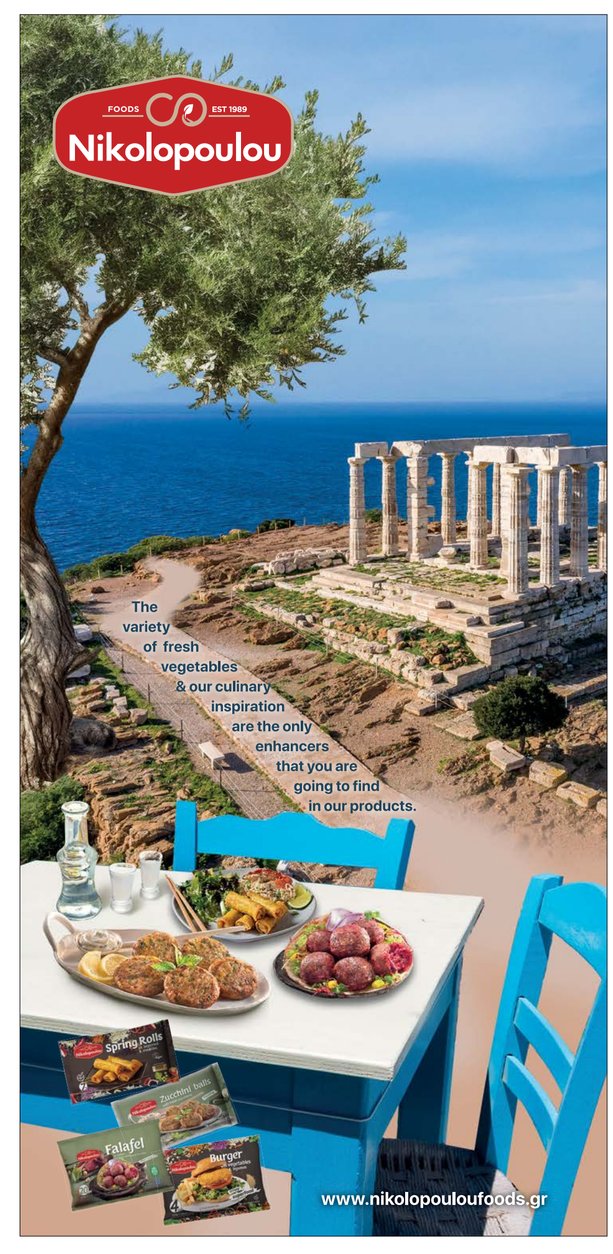
The creation of high-quality, well-paid jobs is a central plank of the government's strategy for luring the diaspora back. One way it has been encouraging innovation-focused multinationals that can offer this employment to enter the country is by investing in the country's research and development capacities. "According to European Union data, Greece is now among the top EU nations in terms of public spending on research and innovation," states Minister of Development and Investments Kostas Skrekas. "We want to link Greek research with the market and industry, so we're going to prioritize access to state aid resources toward investments that involve cooperative research and innovation projects between a private-sector investor and a university, research institution or startup."

Fostering the next unicorns

Greeks are entrepreneurial: BrainReGain's survey found that 22% of those still abroad and seeking to return are aiming to set up their own businesses when they do. So another major component of the government's repatriation strategy has been to strengthen the ecosystem for startups. "There's been substantial progress in this area in the last two to three years, especially with regards to funding, with new funds being created that mainly deal with new technologies," says Georgios Papadimitriou, country managing partner for EY in Greece. "Public and private accelerators and incubators have also been established, as well as tax incentives for angel investors and initiatives to facilitate spinoffs from research centers or universities."

Among the new tools for nurturing the country's startups, which number about 800 at the moment, Papadimitriou highlights Elevate Greece, a government-led platform that helps promising startups connect to global innovation networks. Initiatives like this appear to be working: in 2023, Intel, Cisco, Dell and Hewlett Packard all acquired Greek startups. The year before, JP Morgan invested in a 49% share of Viva Wallet, a cloud-based neobank, giving the company a valuation of over $2 billion and making it the country's first unicorn. "This is testament to the abundant opportunities in Greece's vibrant startup ecosystem. Through initiatives like Elevate Greece, we're aiming to foster unicorns on a regular basis," Giannopoulos declares.

At the March conference, Minister Hatzidakis stated that the government would continue its endeavors to bring Greeks home by, for instance, catalyzing the creation of more specialized jobs, improving working conditions and reducing red tape for returnees. Constantinos Kesentes, president of BrainReGain, said afterwards: "Greece has definitively left the difficult times behind and an environment favorable to the return of skilled Greeks has been formed. Our intention is to ensure that this positive message reaches every corner of the globe where there are Greeks looking for an opportunity to return."



Manufacturing industries elevate exports and R&D

Greek manufacturers are going from strength to strength, with a more robust innovative edge, as epitomized by national champion KLEEMANN

KLEEMANN's cutting-edge elevators are installed in buildings across the globe

Greek manufacturing industries' export sales almost tripled from about $13 billion in 2009 to $32 billion in 2022. Those exports were supplied by a variety of increasingly robust industries, including pharmaceuticals, foods and beverages, construction, metals, renewable energy, shipbuilding, electronics, technology and advanced engineering.

Despite this progress, Greece lags behind many other European Union countries in terms of the contribution manufacturing makes to its economy, a fact the government is keen to change. Therefore, in December 2023 Minister of Development and Investments Kostas Skrekas announced new initiatives to strengthen the Greek manufacturing sector that aim to mobilize investments and finance competitive export-focus businesses.

Two months earlier, Skrekas attended an anniversary celebration at the Central Macedonian headquarters of a world-leading elevator manufacturers that he believes is an "exemplary model" for other exporters. "We are visiting a national champion, KLEEMANN, a company owned by the Koukountzos family, which has been promoting Greece abroad for 40 years," Skrekas said at the event. "A Greek company from a modest regional city like Kilkis has managed to compete with technological giants on an international level."

Capable of producing any type of elevator, lifting system, escalator and moving walkway, KLEEMANN's technology is conveying people and freight in office buildings, airports, stadiums, malls, industrial plants and many other public and private spaces worldwide. The group's turnover is expected to exceed $250 million in 2024, according to its managing director, Konstantinos Koukountzos. "Today, we employ over 1,700 people all around the world, with manufacturing facilities in Greece, Serbia and China. Our international sales account for over 90% of our revenue, with a sales network in more than 100 countries worldwide," he states. "We have our own subsidiaries in strategically important markets, including the US, where we have Day Elevator and Lift in Long Island; the UK, which is currently our biggest market, generating 20% of our revenue; and Australia."

Konstantinos Koukountzos
Managing Director
KLEEMANN

The group was founded by Koukountzos' father, who first licensed and then acquired the KLEEMANN name and know-how from a German manufacturer. Its next evolutionary step came in 2000. "We raised capital from the Athens Stock Exchange, which was invested in expanding our manufacturing facilities in Greece and our international network, as we realized early on that our growth would necessarily be export-driven," he explains. "2010 was another milestone, as we started building our first testing tower in Kilkis, which is about 200 feet high. This became the home of our research and development function, where our team could design and test advanced technologies. That really gave us a significant boost in innovation."

About seven years ago, KLEEMANN augmented its innovative capacity, when it invested in a production site in Kunshan, China, where it has a testing tower that is about 330 feet high. As a consequence of these investments, requests for complex systems in prestigious global infrastructure projects rose, notes Koukountzos: "We realized customers needed a partner that would be responsible for the whole project, not just equipment, but also installation, maintenance and after-sales service. So we started transforming from being exclusively a manufacturer. In our key markets, we became a vertically integrated company."

KONSTANTINOS KOUKOUNTZOS
MANAGING DIRECTOR, KLEEMANN

"Our subsidiary Day Elevator and Lift is a leading dealer of quality mobility products in New York and won first place in Elevator World's Project of the Year."

The group's R&D strengths have made it a pioneer in areas that include energy-efficiency technologies and eco-design principles. "We also innovate in the digital realm with Internet of Things technologies that enable real-time access to an elevator's status and smart functions that give extra value," discloses Koukountzos. "For example, we have a system where, if a passenger of an elevator passes out or has a heart attack while alone and can't press the alarm button, it recognizes the passenger's condition and, in a few seconds, automatically sends the information that there's a passenger in need of help. This technology can truly save lives."

KLEEMANN is at the forefront of sustainable and digital innovation in manufacturing processes too. By introducing cutting-edge energy and waste management systems, the group has reduced its carbon emissions by almost 50% and it recycles 97% of its generated waste. "We're also continuously automating and digitizing production processes and currently have an investment program of about $5.5 million that includes robotic systems for the production of cabins and an automatic process for wiring controllers. As a result, we're a lot faster than most of our competitors," he asserts.

While KLEEMANN started investing in innovation many years ago, the Greek industrial sector as a whole did not. "This has changed in the last three to five years," reveals Koukountzos, who adds that the environment for research cooperation in Greece will soon improve, thanks to a new facility in Thessaloniki: "It's called Thess INTEC and we're supporting it as a founding member. Once completed, it will be one of the biggest European science and technology parks."

Koukountzos' main goal for the group is to gain bigger market shares in various countries, including the US, where its efforts will be targeted through its local subsidiary. "Day Elevator and Lift is a leading dealer of quality mobility products ranging from stairlifts and wheelchair lifts, to commercial and residential elevators. It's among the largest New York-based dealers, with a long history of remarkable projects and installations, such as the Historic Woolworth Estate in Long Island and the newest Platform Lift at Columbia University Historic Earle Hall, for which we won first place in Elevator World's Project of the Year," he states. "We recently relocated our headquarters to a suitable facility in Mineola, New York, with a fully equipped showroom and additional office and warehouse space that can boost even further our expansion to nearby markets and beyond. In order to do that, we will constantly expand our product range to be able to become a one-stop shop for all our customers' needs."

KLEEMANN has upskilling programs in place to ensure its workforce can adapt to emerging technologies. "On top of that, we have a coaching program, which is truly transformative for the culture of the group. It involves three-day workshops and one-on-one sessions that are available to all employees. This connects with our 'Passion for People' value. It's not typical training and it has amazing results for people, supporting them to achieve their breakthrough personal and professional goals. I believe it's no surprise that we've been awarded as a 'Great Place to Work' in Greece and abroad, and that's what truly fuels our growth," he enthuses.

KONSTANTINOS KOUKOUNTZOS
MANAGING DIRECTOR, KLEEMANN

"We make elevators, but what we truly offer is peace of mind."

Koukountzos is confident this growth will continue. "By the end of the decade, over 60 % of the world's population will live in cities, which will become larger with higher buildings. We aim to tap into this growth opportunity with our high-quality products, he says. "KLEEMANN also means trust. We make elevators, but what we truly offer is peace of mind. A construction company buying from us will be carefree, because we always strive to make things right, on time and in case something is not completely right, which is very rare, we find the best and fastest solution. We take great pride in offering the best customer experience for all our partners, including developers, architects, consultants, building owners and end users. In fact, our best branding and marketing tool is the word of mouth of our satisfied customers."

Pharma: A growing global footprint

Greece's pharmaceutical sector has become highly regarded internationally and is expected to grow significantly in the years ahead

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Greece produces 10% of all generic medicine manufactured in Europe

Over the past five years, the pharmaceutical sector has emerged as one of the most dynamic in the country in terms of growth. Predicted to reach $9.8 billion by 2027, exports have been the main driver of that growth, thanks to Greece's ability to capitalize on the European Union's shift toward more self-reliance. Pharmaceutical product exports amounted to $2.8 billion in 2021, while last year 10% of all generic medicine production in Europe came from Greece. "The Greek pharmaceutical industry is becoming increasingly competitive through specialization and transformation," reveals Theodore Tryfon, president of the Panhellenic Union of Pharmaceutical Industries and co-CEO of the Elpen Group. "The companies that operate in the Greek market have already transformed from primarily local generic manufacturers to international manufacturers with a significant export footprint both in Europe and across the world," he goes on.

This transformation came as Europe struggled with the collapse of its supply chains and suffered significant shortages in essential medicines during the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout this period, Greece maintained its strong local pharmaceutical industry as it did not face the same shortage problems as other European nations and was even able to support other countries with necessary pharmaceuticals. "We have a strong production base and a long-standing tradition in the development of generics and value-added medicines," explains Tryfon. "Greece has played a significant role in fortifying not only our local market but also other European countries with the supply of medicines during the recent pandemic."

Further explaining the impact of COVID on Greece's pharmaceutical industry, Kosta Kanaroglou, president and CEO at Cana Laboratories, adds: "Pre-pandemic, the focus was heavily on innovation and innovative products, whereas post-pandemic, the EU outlook is that Europe should be able to cover its basic capacity needs. Greece, according to the Minister of Finance, has about 2% of the population of Europe and about 10% of the generics' manufacturing industry, due in part to the investment strategy of the Greek pharmaceutical industry over the past 20 years."

The government has also done its part to assist the pharmaceutical sector by introducing several policies aimed at attracting research and development-based drug makers to Greece. Partly as a result of this, investment in research has increased, with the pharmaceutical industry currently accounting for 25% of all expenditure on innovation in the manufacturing sector.

"The Greek ecosystem for R&D is now flourishing thanks to a focus on new products, technology and artificial intelligence, as well as initiatives such as the foundation of Pfizer's Center for Digital Innovation in Thessaloniki and the Microsoft Data Center in Athens. All this manifests toward positioning Greece favorably in the new era of innovation in biotech together with academia, universities and research institutions from Greece and abroad," outlines Tryfon. "We have also observed an increase in collaborations with academic researchers and universities in Greece and other countries. The sharing of talent and knowledge is a key aspect of our industry. Furthermore, the new innovations we have now open a new horizon of opportunities for technology transfers to take place between Greek and American companies."

From strength to strength

Highlighting the upward trajectory of the pharmaceutical sector in Greece, Cana Laboratories came close to filing for bankruptcy following the financial crisis in 2008 but is now back on the road to success. This shows the strength and resilience of the local pharma industry and helps explains why international companies are seeking to set up operations in the European country.

"Cana Laboratories represents what Greece went through in the last ten years: a company that was at the top of its sector, which endured the rough crisis years and, because of its acquisition by the US-based Cosmos Health, is now on a growth path again. It illustrates how Greece is rising from the ashes," states Kanaroglou. "This is evidenced by the fact that all the big US pharma companies are present in Greece and in Pfizer choosing Thessaloniki to invest in a digital lab. I believe more companies could use Greece as a hub for R&D."

While the outlook looks positive, some challenges in the domestic pharmaceutical sector will need to be addressed. "These include the state's low health budget and the pressure on the industry to cover and absorb the gap via mechanisms such as the clawback," adds Kanaroglou."This is a mechanism used by the state that forces the industry to absorb the state's spending over their allocated budget. It was implemented as part of the country's COVID resilience plan, but has remained in place… Thankfully, over the past few years, a program was set up to reallocate part of this clawback to investments, which, although it has helped the pharma industry, only affects a minority of the market."

THEODORE TRYFON
PRESIDENT, PANHELLENIC UNION OF PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRIES

"The Greek pharmaceutical industry is becoming increasingly competitive through specialization and transformation."

Pricing mechanisms and further reforms in regard to policies will also help Greece remain competitive in the years ahead. Investments into raw materials for manufacturing are being made and there is a drive to ensure that talent is not lured away from the country.

"As an industry, we are facing many human resources-related issues. The industry is growing locally but the workforce required for that growth is not readily available," reveals Kanaroglou. "The government has incentivized the return of talent with interesting tax cuts, but I think it is more the fact that Greece is bouncing back that is drawing people back in."

Paliria produces a wide range of authentic, tasty and healthy Greek recipes

Nikolopoulou Foods turns Greek agricultural produce into frozen plant-based foods

Greek food: On trend and fueling exports

As global consumers increasingly adopt healthy and plant-centric diets, attention is turning to Greece's high-quality prepared foods

Greece's food and beverage exports are booming, driven by global recognition of the health benefits of a Mediterranean diet and the exceptional standards of the country's products. In 2023, the sector's international revenues reached $11.15 billion, 12% more than in 2022, which equates to 20% of the country's total export income. In-demand Greek specialties include olive oil, fruits, vegetables and dairy products, but there has also been a sharp increase in sales for companies creating added-value delicacies from the nation's agricultural outputs.

"Consumer trends are changing and, while they haven't forgotten about our great Mediterranean ingredients, they're more interested in ready-to-eat Greek products," explains George Kostianis, CEO of Paliria, the leading producer of pre-prepared high-quality convenience foods. "We're bringing the world a whole range of authentic Greek recipes. Our products are tasty, healthy, not processed, and ready to eat or to reheat and eat, straight from the fridge."

The company is one of the nation's largest food exporters. In 2023, its turnover amounted to around $110 million and about 80% of that came from exports to over 60 countries, with 30% of its revenues coming from the US, he states: "We distribute under our own brand Paliria, with Greek origin labels, and also under private labels of supermarket chains."

The firm's most popular product is the one it was founded on in 1957: dolma. It is the world's biggest producer of these flavor-packed parcels of rice and herbs wrapped in vine leaves and hand rolls nearly 2 million of them every day. Now, however, its range extends to diverse national classics, with just a few tempting examples being moussaka, giant beans in tomato sauce, orzo pasta with shrimp, phyllo-pastry pies and lentil salad with pomegranate dressing.

Paliria has also expanded from its family kitchen origins. "We employ about 1,700 people across the world and have state-of-the-art factories in Greece, Bulgaria, China and Jordan," says Kostianis. "These facilities are specialized and this centers-of-excellence mentality helps us produce with consistency." As a result, the products the company offers in the US are of exactly the same quality as the ones in Greece or any other country. "Authenticity and taste are the most important characteristics of our food, and their consistency is one of the reasons that retailers trust us," he notes.

While authenticity is key, so is innovation. At the moment, its research and development programs are focused on two areas. One is protecting the environment by, for example, introducing new recyclable packaging technologies and collaborating with farmers on ingredient sustainability.

GEORGE KOSTIANIS
CEO, PALIRIA

"Authenticity and taste are the most important characteristics of our food."

The other is expanding its portfolio of ready-to-eat recipes and chilled meals, reveals Giannis Markantes, the company's commercial regional director for America: "We now offer an organic range and many taste variants, like spicy and sweet dolmas. We're also doing a lot of research to understand the needs of consumers in different countries," he states. "However, in our customizations, we don't want to alter the core ingredients too much. Consumers want the foods they tasted in Greece. We have to make sure that what they ate there, they can eat at home."

Paliria's recipes have been enjoyed in America for 50 years, but it is now growing its US market share. "We're collaborating with local players like Walmart, Costco, Kroger's and Whole Foods and this addition of new working partners has been important," comments Markantes. Kostianis is optimistic about the firm's growth prospects in the US and worldwide: "We firmly believe we are at the beginning of something good here. Our motto is 'taste the best of Greece,' because we're confident we are the best of Greece in ready-to-eat food."

Spreading Pythagoras' values

"Greek agricultural products are renowned for their quality due to unique varieties, the great soil condition of our fields and, most importantly, because of the photosynthesis enabled by the Greek sun, which allows beneficial vitamins and trace elements to remain in the fruits," explains Eleni Nikolopoulou, founder of Nikolopoulou Foods, one of the nation's most dynamic agri-food businesses. "As we like to say, we cultivate plant-nutrition habits. We process agricultural produce into prepared frozen plant-based foods and hold a 35% share of that market in Greece," she states.

Nikolopoulou grew up in the Peloponnese, not far from her firm's base, as part of a farming family: "I loved the land, its plants and its fruits, and became inseparably connected with them. In 1989, I decided to engage professionally in plant-based nutrition in order to add value to products that were devalued, despite their high nutritional value, such as legumes, cabbage, leek and zucchini. I also wanted to revive traditional Greek and ethnic recipes, which hide wisdom and secrets of taste and health, with innovative practices."

Expected to achieve a turnover of almost $10 million in 2024, Nikolopoulou Foods has grown significantly in recent years, with the rising trend toward vegan and vegetarian diets bringing increasing demand for its products. These are made from a wide variety of Greek fruits, vegetables, herbs and other agricultural goods, and include dishes like spring rolls; falafels; and plant-based burgers, nuggets, croquettes and meatballs.

"Our company culture is to create products of high quality that are beneficial to the human body using Greek raw materials. The philosophical foundations of our approach to plant nutrition are based on the ancient Greek philosophers, especially Pythagoras, the first known vegetarian who lived in harmony with nature in 600 BC and established the pythagorean diet," Nikolopoulou reveals. "Therefore, we follow a farm-to-plate model. We cooperate with Greek certified producers, use protected designation of origin raw ingredients and process them with simple mechanical means, creating products with a mix of basic natural materials, fragrances and spices. Due to our simple processing, these retain their organoleptic characteristics, odor, taste, texture, color and nutritional ingredients."

The company's overriding philosophy has also made it a very active supporter of and participant in the circular economy, environmental protection, food waste reduction and social work that benefits vulnerable groups in its local communities. Another priority for Nikolopoulou is investing in the physical and mental wellbeing of her 55 employees. "I believe that our team's health is not only a measure of our success, but also our strongest competitive advantage," she states. "As a leader, my vision for Nikolopoulou Foods goes beyond the pursuit of profit margins and market share. I'm strongly focused on cultivating an environment of solidarity, humanity and collectivity where employees can truly flourish and where our collective impact transcends the walls of our company, making a positive contribution to our industry, community and society as a whole."

Giannis Markantes
Commercial Regional Director, Paliria

Eleni Nikolopoulou
Founder
Nikolopoulou Foods

The firm's commitment to having a positive impact extends to its dedicated research department, which cooperates with external technologists and nutritionists on the discovery and creation of foods that can improve human health. Two collaborations with Harokopio University in Athens illustrate this: one involves the development of innovative highly nutritional vegan products based on extruded legumes, cereals and pseudo-cereals; the other seeks to exploit the benefits of Greece's black Corinthian raisin, an under-utilized fruit that is a natural sweetener and nutritional supplement with neuro-protective attributes.

ELENI NIKOLOPOULOU
FOUNDER, NIKOLOPOULOU FOODS

"Our company culture is to create products of high quality that are beneficial to the human body using Greek raw materials."

Exports currently account for 10% of Nikolopoulou Foods' turnover, with its goods being sold to European nations, the US and other countries. However, given the know-how and resources that the company has built up, it is now working to enhance its exports as part of a five-year expansion plan. "Our alignment with vegan and vegetarian diets and our association with the Mediterranean diet is garnering strong interest from international marketing and distribution companies. Due to our high-standard production, marketing and sales systems, alongside our very good financial foundations, we've also been attracting investment interest," says Nikolopoulou. "Our goals are to carry on working with partners to expand our product availability around the world and to continue to innovate by creating vegetable products that are tasty and nutritious, that people love and want to consume."

Spice up your life with a distinctive coffee

Deeply embedded in the country's heritage, traditional Greek coffee continues to be the nation's favorite brew

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The Greek population consumes 40,000 tons of coffee a year

Coffee is a way of life in Greece, with over 80% of the population enjoying at least one cup of it every day, according to a survey from the Hellenic Coffee Association trade body. The preferred choice of more than a third of people at home is traditional Greek coffee, a rich, creamy dark brew with a unique taste and aroma that is made from finely ground roasted beans and served in iconic small white cups.

In Greece, that description is synonymous with the name Loumidis Papagalos, the country's leading brand, which was launched by three brothers from their coffee shop in Piraeus, Athens in 1923. Ever since then, the brand's classic ground coffee in its distinctive green packaging emblazoned with a red and green parrot has been a prominent fixture of household and cafe shelves throughout the nation. "We're celebrating our first century and, as part of that, we've refreshed our iconic parrot logo and packaging in order to continue to offer a timeless brand that will last another hundred years," reveals Christos Alevizos, business executive officer at Coffees Nestlé Hellas.

There are three main reasons why it is Greece's favorite coffee brand. The first is that it is widely considered to taste better than its competitors and that has a lot to do with the influence of Nestlé, which bought the company in 1987. "Since the brand joined the Nestlé family, we've been obsessed with delivering the highest-quality cup of Greek coffee. We've invested more than $32 million into our factory in Oinofyta in just the last 10 years and keep on investing in every aspect, from the moment we source our beans to the final cup, to ensure that every cup delivers our excellent quality and legendary taste," says Alevizos. "Major investments include our new coffee roaster, which provides one of the best roasting capabilities Nestlé has globally, and the brand was first mover in introducing foil-sealed packaging to Greek coffee. In addition, investments in our factory allow us to reach a sky-high level of product innovation."

Christos Alevizos
Business Executive Officer, Coffees Nestlé Hellas

Innovative capacity is the second contributor to Loumidis Papagalos' success. While traditional Greek coffee remains hugely popular, the brand is quick to introduce products that meet evolving market trends. Some examples include a coffee that addresses the demand for larger-cup beverages, a decaffeinated version of its classic roast, a limited-edition Christmas blend and its first premium product. "Loumidis Papagalos Ekastos is a single-estate 100% Arabica coffee that adds sophistication and premiumization to the Greek coffee category. Elevated coffee experiences are booming and Greek coffee should play a role in this," Alevizos declares.

The brand is also innovative when it comes to sustainability and is currently developing 100%-ready designed for recycling packaging that will be the first in its sector. "We aim to lead the way in sustainability. For example, our factory's electricity comes from 100% renewable sources and in 2023 we established a photovoltaic park there to further utilize alternative energy," he says. "Our commitment to sustainability extends to our raw materials. Through the Nescafé 2030 Plan, we aim to source 100% responsible coffee by 2025 and for 50% of our coffee to be cultivated regeneratively by 2030."

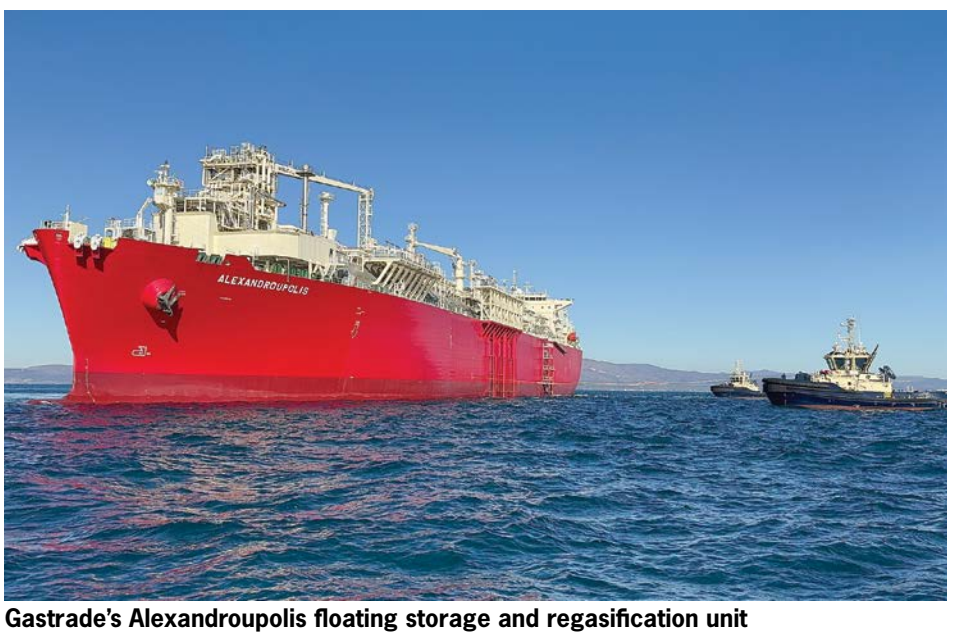
The third element that explains the brand's preeminence is the connection it has with its customers, notes Alevizos: "Loumidis Papagalos is one of Greece's most powerful lovebrands. This is the result of a combination of strategic communication work and pure love throughout the years. It's a century-old brand that keeps writing history close to the hearts of its consumers."

CHRISTOS ALEVIZOS
BUSINESS EXECUTIVE OFFICER
COFFEES NESTLÉ HELLAS

"For Greeks abroad, a sip of Loumidis Papagalos coffee is a sip of Greece."

The brand's concern for its customers extends to the Greek diaspora. "For Greeks abroad, a sip of Loumidis Papagalos coffee is a sip of Greece and we have a responsibility to make it available to all Greek communities," he insists. The brand is currently available in around 20 countries worldwide, including the US, where it has a particularly trusted partner: Loumidis Foods, which was set up by a son of one of the founding brothers of Loumidis Papagalos coffee in the 1980s. Based in New Jersey, the firm distributes the brand, as well as other high-quality Greek food and beverage labels, across the whole of the US. Loumidis Papagalos is ambitious to expand both its international and domestic markets, Alevizos states: "We want to make sure that this emblematic Greek brand continues to grow and innovate, building on its longstanding history and Greek coffee heritage."

IPTO is connecting Greece's grid to those of neighboring countries



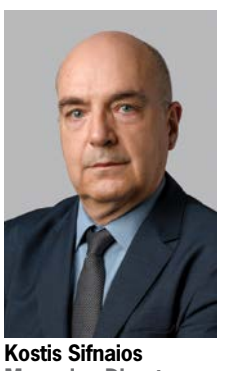
Gastrade's Alexandroupolis floating storage and regasification unit

A green energy hub in the making

At the centre of a rapidly changing energy landscape, Greece aims to position itself as a leading supplier of renewable energy

Theodoros Skylakakis
Minister of Environment and Energy

Manousos Manousakis
Chairman and CEO IPTO


Kostis Sifnaios
Managing Director Gastrade

John Karydas
CEO for Renewables Copelouzos Group

From harnessing the power of wind and the sun to opening new liquefied natural gas (LNG) facilities and installing high-voltage undersea power cables, Greece is diversifying its energy supply and increasing domestic production.

These projects come as Greece continues to reduce the European Union's reliance on Russian gas and undertakes one of the most ambitious climate change agendas in the economic bloc. Last year, 57% of the country's electricity mix was supplied by wind, solar and hydroelectric facilities, whereas the Mediterranean nation plans to entirely phase out all coal-powered electricity by 2028 and reach net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. It is a hugely ambitious target, but the EU's need for energy diversification has been accelerated due to the war in Ukraine; while Greece is, in parallel, betting that a carbon-free future can reshape its economic destiny.

THEODOROS SKYLAKAKIS
MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

"Greece has the biggest potential for offshore wind in the whole Eastern Mediterranean."

"Greece is important as it is an entry point for LNG for the whole Southeastern European region, and potentially also an entry point for electricity coming from outside Europe from the Middle East and North Africa," explains Theodoros Skylakakis, Minister of Environment and Energy. "We will also play an important role in the next 15 years in regards to offshore wind, because Greece has the biggest potential for offshore wind in the whole Eastern Mediterranean."

One company playing a major part in helping transform Greece into a strategic regional gas hub is Gastrade, which became the country's first private company to receive an independent natural gas system license from the state. This led to the successful opening of the Alexandroupolis floating storage and regasification unit (FSRU), a LNG terminal that will have a maximum sustainable regasification capacity of 5.5 billion cubic meters a year.

"The objective of the FSRU is to provide diversification of supply and routes of energy to the wider regions of the Southeastern region from Greece all the way to Romania, Serbia and Bulgaria," states Kostis Sifnaios, Managing Director at Gastrade. "This is a project which is part of a wider program called the Vertical Corridor Initiative, which aims to provide energy and gas now, and hydrogen in the future, from south to north. We believe that Greece, through Gastrade, can enhance its role as a regional gateway for energy and LNG through the existing terminal at Alexandroupolis and through a second terminal that has been licensed."

Currently working under the National Energy and Climate plan, which was first introduced in 2019, the government hopes to speed up its energy transition away from oil and toward gas and renewable sources. Bidding to become an energy hub for the entire region, renewable energy is set to play a central role in the years ahead. "Greece possesses an excellent dynamic of renewable energy potential due to its geographical location and its high-capacity factories, solar radiation and wind. Besides that, recent changes in the regulatory framework that the government has made present ideal momentum for investing in the local renewable energy sector," explains John Karydas, CEO for renewables at the Copelouzos Group.

KOSTIS SIFNAIOS
MANAGING DIRECTOR, GASTRADE

"Greece, through Gastrade, can enhance its role as a regional gateway for energy."

One of the most ambitious projects in Greece's green energy transition is the GREGY Project, which will see a submarine electricity cable with bi-directional power transmission carry electricity from Egypt's renewable energy sources to Greece. This will in turn benefit consumers and businesses in the country and in neighboring European nations. "GREGY is a visionary project that was conceived back in 2008 and has been included in the first Projects of Mutual Interest list of the EU," outlines Karydas. "It has the ability to produce 3,000 MW of green energy, which can replace about 4.5 billion cubic meters of natural gas and reduce carbon dioxide emissions by about 10 million tons on an annual basis. It's a very strong instrument for achieving independence from fossil fuels, independence from Russian natural gas, tackling the climate crisis and supporting the achievement of the green transition targets of Europe."

Another project of substantial significance is the Great Sea Interconnector, which aims to connect the national electricity transmission networks of Cyprus, Israel and Greece via undersea cables. The project will bolster energy security and facilitate the exchange of electricity between the participating nations.

"We own 100% of the whole Great Sea Interconnector project, which began in October 2023," comments Manousos Manousakis, chairman and CEO of the Independent Power Transmission Operator (IPTO). "Energy would primarily be exported from Greece toward Cyprus and Israel. It is geopolitically important for the EU, as Israel will then be technically connected to the European system. We have also signed a memorandum of understanding to form a company that will study a possible interconnection between Greece and Saudi Arabia. This kind of interconnection is important for the stability of the system and for the security of the power supply."

High-caliber projects across sectors

The development of infrastructure in Greece has shifted up a gear, with many world-class schemes under construction and in the pipeline

Greek infrastructure development has undergone a swift uptick in the last decade, with the US Department of Commerce estimating that the sector grew by 4.3% in 2023 and will expand by another 4.1% this year.

Manolis Sigalas
Senior Vice President and Managing Director, Europe, Hill International

Future prospects for infrastructure and construction are also promising, according to Manolis Sigalas, senior vice president and managing director, Europe at Hill International, the US-headquartered global project management and construction consulting firm that is part of the Global Infrastructure Solutions family of companies: "Projects of global caliber have commenced and there's a strong pipeline of projects that can be funded and implemented. That's reflected in the backlog of the big contractors, which has tripled compared to 2019 and will continue to increase."

One of the US's top-ten firms of its type, Hill International is active in 42 countries and has had a presence in Greece since the 1990s. However, it was in 2011 — midway through the nation's financial crisis — that its Greek operations became a major focus for the company.

"We deeply believed in the country's growth potential and the quality of its professionals in our sector and we saw a window of opportunity. Greece had established financial agreements with the International Monetary Fund, the European Union and the European Central Bank, a key element of which was a far-reaching privatization program," reveals Sigalas.

"The premise of our strategy was that investors implementing large capital expenditure programs would require robust management, combining international best practices and service levels with locally available technical skills and talent. Our commitment to the country was rooted and solidified during those difficult times. We never pressed the 'eject' button to abort our mission and we're very pleased our efforts came to fruition."

Today, Hill International has a specialist team of 300 employees in Greece, he adds: "Our Athens office is now the headquarters of our European operations, which reflects Greece's capabilities, especially in professional services."

Inside the country, the firm is currently working across the infrastructure, buildings, energy and data center sectors, where it is acting as project manager, independent engineer or leading technical consultant, among other roles. "We're involved in distinctive projects of global status, such as the $2.5-billion phase one of The Ellinikon, the $2.0-billion Athens Metro extensions, the $500-million Stavros Niarchos Foundation Health Initiative, the $500-million Heraklion International Airport in Crete, the $350-million Port of Piraeus capex program, the $200-million redevelopment of the Four Seasons Astir Hotel in Athens and several other transformational projects," he states.

Komotini combined cycle gas turbine power plant

MANOLIS SIGALAS
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT AND MANAGING DIRECTOR, EUROPE, HILL INTERNATIONAL

"Our Athens office is now the headquarters of our European operations, which reflects Greece's capabilities in the professional services sector."

The company is also contributing its expertise to many of the smaller-scale infrastructure projects taking place in areas such as airports, motorways, health, water, waste and power. A significant number of these are financed by the European Union's Recovery and Resilience Facility and aim to bolster crucial economic sectors like tourism.

"Tourism is not just about developing 5-star hotels. You need to have the backbone infrastructure in place to support a holistic growth plan for Greece's tourism and safeguard the end-user experience," explains Sigalas. "Every project, large or small, is extremely important to Hill International, as it's a piece of the puzzle of growing investment activity in the country. Greece has come a long way in the past decade and literally shifted gears in recent years. As a US firm with a global footprint and strong bonds with Greece, we're delighted to see the nation evolving."