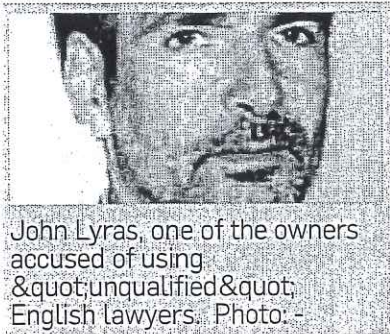


English lawyers escape jail

April 30th, 2001 17:07 GMT



John Lyras, one of the owners accused of using "unqualified" English lawyers. Photo: -

Legal action that could have put English maritime lawyers operating in Greece behind bars has been dismissed.

A Piraeus court has rejected a complaint against 29 individual lawyers, including the senior local partners of a number of top maritime firms.

English lawyers who had gone out to Greece to get near to their shipowner clients were accused of operating without proper authorisation, using illegal methods and making false representations to obtain legal work in a criminal complaint filed by the Piraeus Bar Association in 1999.

The complaint named eight firms: Norton Rose, Watson Farley & Williams, Ince & Co, Holman Fenwick & Willan, Stephenson Harwood, Hewett & Co, Hill Taylor Dickinson and Clyde & Co, as well as 29 named individuals.

A Piraeus Bar Association report claimed the English lawyers were providing legal services to clients who included some of the most prominent figures in the Greek shipping industry.

Owners cited in the 1999 report for employing English lawyers include John Lyras (president of the Union of Greek Shipowners), Georgios Gratsos (president of the Greek Chamber of Shipping), Andreas Potamianos (president of the Passenger Ship Owners Association) and Nikolaos Pentheroudakis (president of the Chartering Brokers Union).

The crux of the Piraeus Bar Association's case was that the English solicitors were falsely representing themselves as Greek lawyers without requalifying under the local system. The English Law Society supported the solicitors against the charges and co-ordinated a defence through an eminent Greek professor of criminal law, Nikolaos Androulakis, who presented a proposal to the Misdemeanor Court of Piraeus.

The court decided that the English lawyers were in fact practising entirely within EU law and did not need to requalify.

Since the Piraeus Bar Association took action, the Greek government has implemented the European Union Lawyers Establishment Directive. This directive gives EU lawyers an unfettered right to establish a permanent base in any EU member state for the purpose of giving legal advice in all areas of the law.

Law Society president, Michael Napier, said it was "good news for everyone if EU lawyers are able to move freely between countries and offer legal advice and representation for clients."