

# Small is beautiful

## Greece

### Bahas, Gramatidis & Partners

**Although it is one of Greece's leading law firms, Bahas, Gramatidis & Partners is not one of the largest, thanks to its deliberate policy of curtailng expansion to ensure it can always offer its clients the personal touch**

As the forefathers of Western philosophy, thanks to the rigorous intellectual enquiries initiated by the pre-Socratics, refined by Socrates and formalized by the likes of Plato and Aristotle, the Greeks are justifiably proud of their ability to deliver a well-constructed argument. It is hardly surprising, then, that the land should be home to some particularly fine lawyers, such as those at Bahas, Gramatidis & Partners, a firm whose legal prowess is matched only by its unswerving commitment to client care.

The firm can trace its origins back to 1970, when Marios Bahas set up his own legal practice in Athens upon returning from the United Kingdom, where he had successfully completed his LLM at the University of London the previous year. Towards the end of the decade, Yanos Gramatidis also opened up his own office in the Greek capital and a decade later, in 1988, the two firms merged to create Bahas, Gramatidis and Associates.

Two years later, a young lawyer called Dimitris Emvalomenos signed up to join the fledgling firm – himself a fellow alumnus from the University of London. The final piece in the merger puzzle came in 2002, when the firm joined forces with the eponymous practices of both Athanassios Felonis and Spyros G Alexandris.

Despite this seemingly complex web of associations that has been woven over the past two decades or so, the firm is still a relatively small concern, with just six partners, 16

associates and a handful of law trainees. This is a deliberate strategy, according to the firm's managing partner, Yanos Gramatidis.

"I think that we offer a very personalized service and that is why we are resisting the urge to increase the number of lawyers," he says. "We like to keep this in the range of 20 to 25 people. Even though we could very well expand further, we think this would almost certainly have a very bad effect on the quality of the service we offer.

"I believe it would distance our lawyers from dealing directly with their own clients. I have seen a number of firms try and grow while maintaining these sorts of standards and it has been the beginning of trouble for them. Now what we do, because we are at the disposal of the client around the clock, it means we can and do give immediate attention to any matter that comes to us from them. This rapid response, coupled with our personal type of service, is something that our client respects enormously."

#### Predicting the future

But speedy service alone is not enough to win a reputation as one of the country's most formidable law firms. In addition, Bahas, Gramatidis & Partners believes that to serve clients effectively, a law firm must meet their needs not only in the present, but also in the future. This is achieved by each and every one of the lawyers at the firm – not only by reaching a detailed, business-oriented understanding of the client's needs, but also by keeping an ear to the ground when it comes to legislative and regulatory developments, and by cultivating contacts that can help to read the prevailing mood in commercial circles both at home and abroad.

"We practise what we like to think of as pre-emptive law," explains Gramatidis. "This means that at all times we keep our clients aware of what is happening and what is going to happen, in terms of legislative change or anything else. Any information we get, we pass on to the clients as soon as possible so they can be well prepared. All of this is something that makes us very different in our market. Very often, our clients come back to us to thank us for our quick response and our flexible thinking with regard to their problems."

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The associates at the firm are trained to understand their clients' goals and to be able to analyze and resolve the legal issues they face from within a commercial context. This understanding is then applied to try and satisfy the client's immediate needs in conjunction with its long-term objectives.

"We believe that a lawyer must possess the foresight and intuition to assure clients of solutions that have the scope to meet their individual needs, as well as taking into account future obstacles and opportunities," continues Gramatidis. "Our resources and business acumen allow us to anticipate changes in regulatory structures, market conditions and technological advances. We then combine our legal skills with an understanding of situation dynamics to identify areas that create either challenges or opportunities for clients."



International networking is something that is very important to us. As a result of our international connections we can call on well-known and reputable law firms worldwide to help deliver local advice as well as global solutions

Opposite page:  
Yanos Gramatidis

Right:  
The Bahas, Gramatidis & Partners  
team



This business acumen is the direct result of many years spent working right at the coalface of Greek commercial life. The combined legal experience represented by the partnership is a deep font of knowledge won over decades of practising commercial law, often participating directly in the decision-making processes of their clients.

“We have always been heavily involved in the businesses of our clients,” confirms Gramatidis. “This has increased our experience every day. This may be surprising to some, our level of involvement, but we often take key business decisions on behalf of the clients, either because we participate as non-executive members of their boards or because their entire organization understands and appreciates our role. They come to us whenever there is a difficulty or a very difficult project – such as a project relating to business investments outside of Greece, where we have to structure the investment. But we also always investigate, together with the client, the pros and cons of each deal. We have this huge business experience, even though we have never been in private business ourselves as such – but we have lived the business from inside the client every day of our careers.”

#### Going for gold

This keen eye for the commercial has seen the firm involved in some major projects in both the public and private sectors in Greece. Major public sector work has included representing the Greek Ministry of Defence in arranging security for the Olympic Games and assisting the Olympics organizing committee in the drafting, negotiation and execution of its hotel contracts with the leisure industry.

Indeed, this pivotal role at the very heart of the behind-the-scenes action that thrust Greece centre stage in the summer of 2004 reflects one of the firm’s key specialist sectors of activity, leisure, tourism and travel (the firm is involved in almost 95% of all aircraft transaction work that goes on in the country). The firm also represented the German KMW in the procurement of 170 Leopard military tanks by the Greek government (a €2.2 billion project). Bahas, Gramatidis & Partners additionally has particular expertise in casino law, medical negligence and

the pharmaceutical industry, in addition to its core activities of IT, competition law and the financial markets. Clients in all sectors are pretty evenly divided between domestic and international companies.

“We have clients both in Greece and overseas,” says Gramatidis. “I would say that there are some days when we have more of one than the other and others when the opposite is true. We have a large international client base and an equally large Greek one. In most of our dealings with foreign firms, we are dealing directly with lawyers and as a result things tend to follow a pattern. We are very used to this sort of business and work very well with in-house counsel. We know exactly what to do.

“There are certain sectors, however, such as the aviation industry, where the clients will come to us directly, usually directed to us by word of mouth, and we are equally comfortable with this set-up.”

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, in the country that gave us the peripatetic method, the aforementioned training in the firm takes the form of mentoring rather than any formal seminars. Gramatidis sees this as being particularly valuable in helping to pass on the requisite skills to maintain the firm’s much-admired standards of client service, particularly as it also helps to build a sense of teamwork among all of the firm’s employees.

“A client can expect Bahas, Gramatidis & Partners to be responsive, attentive and flexible, and to communicate on a regular basis and in understandable language,” claims Gramatidis. “We are committed to giving a personal service to clients. We are dedicated to teamwork and collegiality, and we derive great strength from being a true partnership of lawyers. We exchange ideas and this facilitates the development of creative solutions to our clients’ problems.”

Indeed, the exchange of ideas which Bahas, Gramatidis & Partners actively promotes is not just limited to members of its own firm, as it draws a wealth of knowledge and experience from a number of professional affiliations.

#### International networking

“International networking is something that is very important to us,” observes Gramatidis. “As a result of our

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“The marketing of the firm for the main part is through word of mouth,” says Gramatidis. “We have produced quite a number of publications – and will continue to do this, of course – and we have been invited to contribute to various others, as well as participating in conferences. We are also listed in various prestigious directories, although not everywhere – we have abandoned the policy of ensuring that we appear everywhere and in every directory. Perhaps most importantly, we have good personal contacts all over the globe. We also make personal visits to clients and to international law firms, enhancing our relationships and doing as much pro bono work as we can fit in. Then, of course, by working for the public organizations in Greece and for the government, we can get us some coverage. Finally there are always contacts to be made through our participation in the governing bodies of various associations, chambers of commerce and such. All of these are direct and indirect marketing and all help keep the profile of the firm, and that of our clients, up.”

international connections we can call on well-known and reputable law firms worldwide to help deliver local advice as well as global solutions. More specifically, it helps us help our Greek clients in setting up subsidiaries, branches and representative offices in various parts of the world, and in various commercial transactions throughout Europe, North America, South America, China, Russia and the Far East. It means we can deal with each transaction using our own lawyers, who specialize in such international transactions, and enlist the aid of local counsel we encounter through our international connections.”

The firm is also very active in a number of professional bodies and associations in Greece, including various chambers of commerce and local bar associations. In July 2007 Yanos Gramatidis took over the presidency of the American-Hellenic Chamber of Commerce, the largest bilateral chamber in Greece (it is also the fourth-largest American chamber in Europe in terms of membership and the first in terms of budget. Such memberships are, of course, helpful to the client in terms of the wide range of contacts and business networks that they put at the firm’s disposal; but they also work as a form of indirect marketing for the firm. This is particularly important given that the firm relies mainly on personal recommendation to win new clients and attract new business.

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