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New head of Panama register confident of fee strategy success

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New head of Panama register confident of fee strategy success

Secnaves 'to build on Torrijos success'

"THE continuation of the successful policies developed by Dr Hugo Torrijos over the last nine years" is the way Mrs Bosquez sees her job as head of the Panamanian ship register.

Dr Torrijos, the departing director general of secnaves which administers the register, and Mrs Bosquez are meeting with shipowners in various countries to explain the latest policy developed by secnaves — a substantial reduction in enrolment fees.

Dr Torrijos said that the reductions were in response to the 'price war' begun by Liberia last month. He added, however, that the \$2,500 flat fee was 'practical' for Liberia, but that Panama — with a more mixed fleet — needed a more flexible set of fees.

As a result, the fees were set according to size from \$500 for a 2,000 tons gross vessel up to a maximum fee of \$6,500 for a vessel over 50,000 tons. Previous enrolment fees were calculated on \$1 per net ton.

Dr Torrijos said it was not possible to make a true calculation of what the costs to the register might be of the reduction in fees because it was not possible to estimate how much tonnage might not have registered if the fees had remained high.

But if a direct comparison with 1988 revenue was made, the reductions would reduce income by \$5.2million. Total revenue in 1988 amounted to \$40m.

Dr Torrijos also took pains to explain that no disruption to vessel registration had — or would occur — due to the closure of the New York office.

He said, however, that the office had come under severe pressure in the months prior to its closure.

Dr Hugo Torrijos, who has spent nine years at the helm of the Panamanian ship register steering it through a difficult period, has resigned to be succeeded by Olga Bosquez Paveda. DEBORAH SEYMAN looks at the challenges she faces



Mrs Olga Bosquez Paveda

The difficulties experienced had contributed to the fall in the number of vessels being covered by the annual inspection programme. A full inspection programme would be re-introduced from November.

During their tour Dr Torrijos and Mrs Bosquez will be looking for possible locations for Secnaves offices. Dr Torrijos said it might be the case that they choose to set up two small offices — one in the Far East and one in Europe — rather than concentrate operations in one overseas location.

The Far East is now one of the register's major markets, with the US only accounting for about 10% and Europe, 20% of tonnage flying the Panamanian flag.

He added that despite "confrontation and crisis", August enrolments almost broke the 1million tons record, and overall 1989 registrations were above those in 1988.



Dr Hugo Torrijos

As the threat of the US barring Panamanian-flag vessels from US ports reappears, Dr Torrijos seems confident that this will not happen. He added that such a measure would be prejudicial to the freedom of maritime commerce and damage US trade.

Dr Torrijos also said there were suggestions that the initial rumour of this boycott had begun in Panama — rather than being formulated by the US State Department.

Those in the international shipping community who have dealt with Dr Torrijos during his nine years at the helm of Secnaves are sorry to see him leave.

The Federation of American Controlled Shipping, the grouping of US shipowners which has tonnage under foreign flags, told Lloyd's List that he has been a good friend over the years.

Dr Torrijos has not indicated what he will dedicate his energies to once he leaves Secnaves, but he said he would continue to work for his government.

Modestly dismissing the praise for his particular contribution to the Panamanian register, he said the work at Secnaves was not a matter of personalities but involved team work.

Mrs Bosquez is not a newcomer to the ship registration business but has been part of this team working in association with Secnaves for the last five years.

For the last year, after gaining a master's degree at the World Maritime University, Malmö, she has been the principal technical counterpart for Panama on the Panama maritime sector project sponsored by the International Maritime Organisation and the United Nations Development Programme.

The project is designed to help Panama get more out of its maritime sector given the strategic importance of the canal and of the ship register.

Mrs Bosquez sees the project as particularly important for her country in reaching the challenge of the year 2000 when full sovereignty of the canal is passed to Panama.

She also told Lloyd's List that she feels the new president of Panama, Francisco Rodriguez — who was appointed on Sept 1 when the former president's term of office came to an end — will give substantial support to the maritime sector.

Mrs Bosquez said she was looking forward to meeting the register's clientele during the tour with Dr Torrijos. She added that she hopes they will be able to not only "maintain the register's competitiveness but also attract new clients" on the basis of the new set of fees.

JOHN McLAUGHLIN reports from the Lloyd's

Minister praises