

High winds provide hotel construction challenge

Heavy lift and transport engineering provider Mammoet has been working on a new luxury hotel, La Luna, in Baku. As part of that project, Mammoet, which has an operational office in the city, had to design a solution to lift a huge curved bridge, weighing 2,100 tonnes, to link the 28-storey hotel's two towers at a height of 120 m.

"That area can experience wind speeds of up to 80 km/h so we knew our lift monitoring solution had to be optimised for immediate reporting on wind speed and load displacement," explained Dan Kempin, Mammoet's business development manager – offshore services.

Mammoet's solution involved preparing strand jacks on jacking beams, which were then mounted on each of the towers, 138 m above the ground.

That method, said Kempin, enabled the bridge, which measured 72 m x 20 m x 22 m, to be constructed entirely at ground level before being lifted. This minimised work at height and sped up construction.

"The bespoke design of our strand jack monitoring



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process ensured Mammoet could continue to operate within a greater window of wind speeds, as we could

monitor the real time wind effect – maximising the client's operational time," he added.

One of those is Colin Charnock, group ceo for Trans Global Projects (TGP), a UK-headquartered worldwide project logistics management provider, which has over the last 20 years worked in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, mainly on projects in the power generation, oil/gas and civil engineering sectors.

"Every country in the region is in the same boat, so to speak, and I do not perceive any country or group of countries to be more or less negatively impacted by the economic repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic," he commented. "The advantages and disadvantages each country possessed prior to the pandemic still prevail in its aftermath."

Pandemic effects

When asked about the impact of Covid-19 on current projects, Charnock said that in some cases there had been an understandable slowdown but not in all. "In the main, once a project achieves a final investment decision (FID) it will be completed and commissioned, if not necessarily within the original schedule. A project cancelled midway through construction is a rarity anywhere in the world, not just in the Caspian/Central Asian region."

Similar points were made by Irakli Tsankashvili, founder and ceo of Georgia-

headquartered TET Group, which includes Logistics Solutions, a forwarding and transportation company, and LS Heavylift which manages project cargo internationally, including to the Caspian/Central Asia

region, and particularly Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan.

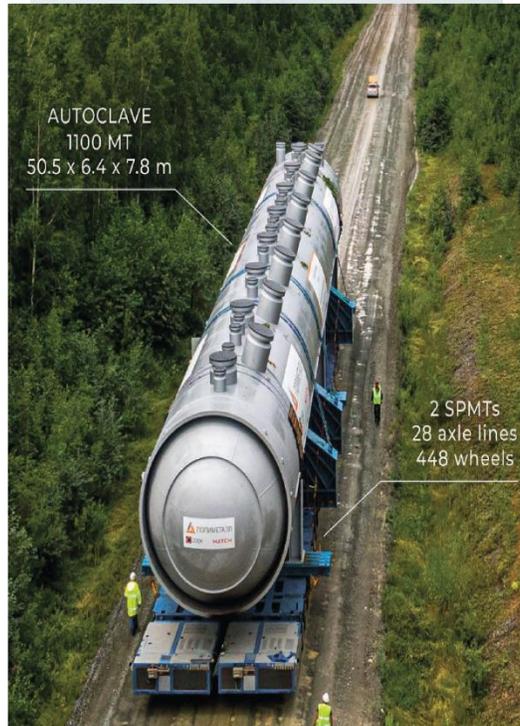
He reported that while the pandemic would lead to sluggish global economic growth and some level of recession, new infrastructure and energy projects in the Caspian/Central Asia region have so far seen only a temporary halt.

"The projects we are involved with have been postponed rather than cancelled. Actually, projects like those cannot be cancelled since most of them are funded by regional international financial organisations such as the World Bank, Asian Bank or Asian Development Bank," he commented.

Tsankashvili added that major projects in the Caspian/Central Asia region, such as BP's Azeri Central East offshore oil development in the Azerbaijan sector of the Caspian Sea and the Tengizchevroil (TCO) oilfield in Kazakhstan, could not be interrupted or halted because they are strategically significant international projects.

"All of them require strong logistical support, so we are not anticipating any drastic slumps in that regard, only a temporary standstill," he suggested.

Tsankashvili believes that energy projects will get back on track as soon as boundaries between countries are opened and direct communications restored. "We are already



observing the first movements toward resuming some projects,” he added.

Blue Water Shipping, a Denmark-headquartered provider of project logistics services whose presence in the region includes offices in Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Russia and Georgia, is involved in various projects in the Caspian and Central Asia region. Oil and gas, mining and renewable power generation are the busiest sectors, with current work including the execution of several major contracts relating to the TCO FGP (Future Growth Project) at the Tengiz oilfield in Kazakhstan.

“We have seen some projects around the Caspian and in Central Asia cancelled or delayed, but at the same time we are also experiencing progress on other future projects that are still scheduled to take place,” stated Thomas Bek, global director energy and projects at Blue Water. “Oil is the key export for many countries in that region and future investment will happen.”

Five-year contract

In this regard, Germany-headquartered global logistics provider Bertling announced during August that it has been awarded a further five-year contract with TCO to manage the delivery of materials to the Tengiz oilfield. Bertling also highlighted the continuing general pandemic-related logistics challenges in this part of the world, noting that its teams in Kazakhstan are working “in difficult situations caused by the Covid-19 lockdown in the country”.

A second project involved Bertling’s operation in Tbilisi, Georgia, delivering two out-of-gauge (OOG) transformers, each weighing 53 tonnes and with a maximum height of 3.56 m, to a hydropower plant in the country.

Looking ahead, though, TGP’s Charnock suggested Covid-19 and related economic developments could lead to some changes in the type of major new projects being commissioned in the Caspian/Central Asia region over the next few years.

“There is likely to be an increase in renewable energy projects being sanctioned, but probably also a downturn in new oil and gas projects seeing the light of day for a few years,” he stated.

He added that Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, in particular, are well into the cycle of several multi-billion dollar projects already under construction and due to be completed in the next year or two.

Nevertheless, Mammoet’s Kempin suggested that projects would be delayed and reappraised, while some plans could potentially be scaled down. “However, if you



The deepwater Gunashli platform in the Caspian Sea, offshore Azerbaijan.

look at Azerbaijan, for example, it has many offshore oil and gas projects in the pipeline – Karabagh, Gum Deniz, Bahar and Umid/Babek, to name but a few,” he pointed out.

Even so, said Yoldashov, the recent slowdown in overall oil and gas industry activity is encouraging major logistics companies servicing the Caspian/Central Asia region to look at expanding their operations in other sectors.

“Construction of wind farms, for example, does not really seem to be affected by Covid-19 issues and Central Asian countries are witnessing a general increase in renewable energy projects,” he stated.

Reflecting that trend, he continued, Mammoet is diversifying its service offerings into sectors that are following an upward trajectory. “Wind energy, for example, requires similar skills and equipment to the oil and gas sector,” he pointed out.



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– Irakli Tsankashvili, TET Group

TET’s Tsankashvili reaffirmed the suggestion that in the longer-term, countries in the region will see a wider range of projects coming through alongside the oil/gas and mining developments it is currently best-known for.

Oil and gas projects

To date, he explained, TET’s logistics companies have been involved primarily with oil/gas sector projects in Azerbaijan, including the lift and movement of a 1,500-tonne structure for the Azerkimiya petrochemical plant last year, and developments in Uzbekistan.

“However, we should not overlook the enormous potential of the other Caspian Sea/Central Asia region countries such as Turkmenistan, Iran and Kazakhstan,” he said. “Apart from an increasing level of mining activity and the implementation of associated projects, those countries have recently been actively investing in the diversification of their economies, and developing the production of building materials and fertilisers, as well as investing in machinery construction and metallurgy. All those projects call for delivery of various types of cargo and we are keeping them on the radar.”

Mammoet’s Kempin also highlighted a few other more general potential repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic for logistics providers looking to win new contracts and/or working on existing projects in the Caspian/Central Asia regions.

Possible developments, he suggested, include more localisation of the workforce where possible and supply chains being less ‘just-in-time’, with more materials/equipment being located close to site to enable work to continue for at least two months in the event of any border closures.

