The project
The South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) system exports gas from Shah Deniz field in the Caspian Sea via the coastal Sangachal terminal in Azerbaijan through the Caucasus to the Georgia–Turkey border. Accommodating the latest gas finds in the Caspian Sea (Shah Deniz 2 Project) requires a capacity increase in the SCP system through the addition of new pipeline loops and compression facilities: the SCPX project.

RSK’s role
RSK undertook the environment and social impact assessment (ESIA) of the proposed facilities to support the consents process for a 52-in. pipeline loop running parallel to the existing SCP pipeline, 55 km of which will be in Georgia and 385 km in Azerbaijan. The ESIA also included a compressor station and metering station located alongside facilities in Georgia. An additional compressor station is also necessary in a greenfield site in a remote part of Georgia, which will require a 16-km access road.

The project included route surveys for ecology, soil classification, traffic, noise, air quality, surface water quality, and landscape and visual impact, and socioeconomic community interviews and reporting, which RSK teams from the UK and local experts undertook. RSK prepared the baseline environmental report.

RSK worked closely with the engineers in London to quantify the project footprint and prepare the introductory project description chapters of the ESIA.

The ESIA report, which followed the preparation of the environmental baseline report, included an assessment of the effects of the construction and operation of the pipeline and its associated facilities. The commitments made in the assessment chapters were captured in a commitments register, which was based on the division of the detailed environmental and social management and monitoring plans (ESMMP).

The ESIA and the ESMMPs were submitted to the Georgian and Azeri regulatory authorities as draft reports, and were accompanied by several public meetings held along the route of the pipeline. Parallel meetings held with the government and the regulatory authorities sought comments on the findings in the draft report.

RSK amended the draft ESIA documents to take into account the comments and reissued the reports as final. Regulatory approval was given in June 2013.

The pipeline diameter was subsequently changed from 52 to 48 in., which necessitated an additional 23 km of pipeline in Azerbaijan and 6 km in Georgia. RSK was commissioned to undertake further studies and an addendum ESIA within six months. The reports followed the same format as that of the full ESIA and included additional environmental and social baseline studies.

Challenges
RSK has been operating in the Caspian region since 1995, trading as AETC in Azerbaijan, and has established good working relationships with local contractors and environmental and social experts, including local universities and academic institutions. RSK staff worked alongside these experts to provide the stringent project planning required for the SCPX ESIA work to ensure that the teams operating in remote locations arrived at their destinations safely and were able to undertake the work in a controlled manner that could be replicated after the pipeline had been installed.

Before the deployment of any survey team, in the field a go–no-go system was implemented that carefully checked the planned activities before permission was given to undertake the work. Daily reports and toolbox talks before leaving for site ensured that all the staff understood the activities to be undertaken that day and had the appropriate equipment.

Transport to site was considered one of the greatest safety risks, so RSK employed trained specialist drivers using cars modified to include roll protection and tracking systems to check driver behaviour.

RSK completed the surveys over one year without incident.

The outcome
To date, RSK has been involved in the £3 million project for over four years. The overall project has now received consent and is currently awaiting consent for the addendum report. Construction for the SCPX is due to commence in 2015.