In 2016, Colas acquired several companies in partnership in the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Qatar, covering the production of construction materials – via quarries and asphalt plants – and road construction and maintenance. Report from the Persian Gulf.

**Colas in the land of Black Gold**

In the suffocating June heat, only half of the Burj Khalifa is visible. Along with Dubai’s artificial palm-shaped islands, the world's highest tower – it soars 830 meters into the sky – is iconic. The city, nestled between desert and sea on the Persian Gulf, fascinates and attracts in equal measures. In early 2016, Colas Middle East opened its offices here having acquired the stakes owned by Anglo American Group in the capital of six companies held or operated in partnership with leading local players (Al Futtaim, Al Zawawi and Midmac), in the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Qatar. With two quarries, 10 asphalt plants and 15 asphalt application teams across three countries, these acquisitions are an illustration of Colas' vertical integration strategy; aggregate production in quarries, asphalt production in asphalt plants and, using the materials produced, road construction and maintenance operations. A perfect example of an end-to-end presence throughout the value chain.

**External growth**

"As part of its targeted external growth strategy, Colas’ management had identified the Middle East as a development zone", explains Paul-Henri Aumont, Colas Middle East Managing Director. With significant infrastructure requirements, countries that are politically and economically stable, a qualified and competent workforce and a growth rate of around 4%, the context was favorable. Having visited various facilities in the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Qatar, the program was >
MIDDLE EAST
In 2016, Colas Middle East opened an office in Dubai following the acquisition in partnership of several companies in the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Qatar.
SHAWKAH QUARRY
Every year, 4.5 million tons of aggregates are produced at the Shawkah quarry, 80 km from Dubai.

launched. The strengths of Colas Middle East? “We are positioned as asphalt mix specialists, applying the highest standards of safety. Moreover, our aim is to bring our expertise and innovations in the field of road construction to these countries”, adds Paul-Henri Aumont.

The Group’s biggest quarry
The Shawkah quarry is located an hour’s drive from Dubai, towards the border with the Sultanate of Oman. On the way, the commotion of the city and its buildings are replaced by the calm of the desert sand dunes. “Producing 4.5 million tons of aggregates annually and with reserves of 520 million tons, it is the Group’s largest quarry”, underlines Graham Jones, Industry Manager. It operates round the clock, 7 days a week, supplying materials to sites up to 500 km from Dubai. Opened in 2005, its peak production came in 2008, with 9 million tons of aggregates produced for a number of major projects in Dubai such as The Palm, a luxury residential and tourist complex built on palm-shaped artificial islands on land reclaimed from the sea. “At the time, there was a constant stream of trucks loaded with aggregates leaving the site, stretching for more than a mile”, recalls Graham Jones.

Anticipating environmental regulations
Dust management is a major environmental concern at all quarries, including Shawkah. One way to minimize dust emissions is to water the tracks. But here, one of the objectives is to reduce the amount of water required to operate the site. “We’re currently working with Dust-A-Side (DAS), Colas’ subsidiary in South Africa specializing in mining site haul road maintenance. Its process, which uses bitumen-based emulsion solutions to stabilize roads, reduces both the amount of dust emitted and water consumption. This synergy allows us to anticipate environmental regulations”, explains Alexandre Salley, the quarry’s Assistant Manager.

Managing dust is also of vital importance due to the damage it causes to vehicle filters, mechanics and tires. This is a gabbro quarry. Gabbro is an igneous magmatic rock ranging in color.
JEDEL AL ASPHALT PLANT
Located 50 km from Dubai, the Jeddah asphalt plant produces 180,000 tons of asphalt mixes annually.
SAFETY
Colas Middle East’s safety policy hinges around 10 golden rules. Here, the STOP card can be used by any employee to call a halt to an activity if he or she thinks it doesn’t comply with safety rules.

DUBAI HILLS
On the site of the Dubai Hills real estate project, teams from Colas Middle East are building the roads.
“Indians, Pakistanis, Filipinos, French, British, Nepalese, etc.: the teams at Colas Middle East are truly multicultural. More than 25 nationalities live and work together in the various entities.”

from dark green to black. It is extremely abrasive and dense, causing considerable wear and tear to equipment. A maintenance and welding workshop, along with a storage facility for spare parts near the quarry, are used to carry out repairs to vehicles without having to worry about supply times – six weeks by boat.

Safety first

2,700 days. More than seven years have gone by without a lost time accident at the Shawkah quarry. Safety is an integral part of the corporate culture at Colas Middle East. “It’s part of daily life, fully embraced by all employees”, explains Craig Streak, Regional Safety, Health and Environment Manager. Safety policy hinges around 10 golden rules, good practices that every employee must adhere to. “Everyone has an active role to play, particularly through the use of the STOP card, whereby any employee can bring an activity to a halt whenever he/she thinks it does not comply with rules or safety conditions are not being met. Safety at work is a permanent and ongoing endeavor”, adds Craig Streak.

Harsh weather

From the air-conditioned control room at the Jebel Ali asphalt plant, 50 km from Dubai, Filipino foreman Edwin Manapat Cruz keeps an eye on asphalt loading and delivery operations for the Dubai Hills real estate project a few kilometers away. “The plant starts early, well before the sites.” And with outside temperatures already hovering around 40°C at 8 o’clock in the morning, there’s little chance of the asphalt cooling en route! On the site, road construction teams from Colas Middle East are already at work, sporting their personal protective equipment (PPE). In the summer, due to the extreme heat and the risks of dehydration, there is a complete ban on working outside between noon and 3 p.m. Throughout the day, employees must make sure they drink plenty of water – one of the golden safety rules at Colas Middle East. These principles are reiterated at the daily Safety Meeting.

A reactive company

Let’s move onto the Abu Dhabi Mafraq asphalt plant. Another Colas Middle East facility, different customers. “Here, we carry out numerous projects – lasting from 2 weeks to a maximum of 2 months – for customers who demand a considerable degree of reactivity”, explains Youssef Arja, Lebanese-born site foreman. “Furthermore, we’re also keen to offer customers the specialty products that the Colas Group is known for.”

Multiculturalism and expats

Meanwhile, back at the Shawkah quarry, it’s lunchtime. The canteen echoes to the sound of conversation and, despite differences of language and culture, sport is always a safe bet, especially when it comes to cricket! Indians, Pakistanis, Filipinos, French, British, Nepalese, etc.: the teams at Colas Middle East are truly multicultural. More than 25 nationalities live and work together in the various entities. “This diversity is Colas Middle East’s strength, underlines Paul-Henri Aumont. “We are keen to ensure the comfort and well-being of our employees, most of whom are expats, separated from their families for eleven months at a time.” A stone’s throw from the current living quarters, new, more modern and more comfortable facilities are being built. “We conducted a complete audit of living and leisure conditions”, continues Paul-Henri Aumont. “We used the results to develop our own standards in a program called “Colas: we care”, which includes nutritional and lifestyle advice among other things.” An undertaking by Colas Middle East that has been welcomed by employees: “Management listens to us, motivates us and encourages us. Colas really looks after us.”

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en route

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