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20  
YEARS



## of Collaborative Success: AmCham Georgia & BLC Law Office

### Interview by **GIORGI BATLIDZE**

Partner at **BLC Law Office**

In a milestone year for both institutions, AmCham Georgia commemorates its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, simultaneously marking two decades of collaboration with BLC Law Office. These twenty years have not only witnessed the growth of both entities but have also significantly contributed to the development of Georgia's legal framework and entrepreneurial landscape.

AmCham Georgia stands as the largest international business chamber in the country, boasting over 200 business members. The organization plays a pivotal role in providing a platform for businesses to raise critical issues

and advocate for policy reforms. AmCham serves as a prominent advocate for businesses in its role with the Georgian government and other authorities, actively contributing to the country's development.

To shed light on the past 20 years of collaboration, I spoke with George Welton, Executive Director of AmCham Georgia, and Ketti Kvartskhava, Managing Partner of BLC Law Office and Member of AmCham's Board of Directors.

**Ketti, how would you describe AmCham's role in Georgia?**

Georgia is a young democracy that embarked on the construction of its democratic institutions in the late 1990s, coinciding with the establishment of AmCham Georgia. There is a prevalent misconception that democracy and the rule of law are concepts pertinent

solely to governmental authorities and the judicial system. In reality, non-governmental organizations play an even more significant role in this regard. These organizations provide a crucial platform for the exchange of ideas, the raising of issues, and advocacy for a better environment in a developing country. It is essential not to overlook the fact that the U.S. is widely regarded as the most important strategic partner for Georgia. Therefore, AmCham is not just about business; it also facilitates bilateral exchange between the Georgian and American people.

I believe that AmCham, as one of the oldest and by far the largest international business chamber in Georgia, plays a pivotal role in fostering the development of the Georgian business environment and enhancing bilateral relations between Georgia and the U.S.

**Can you elaborate on the idea that AmCham is about more than just business?**

Indeed, AmCham's impact extends beyond legal and entrepreneurial realms. Personally, I as a board member have been engaged with diplomatic and trade delegations from the U.S., advocating for Georgia as an attractive destination for investment and business. I have also contributed to student exchange programs, recognizing the importance of educating the younger generation for Georgia's future. This emphasis on education is not accidental; I pursued my master's degree in the U.S., and I am extremely grateful for this opportunity as it significantly helped me become who I am today. Many of my friends and colleagues at AmCham share the same experience. Georgia is not a resource-rich country. Human capital can be seen as the main driver of development. Reflecting on what a limited number of Western-educated individuals have achieved in this country, I am confident that education will be a cornerstone of development in the years to come.

**Thinking back over the last 25 years, what do you see as some of the most significant reform and advocacy initiatives that BLC has contributed to in partnership with AmCham?**

I have actively participated in significant policy reforms, particularly in evaluating the draft law on competition. Our involvement has contributed to enhancing provisions, making them more predictable and less burdensome for businesses. Additionally, I have been part of discussions regarding amendments to the tax code, emphasizing the crucial role of the Commercial Law & Tax (CLT) Committee. The CLT Committee is actively involved in communication with AmCham members to advocate on their behalf and speak with a unified voice towards governmental authorities.

**George, after 25 years of AmCham working hand in hand with the Georgian business community, what accomplishments are you most proud of?**

It's very hard to highlight one particular accomplishment. We've worked extensively on many areas of reform and have had a significant impact on tax, corporate governance, competition policy, the labor code, Georgia's visa regime, support for entrepreneurs, developments in tourism and energy, and much more. I think we were also very useful during the Covid-19 pandemic as a means of helping people communicate with each other, get information about what was happening, and advocate and engage with the government. Against that backdrop, I think I am most proud of how many active members we have - people who would not know each other, if it were not for AmCham, and who have been able to more effectively grow their businesses and build important connections because of us.

**From your perspective, what role have BLC and Ketti Kvartskhava played in AmCham's success?**

Ketti is one of the longest standing members of the AmCham Board of Directors and having someone on the board with that level of experience, combined with her expertise and general professionalism, is enormously useful. She is also a good friend, which enhances my enjoyment of my job!

Beyond the board, BLC has been a major contributor to the Commercial Law and Tax committee since its formation and has given enormous amounts of pro-bono time to work on legislative analysis. The transformation of the legal sector in Georgia is one of the greatest highlights of Georgia's commercial development, and I am very proud that Georgia has local firms like BLC. It is thanks to firms like this that the CLT committee and AmCham are so effective on policy issues.

As AmCham Georgia and BLC Law Office celebrate the 20th anniversary of their friendship and 25 years of AmCham in Georgia, the legacy of their collaboration stands as a testament to the positive impact they have had on Georgia's business landscape and legal framework. We at BLC are very much looking forward to our continued cooperation and are certain that 20 years from now, we will be able to say we helped Georgia develop into a prosperous democracy with a thriving entrepreneurial landscape!

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