American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo

2019 Annual Report

January 2020
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Dear Members,

It's been quite a year for us at the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo with 105 events in 248 working days, and always striving to keep our members at the heart of everything we do. I would like to thank our members for their loyalty and support, our Board of Governors for their leadership and our staff for their relentless work.

AmCham entered its fifteenth year of existence with a five-year strategy, having the promotion of the USA-Kosovo economic relations as its main pillar. We provided Kosovo’s Government with recommendations on the functionalization of the Kosovo-American Economic City, or the Special American Economic Zone.

We have recognized for the first time the member companies that have actively contributed to enhancing the trade and business relations between the United States of America and Kosovo. Furthermore, we have hosted delegations of American businesses, students and institutional representatives visiting Kosovo.

With our Board of Governors, we have completed a very productive mission to United States of America, meeting with ten members of the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate and promoting Kosovo’s achievements and economic cooperation opportunities.

Nevertheless, we have remained very active in our advocacy efforts, reviewing and proposing recommendations to Government’s legislative initiatives, always taking into consideration the views of our members. We have prepared the 2019 Growth Roadmap document, with AmCham’s recommendations for the new Government after October’s parliamentary elections. At the same time, we have conducted two studies, 2019 Manufacturing Index, and 2019 Corruption Perception Study.

We take particular pride in being a partner of the Global Entrepreneurship Week in Kosovo, organized under the leadership of the Innovation Center Kosovo (ICK). This year has been special as we have been recognized by ICK with the GEW Kosovo Champion of the Year award, for the largest number of events - 14 events in 6 days - in which we shared stories of successful entrepreneurs with young people throughout Kosovo.

And last but definitely not least, AmCham and its members have remained true champions of corporate social responsibility, demonstrated through fast and unique mobilization in support of earthquake affected areas and people of Albania, but also many other important causes in Kosovo.

No better way to mark our fifteenth anniversary than to work hard and continue to deliver on the promises of AmCham’s founding members.

Sincerely,

Arian Zeka

Executive Director
1. EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

1.1. AmCham Foundation donates equipment to a Vocational High School in Lipjan

January 9, 2019 - The Foundation of the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo donated IT and other equipment and to the Vocational High School “Adem Gllavica” in Lipjan. The donation includes computers, chairs, and a printer, and it will also provide basic equipment for a laboratory in order to help students practice in subjects regarding economy and entrepreneurship. On this occasion, AmCham Executive Director, Arian Zeka, said that such initiatives aim on improving the environment for students in schools in Kosovo in order to prepare them for the labor market, whereas thanks to the continuous support of AmCham members, these initiatives will continue during 2019 as well. This initiative was also supported by these companies: IPKO, Meridian, Coca Cola HBC, Limak-Prishtina International Airport, Gjirafa, American Clinic, NLB Bank, Railtrans and Orbico. AmCham Foundation functions since 2012, through which a considerable amount of funds is raised for the purpose of educating youth, especially in rural areas in Kosovo.

1.2. AmCham members meet Prime Minister Haradinaj

January 10, 2019 – Despite the fact that during 2018 many reforms were made in the environment of doing business as well as providing tax incentives for businesses in the country, economy will remain the main priority of the Government of Kosovo during 2019. This was said today during the roundtable organized by the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo with the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kosovo, Ramush Haradinaj, where it was mainly discussed about the economic development of the country and also the future steps in improving the business environment. President of AmCham Board of Governors, Ilir Ibrahimi, said that AmCham has welcomed the fiscal reforms during 2018. He expressed AmCham’s readiness in increasing cooperation as well as presenting recommendations in further facilitating the process of doing business in Kosovo.

Prime Minister of the Republic of Kosovo, Ramush Haradinaj, said that the main priority of the Government during 2019 will be the economic development of the country, adding that they have chosen AmCham the starting point in accomplishing this priority. He said that fiscal reforms in the environment of doing business will be further advanced during this year, mentioning the need to increase the dialogue between the public and private sectors as an essential factor in attaining economic development in the country. Prime Minister Haradinaj mentioned the paramount importance of further developing the Special American Economic Zone which will result in numerous foreign direct investments in the country. Further on, he added that the Government of
Kosovo will work on facilitating legal procedures that directly affect the development of businesses, while thanking AmCham for its readiness on continuous dialogue and cooperation in this regard.

1.3. **A group of students from Iowa visit AmCham**

January 11, 2019 – A group of students from Drake University from the U.S. country, Iowa, led by Tonia Land and Stephanie Dana Ely, visited the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo in order to learn more on the environment of doing business in Kosovo. The students were informed about AmCham's activities. They were interested to learn also about the business environment and the current situation in economy in general after the war and onwards, as well as about the challenges that businesses face in Kosovo. The discussion was also focused on the importance of further advancing the state partnership between Kosovo and Iowa. Since 2013, the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo has contributed in strengthening the Kosovo-Iowa partnership which initially started in the military sector and now has also expanded in other areas such as economy, education, and healthcare.

1.4. **AmCham and SCAAK with recommendations on the draft law on tax administration and procedures**

January 16, 2019 – The American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo and the Society of Certified Accountants and Auditors of Kosovo (SCAAK) organized a roundtable with businesses and professional accountants to discuss on the comments and recommendations for the Draft Law on Tax Administration and Procedures which comprises of essential amendments compared to the previous law. The Head of SCAAK Quality Control Department, Arber Hoti, informed the participants on the amendments of the law regarding tax returns, self-assessment, payment, interest, credits, refunds, etc. He also presented SCAAK recommendations which aim to facilitate business operations as well as the clarification of certain articles within the tax legislation.

Chairwoman of AmCham Tax Committee, Grese Rexhepi, spoke about the establishment of the Reviewing Board which will help businesses in having their appeals being reviewed and answered within 30 days. She said that transparency within this institution would be even higher with the publication of decisions made from the Board in this regard. She added that the foreseen amendments for the draft law on tax administration and procedures are a crucial step in tax legislation, however, certain issues require further clarification. Whereas, Chairperson of the SCAAK Tax Committee, Fahri Breznica, said that the other important issues that require our attention should also be the taxpayer's rights, the Tax Administration approach to them, as well as the documentation of control reports findings.

1.5. **Businesses should be informed more on intellectual property**

January 17, 2019 – The American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo organized a workshop on Intellectual Property in Kosovo and European Union where businesses got informed on the latest developments made in this area as well as the progress made in the implementation of Stabilization-Association Agreement obligations. This workshop was organized as part of a project that is financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), managed by the Kosovar Civil Society Foundation (KCSF).

AmCham Executive Director, Arian Zeka, said that the purpose of this workshop is to inform businesses on dispositions that regulate intellectual property rights issues that derive from the Stabilization-Association Agreement that went into effect on April 1, 2016, such as geographical indicators, author’s rights, etc. He said that Kosovo has established a good legislation in this area, urging a higher commitment from all in higher implementation. Kujtesa Nezaj-Shelu, Consultant, made a presentation on the intellectual property rights where businesses were informed on types of intellectual property, current mechanisms in this area, and also obligations deriving from the Stabilization-Association Agreement for Kosovo. She also clarified that the legislation is mostly in line with EU directives, however, further improvements should be made in implementing this legislation.

Director of the Office on the Copyright and Related Rights, Valon Kashtanjeva, explained the role of the office he leads, adding that businesses are not very well informed on the importance of intellectual property. He also explained in detail types of acts that are within the author’s rights.
Furthermore, he added that, in comparison to industrial property, acts within this category do not need to be registered since protection will be offered from the moment the act is created.

Director of Kosovo Industrial Property Agency, Nezir Gashi, mentioned the challenges the agency has faced in this regard, mentioning the need of increasing human and financial capacities in the agency. He also informed the participants that institutions should prioritize increasing awareness amongst the business community on intellectual property and its implementation in order to implement and carry out obligations deriving from the Stabilization-Association Agreement.

1.6. AmCham held its annual meeting of the General Assembly

January 18, 2019 – The American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo held its annual meeting of the General Assembly during which the the new untiiled members of the Board of Governors were elected, whereas the Annual Program and the Supporting Budget for 2019 were approved. In his speech, President of the Board of Governors, Ilir Ibråhimî, said that despite the challenges faced last year, 2018 was a successful year, thanking the Board members and the Executive Director. He also thanked AmCham members for their continuous support to the organization, saying that in 2019 AmCham will continue advocacy efforts for further improvement of the doing business environment. Executive Director, Arian Zeka, presented the financial and activities reports of AmCham in 2018, as well as the Annual Program and the Supporting Budget 2019, which are based in five pillars of the five-year strategic plan approved by the Board of Governors. The General Assembly delegates elected seven new untiiled members of the Board of Governors Mrike Macula representing the Association of Regional Development Agencies, Arjeta Spahiu representing Blanchard Leadership/Advoco Solutions, Agim Bekaj representing Microsoft, Liridon Mavrïqi representing Contour Global, Neritan Tira representing Coca-Cola HBC Kosovo, Driton Zairi representing Ford Kosova Motors, and Hysen Lajqi representing HIB Corporation.

1.7. AmCham and BCC sign memorandum of cooperation

January 23, 2019 – The American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo and Business Consultants Council (BCC) have signed a memorandum of cooperation which will serve as a bridge in creating opportunities and social and economic development. This agreement will generate new opportunities in the consulting industry and the private sector by organizing networking events, advocating the roles of standards and certifications, empowering and increasing medium and small enterprises’ capacities and performance with professional programs, digitalization of sectors, industries, and business processes. AmCham Executive Director, Arian Zeka, mentioned that the institution he leads will provide support to the only association that represents management consulting in Kosovo, Business Consultants Council, and that they are open to cooperation opportunities. During this meeting was also discussed about organizing the Global Consulting Week, which will be marked in June 2019 by BCC, as a parallel activity with 50 countries worldwide which will promote the importance of selecting specialized consultants. Representatives from both institutions, AmCham Executive Director, Arian Zeka, and BCC Executive Director, Jehona Lluka, agreed on working in achieving the goals set in the agreement which will encourage, promote, and support economic cooperation between their members, experts, and professional teams, with a common interest.

1.8. Fiscal reforms, a crucial step in facilitating doing business in Kosovo

January 28, 2019 – Stable economic development in the country is directly affected from the private sector advancement, and, therefore, facilitations and fiscal reforms in this direction are essential in continuing economic growth and macrofiscal stability. This was said during the roundtable organized by the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo with Minister of Finance, Bedri Hamza, on the effects of fiscal reforms in the environment of doing business in Kosovo. AmCham Executive Director, Arian Zeka, said that being one of the most important institutions for the private sector, the Ministry of Finance has undertaken numerous fiscal reforms in 2018 which have affected further business empowerment and development, thus thanking Minister Hamza for their cooperation in this direction.

Minister of Finance, Bedri Hamza, said that 2018 marked a large number of fiscal reforms which resulted in facilitations for the private sector in Kosovo and have also reflected in better revenue performance. He said that the private sector is the main accelerator of economic development in the
country, therefore businesses should be approached directly in order to address their challenges and barriers. Minister Hamza said that 2019 will be characterized with more fiscal reforms which aim on helping the private sector and simplifying tax procedures and to avoid creating barriers and burden for businesses.

1.9. Manufacturers ask for a unique identification number

January 31, 2019 – Issues affecting the manufacturing sector, primarily the necessity on identifying manufacturing entities through an identification number were the main focus in the Breakfast of the Manufacturing Committee of the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo organized with representatives from the Ministry of Finance and Tax Administration of Kosovo. Chairperson of AmCham Manufacturing Committee, Kujtim Gjevori, while evaluating the fiscal reforms which have resulted in growth of manufacturing companies in Kosovo, he mentioned the need of adequate identification of companies in this sector in order to have a fair and equal evaluation and to precede issues of paramount importance in the further development of this sector in the future whether in enabling easier access to finance and also in fighting unfair competition.

Lulzim Rafuna from the Ministry of Finance mentioned that this institution welcomes proposals and recommendations which aim on empowering the private sector in general. He said that the Ministry of Finance is focused on drafting policies that aim primarily on avoiding creating difficulties in private sector development, but rather to help and facilitate doing business. Therefore, Rafuna considered that such an identification number would make a better differentiation between manufacturing and other companies, which would also impact fair competition growth amongst others. However, he added that this should be made by clearly setting identification criteria. Nahit Sharku from Tax Administration of Kosovo also agreed on the importance of equipping manufacturing entities with the identification number since he considers that this also affects in addressing tax issues, and facilitates Tax Administration operations in general. In this direction, Sharku said that he welcomes the idea of AmCham Manufacturing Committee about the identification number and that they remain available in developing this concept.

1.10. Purchasing of goods without tender harms free competition

February 6, 2019 – In-house procurement is a delicate sphere which should be urgently regulated through provisions that foresee equal treatment of public and private sectors in procurement activities, in order to enable fair competition and equal access. This was said in the roundtable organized by the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo. AmCham expresses its belief that “in-house” procurement, respectively purchase of products and services from public enterprises without undergoing public procurement procedures, is a topic that remains a subject of criticisms from business associations, civil society, and international institutions, since the practices applied in awarding contracts are considered to be in conflict with constitutional and legal provisions on equality between public and private sectors, even more so that public enterprises should be treated equally with the private sector in concordance with the Law on Public Enterprises. Head of Public Procurement Regulatory Commission, Osman Vishaj, said that in-house procurement is a field for which this institution, in the past, was obliged to take steps in enabling interpretation of relevant provisions in order to set conditions and regulate this issue which is permissible with the law on public procurement. However, he confirmed that in-house procurement is a sphere which should be considered in being further addressed in the future, and this can be done by drafting the new law on procurement, by encouraging the business community to give comments and recommendations in this direction.

Head of Balkan Institute for Public Procurement, Ilaz Duli, said that procurement should be analyzed in general by three components: legislative, institutional, and the implementation component. He said that Kosovo lacks good implementation in this area, especially in regulating issues in in-house procurement, despite having a good stance in the first two aspects with advanced legislation and proper institutional mechanisms. However, Duli said that besides the good legislation in in-house procurement, the current article 9.4 of the Law on Public Procurement foresees that it has never been amended since 2004, thus not following the development of the private and public sector. Furthermore, he said that the provision which allows in-house procurement is quite broad, however it requires the contracting authority before initiating the procurement activity to consider all the possibilities of fulfilling the requirements, whereas the aim of the authority offering services and products should not be the profit. In conclusion, Duli mentioned the problems in in-house
procurement in Kosovo that became evident in 2016 with the interpretation of Article 9.4 of the Law on Public Procurement from the Public Procurement Regulatory Commission, therefore it is an issue which directly affects fair competition and should be regulated properly through the new Law on Public Procurement or by changing the PPRC’s interpretation.

1.11. Development of infrastructure will facilitate business operations in Drenas

February 13, 2019 – Development of infrastructure, favorable policies, and reduction of bureaucracy in the municipal level increases efficiency and enables the development of operating businesses in Drenas. This was said during the meeting with the Mayor of Municipality of Drenas, Ramiz Lladrovci, organized by the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo in cooperation with the Regional Development Agency-Center. Mayor of the Municipality of Drenas, Ramiz Lladrovci, in his opening remarks said that increasing the cooperation between the private sector and the institution he leads reflects growth of efficiency and better allocation of the Municipality budget. By pledging to continue creating better conditions in the development of businesses, Lladrovci mentioned a number of foreseen capital infrastructural investments in the Municipality of Drenas in energy and roads in order to facilitate the movement of goods and people. He also said that the Municipality of Drenas is in the drafting stage of a development and urban plan which will allow a better spatial planning.

AmCham Executive Director, Arian Zeka, said that continuously informing businesses on the projects of the Municipality, in which a stakeholder is directly affected whereas the other plays a crucial role in the economy area by drafting policies, is necessary in establishing dialogue structures between sectors which is directly reflected in rapid development of the private sector and higher revenues for the Municipality. Amongst others, Zeka also mentioned that the initiative of the Municipality of Drenas in completing the infrastructure is of great impact since this area in the past made it difficult for operating businesses in Drenas to expand. Executive Director of Regional Development Agency-Center, and also member of the Board of Governors of AmCham Kosovo, Mrika Macula, said that the Municipality of Drenas by publishing data regarding business issues has reflected in this Municipality to be evaluated as the most transparent municipality in Kosovo. Besides this, Macula mentioned that the Municipality of Drenas has managed to decrease the number of bureaucratic procedures which will facilitate the administrative load for businesses. Chairman of AmCham Manufacturing Committee, Kujtim Gjvori, while praising the low level of bureaucracy in the Municipality of Drenas, said that the need to provide opportunities for further development of businesses which are mainly engaged in the manufacturing sector making up the highest percentage of creating new jobs. He mentioned that some companies in this sector which operate in property given by the Municipality to utilize find it impossible to take loans which would be helpful in their business growth, therefore a creative solution is necessary in addressing this issue.

1.12. Charity Bowling Tournament

February 13, 2019 – The Foundation of the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo organized the first charity event for 2019, the Charity Bowling Tournament where businesses from various sectors financially supported this cause to help people in need. The winner of the AmCham Charity Bowling Tournament is NLB Bank team comprising of Shpresa Begolli and Fitim Kaçaniku, whereas the second place went to Alban Bacaq and Evetar Zeqiri from Recura Financials. Member companies that participated in this fundraising activity include Coca-Cola HBC Kosovo (3 teams), Artillery One (3 teams), NLB Bank (2 teams), Recura Financials (2 teams), Vi-Print, Limak Kosovo, HIB Petrol, American Clinic, Railtrains, World Vision Kosova, Banka Ekonomike, and AmCham.

1.13. TAK Director committed to strengthening partnership with AmCham

February 20, 2019 – Tax Administration of Kosovo will continue the cooperation with the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo in order to maintain the close partnership between them, and it will be engaged in improving the environment of doing business in general. This was said today during the Breakfast for Executives organized with the new General Director of Tax Administration of Kosovo and leaders and members of the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo. TAK General Director, Ilir Murtezaj, said that he will be committed in creating better relations with taxpayers, encouraging them to directly report their issues and challenges in TAK, pledging to effectively address them. He said that TAK plays a crucial role in improving the environment of doing business for which he said will be his priority. Murtezaj said that he will continue the close cooperation with AmCham but also with other private sector representatives, while also mentioning the issued public
explanatory decision on tax treatment of long-term construction contracts as a step in overcoming this problem for businesses in the construction sector.

1.14. Lack of labor force, a growing concern for businesses in Suhareka

February 21, 2019 – The Business Center Suhareka organized roundtable with the Mayor of Municipality of Suhareka and AmCham Executive Director, as part of its activities in addressing issues that affect the business community. Owner of Vlesia-Co, Gani Sallauka, in his opening remarks emphasized the need to organize joint roundtables with the private and the public sectors more regularly as a communication tool which will allow a stable solution to various issues. While thanking the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo for its engagement in treating issues that affect the private sector, Sallauka stressed that governmental institutions themselves should promote a favorable climate for business operations especially in further stimulating and developing them. Mayor of the Municipality of Suhareka, Bali Muharremaj, valued the commitment of the business community in this zone, mentioning that private sector involvement in solving issues that affect the society in general has started from organizing various events and has continued with initiatives in cleaning the city as well as providing support for citizens. He mentioned that the Municipality of Suhareka remains committed in allocating the foreseen funds with the budget of the Republic of Kosovo and their own funds on stimulating business activities. Amongst others, Muharremaj emphasized the importance of the Municipality engage in addressing the skills gap which exposes the society in general towards the increasing rates of emigration, and undermines development prospects. AmCham Executive Director, Arian Zeka, said that mismatch of employees profiles with the labor market needs is a problem which was evident in 2017 also in the AmCham study “Skills Gap Analysis” which shows that the manufacturing sector is the most affected sector from this gap, followed by trade and services. Zeka mentioned that it is necessary for the education system to intervene in addressing this problem, however, this should not be treated in an isolated manner. On the other hand, he said that the private sector faces many difficulties coming from the governmental level, difficulties that should be addressed through a more inclusive approach to dialogue, specifically by engaging the public, private sector, as well as the academy. Owner of Frutex, Shaqir Palushi, considering that the Government has declared 2019 as the year of economy, mentioned the need to have a more active participation of the private sector in drafting policies.

1.15. AmCham informs potential investors on investment opportunities in Kosovo

February 27, 2019 – The American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo hosted representatives of the River Styxx Capital fund headquartered in Sofia, Bulgaria, led by Elvin Guri who is also a well-known investor from Albania operating in Bulgaria. The meeting was focused on the interest of River Styxx Capital to invest in Kosovo in various sectors with great opportunities for investments. AmCham Executive Director, Arian Zeka, welcomed Mr. Guri and his company’s interest in investing in Kosovo also, considering that the presence of this company in the Albanian telecom is highly positive for the entire region. River Styxx Capital has recently expanded also in the telecom sector of Albania after reaching an agreement of buying Telekom Albania.

1.16. Ambassador Kosnett meets AmCham leadership

March 4, 2019 – Stronger rule of law, a more functional market economy and unhindered regional trade are the way forward for Kosovo to attract U.S. and other foreign investors. These are the key highlights of the meeting of U.S. Ambassador in Kosovo, Philip S. Kosnett, with the leadership of the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo. Ambassador Kosnett told the AmCham Board of Governors and the Executive Director that the U.S. Embassy is pleased to hear that its priorities for peace, justice and prosperity are the priorities that are shared by Kosovo people as well. Ambassador Kosnett stated that the U.S. Embassy is supportive of AmCham in addressing the aforementioned issues, and also in fostering cross-border cooperation with other AmChams in the Western Balkans. President of the Board of Governors of AmCham Kosovo, Ilir Ibrahimi, informed the Ambassador of the key priorities of the Board, which include addressing issues related to political uncertainty, economic populism, women’s economic empowerment, measures to be undertaken to attract foreign investments, rule of law, corruption and contract enforcement. The Executive Director of the Chamber, Arian Zeka, spoke about the activities of the organization aimed at addressing the aforementioned issues and improving Kosovo’s prospects for more U.S. investments. The members of the Board of Governors shared what they believe to be the economic priorities for the country, emphasizing the need for more dialogue between the private and public sector.
1.17. Speaker Series event with Mergim Prishtina

March 4, 2019 – The American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo in cooperation with AAB College organized a lecture with students at this college about the trends and developments in pharmaceutics with the main speaker TrepPharm Executive Director, Mërgim as part of AmCham speaker series. Mërgim Prishtina informed participating students with the story of its company development in the pharmaceutics industry as well as the challenges he has faced in his journey. Prishtina said that tireless work, ambition and the desire to be successful are crucial in order for youth to reach their goals in entrepreneurship. He said that despite the many challenges that they might face, youth should always aim higher in achieving their goals in their academic and professional development. During the lecture, Mërgim Prishtina also informed the students about the opportunities that this industry provides, encouraging them to work in developing their ideas in new businesses in the country. During the discussion, students were notified in detail with pharmaceutical products, about the manufacturing procedures, specifics in this industry, as well as the scope of this company in Kosovo.

1.18. Manufacturers inform Minister Shala about the need for a unique identification number

March 5, 2019 – The need for a unique identification number for manufacturing entities, equal treatment of companies applying for customs exemptions for raw materials, and incorporation of supporting elements in empowering the manufacturing sector through provisions of the Law on Internal Trade which is in the drafting process, were some of the requests of the Manufacturing Committee of the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo in the meeting with the Minister of Trade and Industry, Endrit Shala. AmCham Executive Director, Arian Zeka, while thanking Minister Shala for his availability, he said that the manufacturing sector faces various problems, which include delays in payments up to customs exemptions for raw materials. Amongst others, Zeka also informed Minister Shala about the request of the Manufacturing Committee for manufacturers to be identified with a unique identification number. Chairman of AmCham Manufacturing Committee, Kujtim Gjevori, informed Minister Shala about the meetings the Manufacturing Committee has held in addressing issues that affect this sector, emphasizing the need for manufacturing entities to be identified with a unique number in order to avoid future problems that could arise with the growth of the sector.

Minister of Trade and Industry, Endrit Shala, said that his main goal during his mandate remains the empowerment of the manufacturing sector, therefore creating policies that facilitate businesses’ operations in this sector will be amongst the priorities of the institution’s agenda. Thus, Minister Shala pledged that the Ministry of Trade and Industry will undertake initiatives in institutional coordination in order to set the criteria on identifying manufacturing entities with a unique identification number, while inviting the business community to be part of the drafting process of the Law on Internal Trade since this will be a guide for doing business in the country.

1.19. The delegation of American businesses discusses cooperation opportunities with Kosovar businesses

March 12, 2019 – The delegation of American businesses led by the Consul General of the Republic of Kosovo in New York, United States of America, Teuta Sahatqija, visited the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo, where member companies had the chance to discuss cooperation opportunities with American businesses and creating new relations in various sectors. AmCham Executive Director, Arian Zeka, said that this meeting is a good opportunity to build and create new cooperation with American businesses, and a special occasion for American businesses to be informed about some of the success stories of Kosovo. Zeka thanked Ambassador Sahatqija not only for her work in representing Kosovo in New York but also in building relations between businesses and fostering economic relations between Kosovo and the United States of America which happens to be the mission of the American Chamber of Commerce also.

Consul General of Kosovo in New York, Teuta Sahatqija, said that their highest priority remains creating relations and partnerships with Kosovar and American businesses, as well as improving the image of our companies in international markets. She said that this visit aims on creating new cooperations for our businesses considering their capacities which will also reflect in Kosovo’s image.
as a suitable and attractive country for foreign investments. Founder and CEO of MD Squared Property Group, Michael Mintz, said that the capacities of youth and entrepreneurs in Kosovo as well as their talent are extraordinary. He said that they are impressed with the development of businesses in Kosovo as well as the support of the private sector and the government in cultivating human capital and creating incentives in the development of businesses in the country.

1.20. Kosovar and Serbian entrepreneurs exchange entrepreneurship experiences

March 12, 2019 – With the purpose of increasing partnership opportunities between enterprises in Kosovo and Serbia, the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo organized a networking event with young entrepreneurs from the Atlantic Council of Serbia namely from the youth sector YATA. During this event, AmCham member entrepreneurs had the chance to exchange their personal experiences with the group of 13 young entrepreneurs from Serbia.

The delegation from Serbia was organized by the Atlantic council of Serbia, and its youth sector (YATA), as part of a project called “The role and importance of KFOR for Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo”. As per the organizer, the main goal of this project is to lay the foundations of future friendship between young Albanians and Serbs, and creating a first step towards reconciliation. Although informal, the event was a great networking opportunity for some of AmCham members – young entrepreneurs and the entrepreneurs from Serbia as well.

1.21. Mayor of Gjilan confirms his commitment in empowering the private sector

Gjilan, March 13, 2019 – The American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo in cooperation with the Regional Development Agency-East (RDA) organized a meeting with the Mayor of the Municipality of Gjilan, Lutfi Haziri, where, together with manufacturing businesses, it was discussed about the role of the municipality in the local economic development with the zero policy for taxes on businesses as well as addressing businesses issues in their operations. Mayor of the Municipality of Gjilan, Lutfi Haziri, said that the investments fund for these three years based on medium-term budgetary forecasts is 61 million euros, 47 million of which are from EBRD, whereas other revenues come in other forms from the sectors. “We are working in order for the private sector to be the primary sector for employment. The only way to have a stable future in economic development is through the private sector empowerment,” said Haziri. Furthermore, he stated that the municipality that he leads is oriented in local economic development, specifically in the private sector in order to have stable development and to increase the employment, mentioning that they remain committed in creating a favorable climate of doing business. AmCham Executive Director, Arian Zeka, said that youth emigration in foreign countries and their preference in working in the public sector are some of the main factors that reflect in lack of labor force in the private sector. He said that the coordination between the private sector and governmental institutions is crucial in drafting favorable policies for economic development.

1.22. Prime Minister Haradinaj: The private sector stimulates stable economic development in the country

March 14, 2019 – The Prime Minister of the Republic of Kosovo, Ramush Haradinaj, hosted in a meeting some manufacturers in the country with whom he discussed about their operations, challenges, and economic activities. During the meeting, in which were present the Executive Director of the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo, Arian Zeka, Chairman of Kosovo Chamber of Commerce, Berat Rukiqi, and a representative from the Energy Regulatory Office (ERO), Haradinaj said that the Government of Kosovo is working with all relevant institutions and is committed in improving the legislation in providing better opportunities for the private sector. Amongst the main topics of the meeting were also stable energy supply for manufacturers and its price, and also creating favorable policies for manufacturing companies.

1.23. AmCham members meet with Head of EU Office in Kosovo

March 18, 2019 – Free trade with European Union member states, encompassed through the Stabilization and Association Agreement, has led to a favorable climate of doing business in general and has exposed Kosovo to a large market. This was during the Breakfast for Executives organized by the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo with Nataliya Apostolova, Head of the EU Office
in Kosovo and EU Special Representative, and AmCham Board of Governors, patron members, and the Chairpersons of the AmCham Manufacturing, Trade, and Technology and Innovation Committees, hosted by Emerald Hotel. The AmCham members also spoke about difficulties in finding potential business partners, enhancing labor skills, and developing innovative business ideas. Ambassador Apostolova informed the participants about priorities of the EU in Kosovo, stressing the European Reform Agenda, efficient rule of law, public administration reform, and investments in the education sector as crucial in the economic development of Kosovo. She expressed gratitude towards AmCham for providing suggestions for the European Commission’s Annual Report. Ambassador Apostolova also welcomed furthering of cooperation with the private sector in Kosovo. President of AmCham Board of Governors, Ilir Ibrahim, said that AmCham has raised concerns on many issues regarding the private sector in Kosovo, inviting the EU office to develop stronger cooperation between business institutions while pursuing more sustainable economic growth in Kosovo. AmCham Executive Director, Arian Zeka, while mentioning the priorities of AmCham in advocating for economic issues, said that AmCham welcomes meetings in order to increase cooperation between the private sector and the EU in Kosovo since this is crucial for the development of businesses in Kosovo.

1.24. AmCham marks its 15th anniversary of establishment

March 24, 2019 – March 24, 2019 marks the 15th anniversary of the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo. In these fifteen years, AmCham has constantly grown to become one of the most powerful business associations in Kosovo serving American and other businesses. As it celebrates its fifteenth anniversary, AmCham remain committed to further advocate for the betterment of the doing business environment in Kosovo. It remains forever grateful to the founding members Ardian Jashari, Arianit Koci, Armend Malazogu, Armend Mustafa, Besaraj Blakaj, Driton Dalipi, Fadil Rexha, Fisnik Ismaili, Ilaz Ramajli, Jerry Rexha, Laura Kryeziu, Lavon Bajrami, Luan Dalipi, Ramadan Berisha, Ramis Ahmetaj, Rob Gullick, Robert Curis, Salih Devolli, Skender Kutlovo, Valbona Rraci and Vjolca Krasniqi and Ambassadors Marcie Ries and Philip Goldberg, as well as the members who have remained loyal to AmCham since its establishment in 2004: RIT Kosovo, Asseco, Coca-Cola HBC Kosovo, Deloitte Albania and Kosovo, Devolli, IPKO, Meridian Corporation/Meridian Express, Microsoft, NLB Banka, Pestova, Raiffeisen Bank Kosovo, and Western Union.

1.25. Municipality of Peja to address problems in improving the doing business environment

March 27, 2019 – During the roundtable organized by the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo with the Mayor of the Municipality of Peja, Gazmend Muhaxheri, and the Regional Development Agency-West, businesses from this region addressed problems and challenges they face in their daily operations and was also discussed the role of the Municipality in this regard. Mayor of Municipality of Peja, Gazmend Muhaxheri, mentioned that the role of local institutions is crucial in creating a favorable environment of doing business, adding that the Municipality of Peja welcomes the cooperation between the private sector and business associations. Specifically, Muhaxheri mentioned the need for better coordination between stakeholders in addressing important issues such as lack of qualified labor force and high rates of emigration. Executive Director of Regional Development Agency-West, Leman Hatashi, said that there are still many challenges in the business community and local authorities have expressed their readiness to solve various problems that businesses face. Hatashi mentioned the need of organizing such roundtables more frequently, whereas in regards to issues related to labor force she mentioned the need to establish competency centers in the region of Peja.

1.26. Kosovar businesses face challenges in maximizing potential benefits resulting from SAA

April 1, 2019 – There are many benefits that result from the Stabilization and Association Agreement between the European Union and Kosovo for the economy of Kosovo, however growth of Kosovar exports to the EU market remains at unsatisfactory levels. This was said during the roundtable organized by the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo titled “Maximizing SAA benefits” where it was discussed about issues in fulfilling SAA obligations and the benefits from this agreement in economy. AmCham Executive Director, Arian Zeka, said that this agreement is a highly valuable framework which should be used by businesses in various sectors, mentioning that the expectations for this agreement were very high when it was signed. Minister of European Integration, Dhurata
Hoxha, said that reaching this agreement, the first contractual agreement between Kosovo and the European Union, foresees empowered democracy, higher international cooperations, promotion of regional cooperation, and economic development, amongst others. Minister Hoxha said that applying the numerous reforms that include aligning our legislation with the EU legislation as well as increasing access of businesses to the European market are crucial in maximizing benefits that result from SAA. Minister Hoxha added that the institution she leads will continue to coordinate the fulfillment of obligations deriving from the SAA application as well as the European Reforms Agenda, saying that this agreement has resulted in many positive direct and indirect developments mentioning here economic growth, exports growth, higher foreign investments, and budgetary income. Head of AmCham Economic Research Institute, Visar Hapçiu, said that despite the implementation of SAA in the country, Kosovar exports remain at a lower level compared to European exports in the Kosovo market. He said that the business perception on SAA shows that amongst the main challenges that they face are lack of partnerships with European businesses and the image of Kosovo which is not very good in the eyes of investors. Hapçiu added that businesses are satisfied with the fiscal reforms in the environment of doing business saying that businesses require from institutions to take future steps in providing grants and subventions for them. Further on, Driton Zairi, Managing Director of Ford Motors Kosova and Member of AmCham Board of Governors, said that signing this agreement has positively affected the car industry in Kosovo mentioning the increasing number of new vehicles import from the start of its implementation. Albulena Veseli from Suhareka Verari said that the wine sector also has easily distributed its products in the European markets which has resulted in higher exports. Whereas Kushtrim Ajvazi from the meat processing company Apetit Group said that amongst the challenges they face in this industry is the lack of recognition of their products’ certificates which is being reflected in very low figures of their products present in European markets.

1.27. Businesses ask for higher inclusion in the drafting process of policies in the health sector

April 3, 2019 – During the meeting organized by the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo with the Minister of Health, Uran Ismaili, and members of AmCham Healthcare Committee was discussed about the creation of a health insurance system, its importance in the country, as well as the need for higher inclusion of businesses in the drafting process of policies in this sector. Minister of Health, Uran Ismaili, considered the continuation of genuine communication between the public and private sectors in the drafting process of policies in the health sector which are of prior importance in ensuring the implementation of these policies in the country. Minister Ismaili mentioned that the lack of the health insurance system has resulted in high costs for citizens and also in difficulties for public institutions’ operations. In this regard, he said that the Ministry he leads has advanced in the drafting stages of the law on health insurance which will regulate this issue in a fair manner. Chairperson of AmCham Healthcare Committee, Armend Agani, said that Kosovo needs continuous training and education for healthcare practitioners in order to provide the most qualitative services for citizens. Agani thanked Minister Ismaili for his commitment in regulating the health sector, while requiring a higher inclusion of the private sector in working groups in drafting the legislation which highly affects their operations.

1.28. South East European University students visit AmCham

April 11, 2019 – The American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo hosted a group of students from the South East European University (SEEU) where they were informed about AmCham’s activities and the environment of doing business in Kosovo. During their visit, the group of students were informed about the role of AmCham in the public-private dialogue, and its advocacy efforts about issues that the private sector faces, as well as about the recommendations in improving the environment of doing business in Kosovo. Further on, students expressed their interest about economic developments in Kosovo as well as the reforms made throughout the years. The discussion was also focused in the impact of the private sector in the policymaking process about essential issues for businesses in the country, the impact of the fiscal policies in their operations, and attracting foreign direct investments in Kosovo.

1.29. Women’s role is essential for stable economic development

April 16, 2019 – The American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo organized the Parliamentarian Breakfast with the Women’s Caucus of the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo and women leaders,
AmCham members, as part of its events which aim on empowering women in entrepreneurship and decision-making positions. During this breakfast was discussed about increasing the cooperation between businesses and members of the Assembly for the emancipation of women in the Kosovar society and their further inclusion in decision-making positions. President of the Women's Caucus, Mexhida Mjaku-Topalli, said that the group she leads has set concrete objectives in empowering women entrepreneurs, mentioning the project Women in Business which is now part of the working plan. She said that they are monitoring the law on gender equality in order to ensure the implementation of gender quota in including women in public enterprises. She added that Women's Caucus will be engaged in increasing women's participation in entrepreneurial positions and in ensuring equality in the society through legislation.

Executive Director of Regional Development Center and Member of AmCham Board of Governors, Mrika Macula, said that women empowerment is essential in establishing stable economic development by treating women equally as men. She asked from the Women's Caucus to build concrete steps in creating incentives for further inclusion of women in decision-making positions and to provide opportunities in their advancement, adding that the implementation of current laws for equal treatment of women are not at satisfactory levels. Senior Economic and Commercial Officer at the U.S. Embassy, Lori Michaelson, said that market diversity in Kosovo is necessary to have stability in economic development of the country. Michaelson said that meetings between representatives from institutions and women from the business sector enable institutions to directly address issues and challenges that have impact in increasing opportunities for development, adding that together we can make the change that we aim on reaching.

1.30. Former Member of the U.S. Congress visits AmCham

April 24, 2019 – The American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo hosted in a meeting the Former Member of the Unites States Congress, Jerry Weller, during which they discussed about opportunities of increasing the cooperation and utilizing current opportunities of doing business with U.S. businesses. Former Member of the U.S. Congress, Jerry Weller, highly evaluated the work of the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo. Weller pledged to support AmCham and its members in promoting them in the USA, along with opportunities of doing business with U.S. businesses. AmCham Executive Director, Arian Zeka, thanked Mr. Weller for his readiness in supporting AmCham, while mentioning the numerous opportunities that Kosovo provides for U.S. investors. The meeting was also focused in better utilizing the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) which enables Kosovar companies to export their products in the USA exempted from tax duties.

1.31. Businesses address issues that derive from the new law on trade

April 25, 2019 – The American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo organized a roundtable in order to discuss the impact of and implications that derive from the Law on Trade for the private sector in the country. AmCham Executive Director, Arian Zeka, evaluated the law as important, but called upon institutions to avoid overregulation which would harm business interrelations and would hinder the process of doing business. He said that the position of AmCham is that overregulation would suffocate business operations and would be in contradiction with the orientation of the country towards a free market economy. Adviser at the Ministry of Trade and Industry, Mrika Selimaj, said that the law on trade foresees a number of new implications which aim on the overall regulation of the market in the country, adding that this law leans more toward the administrative aspect. Selimaj said that the Ministry aims on making necessary modifications in order for this law to be easily implemented and that the reforms are more than necessary in regulating this sector. She encouraged businesses present to present their recommendations and comments in drafting this law which will affect their business activity. Chairman of AmCham Trade and Customs Committee and Owner of Delfin Ltd, Avni Krasniqi, said that the lack of inclusion of the private sector in drafting laws that affect the retail trade and other sectors is directly affecting the proper implementation of the law in the country. Krasniqi said that due to the fact that the private sector will be affected the most from the specifics and new implications from this law, businesses fear that many difficulties will arise from the implementation of this law which will result in deregulation of the market. He required that businesses be included and be an inseparable part of this process in giving recommendations in order to address issues that would be a burden to the private sector.
Owner of the company Proex, Ylber Kuraja, said that the retail trade sector in Kosovo is the main contributor to the budget of our country, therefore, the inclusion of this sector in the modification process of the law on trade is necessary. He said that issues such as lack of full fiscalization of stores, amongst others, are reflecting in lack of full implementation of current laws, adding that further inclusion of businesses in the drafting process of laws would enable institutions to properly address issues that affect the private sector.

1.32. Kosovo must improve its image to create opportunities in outsourcing

May 3, 2019 – Kosovo and Kosovar businesses have potentials in outsourcing business processes from foreign businesses to businesses in Kosovo. Even though there are many businesses in Kosovo that provide such services for U.S. and other companies, Kosovo must work more in promoting Kosovo’s image as a destination for outsourcing. This was said during the roundtable organized by the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo on opportunities Kosovo’s market provides in the outsourcing industry and challenges that affect its development Chairperson of AmCham Technology and Innovation Committee, Ardian Hoxha, said that outsourcing from foreign companies to Kosovar companies is a great opportunity for the economic development of the country. He also talked about the commitment of the Committee he leads in promoting digital economy in Kosovo and the advancement of the legislation in this area Chief Executive Officer of Melita & Partners, Arben Ymeraga, mentioned that legal security is an essential factor in building new partnerships with foreign companies, adding that by properly addressing challenges in this sector and presenting capacities would enable further growth of this sector Armand Ukshini, representative from Kosbit, a company which provides services for well-known U.S. companies such as AT&T, Microsoft, CISCO, IBM, and others, said that in order to reach a new partnership between two stakeholders in outsourcing one must consider earning their trust which is necessary for partnerships with foreign companies, adding that even though the Kosovo market currently has many advantages, improving the image of the country would be an asset in attracting potential partners to create new cooperations. Prosperoware Executive Director, Milot Arifi, said that despite the potential that Kosovo has through its youth, capacities remain limited in having big results in this sector. He said that trainings are an inseparable process of staff recruitment in this sector due to lack of qualified profiles. In this regard, he added the need for a stronger advocacy of responsible institutions in orienting youth in profiles that provide these services. Arifi also agreed that presenting youth’s potentials and the significant development of businesses would reflect in higher opportunities in outsourcing in Kosovo.

1.33. American business delegation is informed about investment opportunities in Kosovo

May 14, 2019 – A delegation of American businesses visited the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo where it met with representatives of businesses operating in Kosovo. The purpose of this meeting was to inform the delegation about the opportunities that Kosovo provides for U.S. investors. U.S. Congressman, Randy Hultgren, was also part of the delegation President of AmCham Board, Ilir Ibrahim, informed the representatives about the numerous investment opportunities that Kosovo provides in various sectors. He said that the high number of successful businesses is proof of their commitment and hard work to further grow and expand. Ibrahim said that networking between local and U.S. businesses is one of the best ways to strengthen relations between the United States of American and Kosovo in order to secure a higher number of U.S. investments in the country. One American businessmen, part of the delegation, Michael Stoltzfus, expressed his interest about the quality of education and the development of entrepreneurship as some of the key pillars for sustainable economic development. Stoltzfus mentioned Kosovo’s youth as of significant importance that could result in a more stable economic growth for the country which would reflect on the establishment of a larger number of new enterprises and later on resulting into new jobs.

1.34. New fiscal measures should be taken to stimulate manufacturing growth

May 23, 2019 – Increasing the competitiveness of domestic manufacturers through tax incentives and creating specific policies in stimulating exports growth are necessary in the further development of manufacturers, however, mechanisms from relevant institutions are still necessary in addressing and eliminating trade and tariff barriers. This was said during the presentation of the study “Manufacturing Index” conducted by the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo AmCham Executive Director, Arian Zeka, said that despite the attention given to the development of the
manufacturing sector in the country, by certain measures such as fiscal measures from the Ministry of Finance, and supporting grants schemes from the Ministry of Trade and Industry, there is still a lack of impressive results. He said that this study has addressed numerous areas in the manufacturing sector such as labor force, supporting infrastructure, access to finance, quality infrastructure, rule of law, etc, which reflect the current situation in the manufacturing sector and problems which should be addressed by relevant institutions. Whereas, President of AmCham Board of Governors, Ilir Ibrahimi, said that the manufacturing sector has received the necessary attention in the public debate in the country, however, besides this, concrete measures should be taken from public institutions in order to have long-term and satisfactory results in this sector, it being amongst the biggest contributors in the economic development of the country.

Head of AmCham Economic Research Institute, Visar Hapçiu, said that this study aims to be an authentic basis in following the developments in the manufacturing sector and also addressing the main issues that affect manufacturing businesses. Amongst others, Hapçiu mentioned the fact that businesses positively evaluate the fiscal environment in the country and this comes as a result of the continuous improvement of the tax legislation and numerous fiscal measures undertaken, however on the other hand they assess with a very low grade the progress made in fighting corruption. Lastly, he said that undertaking fiscal measures and tax incentives in continuity result in a stable and continuous development of manufacturers.

Minister of Finance, Bedri Hamza, said that the priority of the Ministry that he leads is to maintain the stable situation and the macrofiscal stability. Ministry Hamza said that we need to make reforms in the economic structure in order to decrease the high trade deficit, adding that the current fiscal reforms, such as in raw materials, information technology equipment, etc, have shown significantly positive results in the development of businesses and in increasing their manufacturing capacities.

Representative from the Ministry of Trade and Industry, Durim Limaj, said that the Ministry has made its priority the growth of domestic production and the equality of products by taking measures in certain products and also by drafting the law on internal trade, amongst others, mentioning the readiness of the Ministry in addressing tariff and non-tariff barriers for manufacturers. On the other hand, Leonora Kusari from the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) said that the Bank aims on assisting businesses in the private sector through various instruments and mechanisms, adding that the empowerment of businesses through financing and advising is essential for their expansion in international markets and in increasing the quality of their products.

1.35. Public-private dialogue, a precondition for stable economic development

May 31, 2019 – Increasing communication between the public and the private sector is a precondition in stimulating economic growth, improving the business environment and empowering rule of law. This was said during the Parliamentarian Breakfast organized by the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo with members of the Parliamentary Committee for Economic Development, Infrastructure, Trade, Industry and Regional Development President of AmCham Board of Governors, Ilir Ibrahimi, mentioned that organizing such roundtables assists in creating a platform which addresses concerns of businesses and in exchanging recommendations in order to foster economic development in the country. Ibrahimi mentioned that, in the past, the dialogue was not completely stable between the private and the public sector, recommending the creation of an adequate dialogue mechanism President of the Parliamentary Committee for Economic Development, Infrastructure, Trade, Industry and Regional Development, Sala Berisha-Shala, emphasized the fact that AmCham remains an important partner regarding issues that affect business operations, therefore cooperation with the Commission she leads is necessary. Whereas Vice President of this Commission, Dardan Sejdiu, said that the cooperation with Chambers of Commerce is crucial during this period considering that this year the Law on Internal and External Trade will be drafted. He urged businesses to actively participate in public hearing sessions of this parliamentary committee.

1.36. Potentials for investments in Kosovo presented by AmCham in Great Britain

June 7, 2019 – British investors had the chance to get informed about potentials for investments in Kosovo during the conference Outlook on Kosovo in London organized by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and Emerging Europe in partnership with Raiffeisen Bank Kosovo and the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo. AmCham Executive Director, Arian Zeka, during
the conference said that Kosovo provides numerous potentials for foreign investors in general and for British investors also. These potentials, starting from information technology services to easier manufacturing, combined with the young labor force and continuous reforms in the environment of doing business make Kosovo an attractive country for foreign investors. AmCham Director talked about the Special American Economic Zone as a unique model of free economic zones which aims on attracting U.S. investors from the USA but also other U.S. investors that are already present in the Great Britain. Furthermore, he said that U.S. and European manufacturing companies should consider opportunities that emerge from Kosovo’s easy access to the European Union market through SAA, respectively to the United States of America through the generalized system of preferences which allows exports of over 3,500 Kosovar goods to the U.S. exempted from all taxes. Speakers in this conference were also the Minister of Economic Development, Valdrin Lluka, and Head of EBRD for Kosovo, Neil Taylor, and Executive Director of Raiffeisen Bank Kosovo, Robert Wright. Amongst others, the discussion was also focused in Kosovo’s 4% economic growth in the past and is expected to have in the future also, mineral resources, investments in infrastructure, positive developments in the technology sector and entrepreneurship ecosystem.

1.37. Businesses discuss Draft Law on Public-Private Partnership

June 12, 2019 – During the roundtable organized by the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo regarding the functioning of public-private partnerships, businesses from the private sector discussed about the terms, conditions, and provisions deriving from this draft law on regulating public-private partnerships (PPP). Ramis Ahmetaj, Business Consultant, said that this draft law aims on addressing problematic issues regarding public-private partnerships such as ownership of the project, technology transferred from the public to the private sector, and the length of planning the project, including the fiscal space. Ahmetaj said that setting a minimum value for the projects that are qualified for PPP would be welcomed since projects with low value do not attract the public interest and present numerous risks. Director of Central Department for Public-Private Partnership, Ministry of Finance, Ilir Rama, said that the draft law on public-private partnerships (PPP) foresees specific criteria which could impact in increasing flexibility in contracts, and also solving the issue of long procedures in approving projects. He mentioned the cooperation with the private sector as crucial in addressing important issues in better implementation of various provisions, saying that the help provided by this sector through recommendations has always reflected in better structure of laws from the relevant institutions. Rama further added that, in this draft law, they have proposed, amongst others, returning unsolicited proposals, and addressing the lack of professional capacities in project management in relevant institutions.

1.38. AmCham and IFC organize discussion on positive effects of bankruptcy

June 18, 2019 – The International Finance Corporation (IFC) in cooperation with the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo organized a roundtable in discussing about the positive effects of bankruptcy and about using the framework for insolvency. Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Trade and Industry, Arbresha Krasniqi, said that MTI is working together with IFC in improving procedures in the country related to bankruptcy and efforts in supporting the development of the private sector as well as stimulating economic growth. Krasniqi further added that the Law on Bankruptcy is considered crucial on functioning of business activities in market economy and overall economic development.

AmCham Executive Director, Arian Zeka, said that the Law on Bankruptcy, approved by the Parliament of Kosovo in June 2016, has enabled a new legal framework which provides a modern platform for restructuring and liquidation of businesses, adding that this framework sets the appropriate processes through which businesses should go through and offers flexible protection in order to be in line with the requests of businesses in a dynamic environment of doing business. Zeka further added that this law consists of the best European and U.S. practices and standards for a modern and practical bankruptcy system which at the same time focuses in restructuring and reorganizing debt which is a crucial component in IFC project.
1.39. AmCham organizes meeting with its Corporate Social Responsibility Committee

June 20, 2019 – The Corporate Social Responsibility Committee of the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo held its first meeting for this year whereby members unanimously elected Ariel Shabani from KIVO as Chairperson, and Shpresa Kika, from Sutherland as Vice Chairperson. AmCham Executive Director, Arian Zeka, informed the participants that the CSR Committee aims on serving as a platform whereby jointly they can promote members’ activities. Besides this, Zeka added that this committee will also work in promoting the importance of the Corporate Social Responsibility throughout Kosovo, and in organizing joint CSR activities so that such activities are promoted in society. Whereas Corporate Social Responsibility Committee Chairperson, Ariel Shabani, said that as a chairperson he will insist that the Committee generate concrete results in this regard.

1.40. Mayor of Des Moines, Iowa visits AmCham

June 25, 2019 – Mayor of the city of Des Moines in Iowa (USA), Frank Cownie, and Des Moines Sister Cities Commission Chairman, Roger Nowadzky, accompanied by Kosovo Counsel General in Iowa, Artan Duraku, visited the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo where they met with the organization’s leaders as well as the Director of strategic planning and stable development at the Municipality of Genc Bashota. Mayor Cownie expressed his interest in cooperation opportunities between U.S. companies from Iowa and Kosovar companies, pledging that he will personally be engaged in strengthening Iowa-Kosovo relation, especially with the city he leads, Des Moines. President of AmCham Board of Governors, Ilir Ibrahimimi, spoke about the good relations between both countries, mentioning that AmCham has played a crucial role in creating these relations, pledging to continue this role even in the future.

AmCham Executive Director, Arian Zeka, informed the visitors from the United States of America about the decision of the Government of Kosovo for the establishment of the Special American Economic Zone as a great opportunity in attracting businesses from the U.S. in general, especially from Iowa. He spoke about certain sectors that could be more attractive for U.S. investors but also about the qualitative products of Kosovo which can easily emerge in the U.S. market. On the other hand, General Counsel of the Republic of Kosovo, Artan Duraku, spoke about his plans on strengthening bilateral relations between Iowa and Kosovo, specifically in economy.

1.41. Private sector requests support in preparing youth for labor market

July 2, 2019 – Bridging the skills gap in the labor force through initiatives undertaken by businesses in training young people is necessary for further development, however they need support in stimulating these practices in the whole country. This was said during the roundtable organized by the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo where AmCham members discussed about initiatives undertaken by the private sector in bridging the skills gap in Kosovo.

AmCham Executive Director, Arian Zeka, said that one of the most common challenges that businesses face in their operations is the skills gap in the labor force. He said that despite many initiatives undertaken by the private sector in this regard, businesses still are challenged by this issue which highly impacts their operations.

Executive Director of Cacttus Education, Besim Ilazi, said that even though businesses are training youth and this is resulting in many benefits for their professional development, training them is becoming a burden for the private sector. Ilazi said that despite the fact that the private sector has taken the role of the leader in bridging the skills gap, they do not have any support, urging institutions to provide incentives for businesses in this regard.

Head of Competence Center and Strategic Initiatives at Raiffeisen Bank Kosovo, Kreshnik Halili, said that initiatives undertaken by this company in preparing youth have been reflected in a higher employment rate of these individuals in the company. He said that including youth in projects with high impact in the early stages of their training impacts their professional growth, adding that it is their responsibility to provide youth with internship opportunities for their profession and to expose them to new technologies in the banking sector.

Chief Operation and Outreach Officer at RIT Kosovo, Visar Jasiqi, said that through its training and development center, this institution aims on continuously training and preparing individuals for the labor market through professional trainings and other forms, and also transferring them to the labor
market directly. He mentioned the need for a better coordination between businesses and educational institutions in providing internship opportunities which then directly reflects in professional skills thus avoiding the scenario of them leaving the country.

1.42. **EBRD and AmCham discuss on supporting private sector**

July 3, 2019 – Supporting the private sector through financing various projects from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development is more than necessary for stable economic development in the country and attracting foreign direct investments. This was said during the Breakfast for Executives organized by the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo with Head of European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) in Kosovo, Neil Taylor.

AmCham Executive Director, Arian Zeka, said that EBRD offers great opportunities of financing for the private sector, adding that the investment portfolio in the country has increased during the recent years. Zeka added that AmCham would like to see higher participation of the private sector in the EBRD investment portfolio which currently is only 30%.

Head of EBRD in Kosovo, Neil Taylor, said that support for the private sector through advisory and financing various projects from EBRD remains one of the main priorities of EBRD in its mission in Kosovo, mentioning that during the previous years they have invested 322 million euros in Kosovo and have supported with business advice over 800 enterprises. Regarding the support and development of the private sector, Taylor mentioned the recently launched Competitiveness Program in partnership with ProCredit and BpB in providing financial support for micro and small businesses, whereby he said that, besides the private sector, two other areas that EBRD aims to invest in are the development of infrastructure and in increasing the number of renewable energy projects. Taylor said that the main concerns of EBRD in attracting foreign direct investments are the weak rule of law, mentioning amongst others also the high level of corruption, informal economy, etc. Amongst others, he mentioned some of the investments of this bank in Kosovo including various sectors such as energy, empowering women entrepreneurs, and others.

1.43. **Congressman Engel learns about private sector achievements in Kosovo**

July 7, 2019 – One of the greatest friends of Kosovo, U.S. Congressman Eliot Engel, visited the manufacturing company, KIVO in Kaçanik. Accompanied by his wife, Patricia Ennis, close cooperators, patriot and businessman, Hari Bajraktari, USAID representatives, and the Executive Director of the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo, Arian Zeka, Congressman Engel was informed about the achievements of the company which is one of the most successful investment stories in Kosovo.

Co-Founder of KIVO, Visar Ramajli, informed Congressman Engel about the operations of the company and the opportunities of doing business in Kosovo. He thanked Congressman Engel about his important contribution for the freedom and independence of Kosovo. Ramajli, who is also Secretary General of AmCham Board of Governors, mentioned that now is the moment to discuss in Washington about increasing U.S. investments in Kosovo, adding that throughout the years we have witnessed huge improvement in the environment of doing business in Kosovo.

On the other hand, Congressman Eliot Engel, impressed with the achievements of the company, said that such success stories are the true reflection of the Kosovar spirit. He said that he is proud with his engagement with Kosovo, adding that even after 30 years of his career in politics, he would still put Kosovo at the top of his priorities.

1.44. **TAK and Customs to facilitate tax and customs procedures for business**

11 July, 2019 – Although fiscal policies facilitate the operations of the private sector in the country, businesses still encounter various issues regarding the tax legislation and customs procedures. This was said during the fiscal policies forum organized by the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo, whereby businesses discussed the difficulties and barriers they face in regards to the Tax Administration of Kosovo and Kosovo Customs.
AmCham Executive Director, Arian Zeka, said that the AmCham is committed to increasing the partnership with these institutions in providing business recommendations about issues that are challenging for them, adding that the cooperation between public institutions and business representatives is necessary. While Remzi Uka, Chief Executive Officer of AFAM Group, said that such discussions with relevant stakeholders about business operations and barriers they face in trade or other sectors serve as a platform where businesses can address their challenges in the environment of doing business.

Director of Kosovo Customs, Bahri Berisha, said that amongst the main strategic objectives of the institution he leads are the development of businesses through trade incentives and the advancement and simplification of customs procedures. Berisha added that businesses still face many problems in customs procedures and legal barriers that hinder their development. He reassured that Customs is committed to continue the partnership with the private sector, and will remain transparent and open to work closely with businesses that work based on trade principles.

General Director of Tax Administration of Kosovo, Ilir Murtezaj, amongst others, mentioned the drafting procedure of new laws in tax legislation which directly affect businesses. Murtezaj said that one of the main goals of establishing fiscal policies by TAK is to create stability in the market by improving the legislation and advancing businesses through tax incentives, adding that the cooperation with the private sector is key in this regard.

1.45. Governor of CBK meets AmCham representatives

July 12, 2019 – The Governor of the Central Bank of Kosovo, Fehmi Mehmeti, hosted in a meeting the representatives of the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo, led by its Executive Director, Arian Zeka, with Chairperson of AmCham Manufacturing Committee, Kujtim Gjevori, and Chairperson of AmCham Digital Economy Committee, Ardian Hoxha.

Governor Mehmeti informed AmCham representatives with the latest developments in the financial sector in the country, specifically the banking sector which is performing well, mentioning the growth of this sector in support to the economic development in the country and the high stability rate of this sector.

1.46. Impact of labor law provisions in private sector must be considered

July 18, 2019 – The American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo organized a roundtable regarding the Draft Law on Labor whereby various issues which affect the labor market and business operations were discussed. Head of Parliamentary Commission on Health, Labor, and Social Welfare, Besa Baftiu, said that in order to address issues affecting the labor market deriving from the Draft Law on Labor, we should consider private sector’s comments since this will directly affect their operations. In comparison to the previous draft law, she said that this law is more advanced in regulating the labor market, including other areas such as maternity leave, and it is based on the European Union legislation, adding that this draft law includes 70 EU directives. Baftiu also added that they welcome AmCham’s comments and its member companies since they will help in amending the law properly.

Director of Human Resources and Administration at Meridian Corporation, Abdylkerim Ratkoceri, said that compared with the previous draft law, no major changes were noted, citing some aspects of the draft law such as termination of contracts, medical leave, and maternity leave. Ratkoceri said it is necessary to review maternity leave as it currently poses a burden on businesses and results in lower employment rate of women in this sector, adding that taking into consideration the private sector’s comments will result in sustainability and equality in the labor market.

1.47. Women leaders address challenges in business environment in Kosovo

July 18, 2019 – In order to address issues and challenges that women leaders and entrepreneurs face in the labor market and private sector, the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo in cooperation with the U.S. Embassy in Prishtina organized a meeting with women leaders and managers of AmCham member companies.

U.S. Ambassador’s spouse, Alison Kosnnett, said that the high unemployment rate amongst women in Kosovo is at concerning levels, adding that more should be done in encouraging women in pursuing
their career in business and should provide more opportunities for their growth. She said that there is a lot of potential amongst women in the country which needs to be encouraged, mentioning that there are many areas that we can work in stimulating women to start their own businesses and provide opportunities for many other young girls.

Senior Economic and Commercial Officer at the U.S. Embassy, Lori Michaelson, said that women are a crucial part of the society and their role in economy, education, peace, and security, amongst others, should be emphasized by increasing their participation rate in the labor market. Michaelson said that besides meeting successful women leaders and entrepreneurs, more should be done in seeing what they can do in empowering other women and to address the challenges they face in being promoted to executive and decision-making roles in companies, emphasizing the role and potential of women in business development. Furthermore, Michaelson mentioned the importance of mentorship programs for women which can stimulate them to continue their professional development.

1.48. Groundbreaking Ceremony for the Statue Honoring Senator Bob Dole

July 22, 2019 – During the groundbreaking ceremony for the statue honoring U.S. Senator, Bob Dole, Acting Prime Minister of the Republic of Kosovo, Ramush Haradinaj, said that this is a very good moment to congratulate Senator Bob Dole, a friend of Kosovo, on his birthday.

"His visit in 1999 in Kosovo was a turning point for Kosovo, an initiative for Kosovo’s prosperity and so it was continued by all those who honored us with visits later in Kosovo and so continued with the support of ’99, with stopping the tragedy in Kosovo and I think that today, the entire people of Kosovo honors themselves and this friendship," said Prime Minister Haradinaj adding that they are delighted that the people of Kosovo address him with a reverence and gratitude for his contribution for Kosovo. "We thank President Trump for the care of Kosovo and at the same time wish our Kosovo-American friendship to be eternal."

U.S. Ambassador in Kosovo, Philip S. Kosnett, thanked the acting Prime Minister, the Government of Kosovo, the Municipality of Pristina and AmCham for the opportunity of this inspiring moment, saying that they are honored to be witnesses of the groundbreaking ceremony and also Senator Bob Dole has been affected by this reverence. "Throughout his service life, Bob Dole has always been the driving force behind the cause of freedom around the world. Therefore, it was not surprising that he became an indispensable supporter of Kosovo, standing by the people of this country in your efforts to build a strong and free country," said Ambassador Kosnett said.

AmCham Executive Director, Arian Zeka, said there is no better way than to congratulate Senator Bob Dole on his birthday, and at the same time there is no better day than today’s joint confirmation for the perpetuation of memory for all the role and contribution that Senator Bob Dole has had in Kosovo.

1.49. AmCham organizes training on Managing Generations

July 23, 2019 – The American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo organized the training "Managing Generations" for its member companies, a training delivered by Arjeta Spahiu, Chief Executive Officer of Advoco Solutions and Member of AmCham Board of Governors. During the training, Spahiu said that properly managing various generations within the company is a key factor in the organizational development of businesses. She said that recognizing certain qualities of employees as well as managing their relations within the team plays a crucial role in the conduct of business operations. Among other things, Spahiu also mentioned the importance of emotional intelligence in human resource management, adding that capacity recognition and management through emotional intelligence results in greater efficiency within the company as well as increased communication between employees.

1.50. AmCham recognizes members companies with USA-Kosovo Partnership Award

July 31, 2019 – The American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo recognized AmCham member companies with the USA-Kosovo Partnership Award, companies that have contributed to strengthening economic relations between the U.S. and Kosovo.
U.S. Ambassador in Kosovo, Philip S. Kosnett, said that one of the duties of any American Ambassador is to help American businesses expand globally and this is crucial for the U.S. because it creates jobs and prosperity at home and grants quality products in the market and ensures sustainable growth. Ambassador Kosnett said that the U.S. government is committed to support not only American businesses but also people in Kosovo, the business community, and the government to build prosperity in the country. As part of his remarks Ambassador Kosnett said, “Right now, growth is hovering around 4%. That may sound impressive, but Kosovo produces per capita only about a tenth of the European average. That means that in order to catch up with growth in Europe, Kosovo’s economy must grow 8 percent a year for the next 30 years. Kosovo needs private-sector expansion to meet that goal, and the government needs to get serious about supporting the private sector. It is important that whatever the shape of Kosovo’s next government, that next government must be committed to concrete action to increase the flexibility and competitiveness of Kosovo’s private sector. For business to thrive, the government must decrease corruption and promote professional standards in government, business, and education.”

AmCham Executive Director, Arian Zeka, said that it is a positive factor the ever-increasing presence of U.S. brands and companies in Kosovo, which is also a call being answered for AmCham. “We are gathered to recognize member companies which are contributing to stronger economic bonds between United States and Kosovo, and also for their contribution to Kosovo’s economic growth, technology transfer, creating jobs and giving hope for its people,” said Zeka.

President of AmCham Board of Governors, Ilir Ibrahimi, said that Kosovo and the U.S. have relations in many areas but economic relations are the best and the strongest. Therefore, Brahimi added that the mission of AmCham for this year and the upcoming years is to strengthen the relations between Kosovo and the U.S., and businesses are the ones that make this possible.

Companies that received the USA-Kosovo Partnership Award were top importers of goods of U.S. origin (Elkos Group, Fluidi, Allmakes Global Services, Meridian Corporation, Delfin Ltd); top exporters of Kosovo goods and services to USA (StoneCastle Vineyards and Winery, Devolli Corporation, and Kosbit); companies representing U.S. brands in Kosovo (Coca-Cola HBC Kosovo, Microsoft, Cisco, Contour Global, Gjirafa Inc, Grant Thornton, Deloitte, Ingram Micro, Sutherland, Fingermarket, FINCA, Prosperoware, KFC, Balkan Foods – Burger King, American Hospital, Brovina – Hertz, Auto Trade – Avis, Ford Kosova Motors, KCC – TNT & Fedex, Teknoxgroup – Caterpillar, Western Union, Vilesa-Co – Ria, Capital – Ria, Art House – Xerox, Komtel – General Electrics, and Melita & Partners); and lastly organizations supporting students exchange and promoting U.S. education values in Kosovo (Kosovo American Education Fund, R.I.T. Kosovo, and American School of Kosovo.)
AmCham thanks KFC and Sushico for their support for this event.

1.51. AmCham organizes meeting with its Tax Committee

August 6, 2019 – The American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo organized a meeting with its Tax Committee whereby representatives of member companies discussed certain provisions of the Law No.06/L-105 on Corporate Income Tax as well as the changes made regarding its approval. Chairperson of AmCham Tax Committee, Gresë Rexhepi, informed the participants about the new provisions and also the changes made in this law, mentioning issues that affect, amongst others, businesses in the banking sector, insurance companies, etc. She urged business representatives to provide their comments about certain provisions in order for the relevant institutions to address them and to facilitate the law implementation. The meeting further focused on various interpretations of provisions of this law, whereby Rexhepi added that further clarification from relevant institutions is needed for specific provisions in order not to create room for misuse.

1.52. The new government should prioritize manufacturers’ recommendations

August 20, 2019 – The support for manufacturing companies through facilitations should be a priority for the new Government in order to increase manufacturing capacities in the country and exports of Kosovar goods. This was said during the roundtable organized by the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo in which manufacturers provided their recommendations to the new Government.

AmCham Executive Director, Arian Zeka, said that the aim of this roundtable is to get the recommendations of the manufacturing sector for the new Government regarding the further development of the sector in the country. Furthermore, Zeka added that among the challenges that Kosovar manufacturers face is the skills gap, mentioning among others the law on internal trade, which is expected to be among the priorities of the new Government.

Chairperson of AmCham Manufacturing Committee and representative from SCAMPA, Kujtim Gjevori, said that despite the development in the manufacturing industry, the new Government should continue with facilitations for this sector. He said the sector faces various problems that need to be addressed in order to promote the development of manufacturers in terms of access to finance, and also by addressing issues in electricity, and skills gap in the workforce, adding that a greater coordination between the private and public sectors in training the workforce is necessary.

Bajram Rushiti from Buka Bakery said that in order to further develop the manufacturing businesses in the country they must be identified with a unique number regarding what the companies produce. Rushiti said that access to finance for manufacturers should be improved given the huge losses these companies register in their operations.

Gojart Kelmendi from EuroKosova said that given the fact that Kosovo has a high trade deficit with regional countries, a short-term and long-term strategy is necessary for the development of the sector. While addressing skills gap in the workforce, he said that the growth of the manufacturing sector could result in a lower level of migration of young people to foreign countries.

Whereas, Ylber Bajraktari from StoneCastle said that lack of support from the Government in their operations has caused businesses not to be competitive enough with the countries in the region, adding that various customs duties result in high costs in manufacturing their products.

1.53. AmCham organizes training on social media

August 22, 2019 – The American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo organized a training for its member companies on social media in business, which was conducted by Valon Canhasi, Chief Executive Officer of Hallakate. During the training, Canhasi discussed the development of social media over the years and their impact on both society and business operations. He mentioned the importance of using social media in promoting companies’ products and services in targeting the right audience for them. In addition to this, Canhasi also mentioned the rapid development of social media and the high internet penetration in our country, adding that by efficiently using them businesses will easily promote their products and services.
1.54. Digitalizing Kosovo’s economy should be among priorities of the new Government

**August 26, 2019** – Digitalizing Kosovo’s economy is one of the preconditions for the further development of businesses, facilitating the process of providing their services in the market, but also for the economic growth of Kosovo. This was said during the roundtable organized by the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo in which business representatives provided their recommendations to the new Government regarding the digitalization of the economy.

Chairman of AmCham Digital Economy Committee, Ardian Hoxha, mentioned the priorities of the Committee he leads which should be considered by the new Government, such as establishing the legal infrastructure for digital economy, increasing cyber security measures, approving the Draft Law on Electronic Identification and Trusted Services in Electronic Transactions, etc. He said that considering the fact that the information and communication technology sector remains the sector with the largest growth in the country, its facilitation and development should be the focus of the governmental institutions for the country to be competitive with other countries in the region and the world.

Representative of the U.S. company Sutherland, Shpresa Kika, said that one of the challenges that foreign businesses face in the Kosovar market is the lack of access to information which is fundamental in providing quality services to clients. She added that despite the lack of information which is key to expanding businesses in various countries, the cyber security level is also a major challenge for businesses in the country.

Sharing the view of Innovation Centre Kosovo (ICK), Executive Director Uranik Begu said that given the fact that technological trends are constantly changing, continuous partnership between the public and private sectors is more than necessary for higher success in the digitalization of the economy. Begu said that Kosovo needs a mission that for the next five years clearly places the country as the leader in the digital economy in the region in a certain area, adding that the proper use of financial resources in this regard is necessary for the development.

Arianit Fazliu from Kutia said that Kosovo has easier access to internet than some European countries and therefore its higher use impacts the economic growth and business development. Among others, he mentioned various methods for monetization by businesses providing digital services, such as selling products online, adding that the inclusion of institutions should be made in order to simplify access to online shopping platforms. According to him, this would help to further materialize the higher internet use in Kosovo, which is among the highest in Europe.

1.55. Businesses ask from the new Government higher commitment in bridging skills gap

**August 30, 2019** – Despite the commitment of the private sector in training youth in various industries, the Government must play a crucial role in preparing youth in certain areas through long-term strategic programs. This was said during the roundtable organized by the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo in which businesses provided their recommendations to the new Government on human capital.

AmCham Executive Director, Arian Zeka, said that one of the main issues that businesses face in the manufacturing, services, and trade sectors, especially in manufacturing, is the lack of qualified workforce, adding that the new Government should focus in eliminating this problem that businesses encounter continuously.

Public Relations Manager at Prishtina International Airport, Valentina Gara, said that digital economy is of special importance considering the fact that it is now becoming a precondition for the workforce in many jobs. She added that the country will not register economic development by only creating new jobs, but by providing the right skills, adding that the new Government should focus on how it invests in human capital.

On the other hand, Chief Executive Officer of Orbico, Fikret Havolli, said that skills gap is one of the main problems, thus it should be solved in order to have stable economic development in the country. Havolli said that the new Government should focus on establishing a long-term strategy in preparing the workforce and it should make entrepreneurship a priority. He recommended creating stimulation packages based on KPI criteria (Key Performance Indicators), adding that the next
Government should focus on investing on talented individuals in order to prevent them from leaving the country. He also added that the country needs a substantial reform in the education system.

Whereas Rainer Gerke, Vocational Education Training Expert at Getting Competent, mentioned the importance of promoting pull factors which keep the workforce in the country and not leave it. He added that the Government must identify the reasons why the young people are leaving the country and should focus on creating more favorable conditions for them, adding that Kosovo cannot continue importing people since it affects its economy.

Furthermore, Chief Business Development Coordinator at KIVO, Ariel Shaban, said that Kosovo needs reforms in long-term internship programs. He also said that we need a systematic approach in vocational education and that universities should add new areas of studies based on the industrial trends in Kosovo.

1.56. Establishment of a commercial court should remain a priority for the new Government

September 3, 2019 - The proper implementation of the legal framework, professional and timely response from institutions when fair competition is harmed are essential for the development of a favorable business environment and also in attracting foreign investments, whereas the establishment of a special court in resolving commercial cases would help in contract enforcement and increased legal security. This were the conclusions of a roundtable organized by the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo in which businesses discussed recommendations for the new Government about rule of law in the country.

President of AmCham Board of Governors, Ilir Ibrahimi, said that rule of law is undoubtedly one of the main challenges that the private sector faces. He said that despite the efforts in reformation of the rule of law, including a contribution from foreign organizations, more remains to be done.

Blinera Osmani, Expert of Legal and Regulatory Affairs at IPKO, spoke about the necessity of a proper interpretation of legal provisions which would treat public and private enterprises equally, referring to the provisions of the Law on Public Procurement. Furthermore, Osmani also raised the issue of the delays in handling cases on competition protection, emphasizing the necessity of having legal deadlines within which the relevant authority would resolve the cases and provide its opinion to particular claims.

On the other hand, Ardi Shita, Partner at Shita & Ibrahimaga law firm, emphasized the importance of having a commercial court, which he considered to be the most important reform in commercial justice. He expressed his hope that the establishment of the commercial court will remain a priority for the new government as well, knowing that this court will provide a special and efficient mechanism for resolving commercial cases, but also because of the increased number of judges that this court is expected to have.

Floran Pustina, Partner at TashkoPustina law firm, said that Kosovo's legislation is approximated with the EU legislation, however the proper law implementation remains one of the biggest challenges for businesses, adding that the efficient state administration should also be in line with the modern legislation. He said that businesses, free professionals, business consultants, and chambers of commerce can help not only in drafting laws but also in their interpretation.

1.57. New government should refrain from decisions that contravene constitutional provisions for a market economy

September 18, 2019 - Predictable legislative and regulatory environment, functioning of a market economy, equal treatment of all businesses, and combating the informal economy should be key priorities of the new Government. These conclusions were drawn from today's roundtable organized by the American Chamber of Commerce, where businesses were able to present their recommendations to the new Government. During the roundtable, concerns were also raised about past decisions taken without prior coordination with the business community, which have had an effect in disruption of business operations.

Avni Krasniqi, Chairman of the AmCham Trade and Customs Committee and representative of Delfin LTD, mentioned that the country's constitution provides for a free market economy, noting that
Institutions must consequently be committed to fulfilling these constitutional provisions and refrain from unilateral decisions and legal changes that affect free trade. An example taken on this was the draft law on trade, proposed by the Ministry of Trade and Industry in the last governing mandate, which foresaw burdensome provisions in the trade sector.

Hakif Gashi, Vice President of the Board of Governors of the American Chamber of Commerce, as well as a representative of Meridian Corporation, said that trade effectively affects all sectors, including production and services, so its importance in sustainable economic development should be appreciated. He further said that the new Government should take into account the recommendations of AmCham as well as other private sector organizations, as they will help maintain a healthy business environment.

Përparim Tushaj, a representative of Japan Tobacco International, spoke about the need for predictability in the operations of the respective industries, noting that immediate decisions undermine business planning and make it difficult to operate. He said that Kosovo, however, has had a better business environment compared to other neighboring countries and this should continue in the future. Tushaj considered it necessary for Kosovo to begin with what is known as the Regulatory Impact Assessment, which is implemented in EU and OECD countries for instance, and takes into full consideration the impact that certain policies can have on a comprehensive basis.

1.58. AmCham donates equipment to the Resource Center "Xheladin Deda" in Peja

September 20, 2019 – The Foundation of the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo has donated three Braille type writers to the Resource Center “Xheladin Deda” in Peja, in order to provide children at this center with the equipment needed to master the writing techniques of the Braille alphabet. The Braille writers are a donation from the funds raised at AmCham Gala Charity Dinner in 2018. AmCham acknowledges the contributions of Coca-Cola HBC Kosovo, Gjirafa Inc, Meridian Corporation, Devolli Corporation, Limak Kosovo, NLB Bank, American Clinic, KEDS, Bank for Business (BPB), Scardian, HIB Corporation, Orbi-Co, Proex, Railtrans, FINCA Kosovo, SCAMPA, Boga & Associates, Innovation Center Kosovo (ICK) and TEB Bank on the creation of an inclusive environment for children in Kosovo.

1.59. AmCham organizes the “John McCain” charity football tournament

September 28, 2019 - The American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo organized the annual charity football tournament, John McCain, which in addition to its philanthropic intentions also aims to honor the friendship between the United States of America (USA) and Kosovo.

This sports event hosted 18 member teams, all of which gave a financial contribution to increase the funds that AmCham Foundation dedicates to persons or organizations in need. The participating teams were representatives of Coca Cola HBC Kosovo (3 teams), Limak International Kosova, NLB Banka, Atlantik Group, Emona Group, Cacttus, Kolegji AAB, Vi-Print, KFC, Burger King, Sigal Uniqa Group Austria, KEP Trust, Banka Kombëtare Tregtare, Finca, and Al-Trade Center. The tournament was also supported by Red Bull. Besides having a fun football day, these teams competed with each other within four groups; therefore, those who won in the group phase proceeded to the semifinals. The winners of the tournament were Emona Group for the first place and Coca Cola HBC Kosovo for the second.

Funds raised from this tournament will be dedicated to supporting the people in need of emergency medical assistance. AmCham is grateful to all the participating companies for their help and remains committed to providing support for charity initiatives or activities as a sign of contribution to the Kosovar society.

1.60. Enhancing Women’s Employment (EWE) project has kicked in!

October 2, 2019 – American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo started implementing Enhancing Women’s Employment (EWE) project which is supported by U.S Embassy in Pristina. The six-month project aims to improve women’s access to economic opportunities by combining gender equality promotion with enterprise development through training and in-job experience.
Through this project, the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo will equip 30 post-graduate women students with the skills necessary for career development in the private sector by providing 3-month training modules on developing soft and management skills and 3 month in-job experience to AmCham member companies. By the end of the project, the candidates will have the required skills to actively participate in the labor market, and sufficient working experience to foster their career development in the private sector.

AmCham recognizes the fact that women’s participation in Kosovo remains very low, thus remains committed to take concrete action-steps to tackle this phenomenon.

1.61. AmCham representatives meet U.S. senators and congressmen

November 1, 2019 – Strengthening economic cooperation with the United States of America, as well as increasing American investments in Kosovo, are crucial to the stability of the region. This was concluded from the meetings between the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo’s Board of Governors and the members of U.S. Senate and Congress in Washington. In separate meetings with ten American legislatives, AmCham Kosovo’s leadership has presented numerous developments in the country. Among others, significant topics discussed in the meetings have been the greater promotion of Kosovo’s economic prospects by American lawmakers, and the possible arrangement of a trade delegation in Kosovo from their side.

Through the course of two days, AmCham Kosovo’s delegation has met congressmen Eliot Engel, Michael Guest, Dean Philips, Bill Flores, David Price (Chairman of the House Democracy Partnership), Markwayne Mullin, Adrian Smith, Mike Conaway and Tim Burchett. The meeting with Iowa State Senator Charles Grassley, Chairman of the U.S. Senate Finance Committee has been highly important, given that this committee covers trade and tax matters. AmCham Kosovo’s Board of Governors has furthermore discussed the need for continuance of the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) for Kosovo, which currently provides the duty-free export of over 3,500 products for Kosovar manufacturing companies to the U.S., as well as opportunities to expand the list with other products.

AmCham Kosovo’s delegation was also hosted by the U.S. State Department, Office of Eastern European Affairs, where the need for Kosovo to demonstrate political stability, pursue reforms towards improving the business environment and promote free trade was discussed. New financing opportunities for Kosovo companies following the creation of the Development Finance Corporation (DFC), were additionally discussed at a meeting with officials from the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC).

1.62. AmCham presents the economic capacities of Kosovo in Minnesota

November 5, 2019 - With the aim of promoting opportunities for investment in Kosovo, the leadership of the American Chamber of Commerce has held a series of meetings with economic and commercial authorities, local chambers of commerce, and businesses from the state of Minnesota. During this visit, members of the Board of Governors of the American Chamber of Commerce were hosted by the Minnesota Department of Commerce, the Minnesota Trade Office, the Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce, and the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce. Furthermore, the delegation has also met with individual companies, including the eminent innovative company “3M”.

The Delegation of the American Chamber of Commerce has discussed Kosovo’s achievements over the eleven years as a state, both in terms of economy and overall stability, emphasizing the need for U.S. investments not only in Kosovo, but throughout the entire region. Kosovo has been introduced as a country from which U.S. manufacturing companies that would settle in the U.S. Special Economic Zone, would be able to export their products easily to the European market, and even further to states that Kosovo has free trade agreements with. On the other hand, Kosovo can learn a lot from U.S. states such as Minnesota, which by promoting a program on ease of investment, has managed to obtain a large presence of companies from “Fortune 500”. The American Chamber of Commerce has invited business delegations from the state of Minnesota to visit Kosovo, so they can be closely familiarized with the economic potential of the newest country in Europe.
1.63. The stability of Kosovo is a key precondition to attract investments

*November 7, 2019* – Good neighborly relations, strengthening of rule of law, fighting corruption, and increasing the stability of Kosovo and the whole region, are key to increasing U.S. investments. This was concluded during the Breakfast for Executives organized by the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo, where businesses had the opportunity to discuss with the Regional Economic Officer, from the Office of South-Central European Affairs at the U.S. Department of State, Robert E. Morgan.

In his meeting with AmCham business leaders, Robert Morgan, Regional Economic Officer in the Office of South Central European Affairs at the U.S. Department of State, stated that stability is essential to attracting investment, emphasizing that the continuation of dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia is a necessity for economic growth. He commended AmCham business leaders for continuing to build positive perceptions of Kosovo through their international partnerships and stated that many U.S. businesses have little information about Kosovo. Positive engagement and progress with neighbors would help in this regard. For his part, Robert pledged that he could carry the message of Kosovo’s investment opportunities back to Washington and the wider U.S. business community. Finally, Mr. Morgan encouraged AmCham to continue to use its influence to encourage the next government to take concrete steps to improve rule of law and the business environment. On the other hand, AmCham members informed the Official from the U.S. State Department on the challenges and opportunities of doing business in Kosovo. They expressed their concerns regarding the weak rule of law, the need to improve contract enforcement, and the lack of transparency as the main challenges currently hampering business operations and economic growth in the country. Participants also emphasized the need for establishment of institutions as soon as possible after the recent parliamentary elections, the continuation of reforms in the doing business environment in general, and fiscal and judicial reforms in particular, including here the creation of a Commercial Justice Court. Among others, the meeting also focused on improving the image of Kosovo, and raising awareness of the international business community on the country’s several capacities and economic developments.

1.64. Global Entrepreneurship Week in Kosovo 2019 begins

*November 18, 2019* – Under the leadership of Innovation Center Kosovo (ICK) and in cooperation with the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo, the Global Entrepreneurship Week in Kosovo has begun, during which 180 countries worldwide organize various activities in order to promote entrepreneurship and encourage entrepreneurial activities.

At the opening event of this week, the executive director of ICK, Uranik Begu, stated that for the past 7 years, it has become a culture for entrepreneurial communities including here all partners, donators, government, organizations and startup businesses to gather during Global Entrepreneurship Week in order to advance entrepreneurship as a path of creating new vacancies. Furthermore, he added that this year around 60 organizations have united for the same noble mission, to promote entrepreneurship and encourage young entrepreneurs to work towards making their dreams come true, despite the barriers they might encounter. Begu pledged that more than 80 activities will be organized during this week, emphasizing the fact that entrepreneurial awareness is increasing in all regions of Kosovo, unlike in the previous years when activities were mainly focused in Prishtina.

The Deputy Head of Mission at the Embassy of Sweden, Nasrin Pourghazian, has stated that she feels happy about the inclusion of education as a means to promoting entrepreneurship during GEW. Moreover, she expressed that there is more to be done in creating favorable conditions for entrepreneurship in less developed areas of Kosovo, as well as to increase women participation in entrepreneurship.

Ambassador of Kosovo to the United States, Vlora Çitaku, stated that both the youth and the entrepreneurial spirit are key factors to pushing Kosovo forward. According to her, over 60% of our country’s GDP comes from services and tech related industries that are gradually developing in Kosovo. Çitaku also stated that by considering the fact that we live in an interdependent world, we should work together because success is achievable only if we share knowledge and help each other.

Managing Director for Economy, Policy and Governance at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), Mattia Romani, expressed that entrepreneurship is of high importance for EBRD, and as the largest investors in Kosovo, this year EBRD will invest over 100 million euros.
in the country. According to him, what they are most proud of is their cooperation with small businesses.

AmCham Executive Director, Arian Zeka, stated that at a time when most of the young people see no prospect in our country, the main goal of AmCham, as a partner for several years in organizing GEW, is to share as many success stories as possible, therefore giving specific examples to the youth so as to support the fact that it is possible to succeed in Kosovo. Moreover, he added that AmCham in cooperation with its partners, this week will organize 14 activities in different regions of Kosovo.

1.65. Kosovo youth are introduced to the tax and legal aspects of starting a business in Kosovo

November 19, 2019 – Following the activities organized as part of the Global Entrepreneurship Week, AmCham organized the event "Starting Up in Kosovo: Legal and Tax Considerations", where different points of view regarding the laws and tax system in the country, as well as their impact in starting up a business were discussed.

Ruzhdi Zenelaj, senior tax expert and advisor at Deloitte Kosovo, provided important information regarding the tax challenges and opportunities for starting a business, stressing that the tax system in Kosovo is similar to that of EU countries. He also cited relevant laws in these matters, and considered the fact that these laws leave much room for interpretation as one of the main challenges. Furthermore, Zenelaj also focused on some favorable provisions of the laws, as opportunities that should be considered for boosting entrepreneurship.

Virtyt Ibrahimaga, Attorney-at-Law and Partner in the law firm Shita and Ibrahimaga, stated that the main challenge which startup businesses in legal terms face, is the fact that Kosovo does not have any supporting laws, as many of the developed countries in Europe and America have. Such practices highly encourage new business creation by covering their initial spendings such as rent and others, and by providing an adequate infrastructure for starting a business. Nevertheless, he mentioned that an advantage for startup businesses in Kosovo, is the fact that legal procedures for establishing a company are more simple.

1.66. The youth of Shtime learn about Entrepreneurship opportunities

November 19, 2019 – As part of the activities for the Global Entrepreneurship Week, AmCham in partnership with the Regional Development Agency – Centre, organized the event "Becoming Entrepreneur: Self-Employment Perspectives" in Shtime, with the aim of raising entrepreneurial awareness among the youth of this municipality. Participants discussed about the role of entrepreneurship in social welfare and economic growth, among other things. The Executive Director of the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo, Arian Zeka, during this roundtable stated that it is highly important for the youth to consider entrepreneurship and the private sector as means for professional and career development, as well as a way of contributing to the society. Meanwhile, the successful entrepreneur Gojart Kelmendi, from Eurokosova – Flutra, talked about the steps he has taken towards the establishment of his enterprise, as well as the difficulties that he has gone through and continues to go through as a manufacturer. He added, however, that today it is much easier to start an enterprise, especially in the sector of digital economy, where opportunities are endless.

1.67. The youth of Mitrovica learn about Entrepreneurship Perspectives

Mitrovica, November 19, 2019 – As part of Global Entrepreneurship Week, AmCham in partnership with IBCM (International Business College Mitrovica) in Mitrovica organized the event "Becoming an Entrepreneur: Self-Employment Perspectives" where Kosovar entrepreneur Agon Gashi from Meridian Express, as well as Serbian entrepreneur Bojan Slavkovic from PIXEL Mitrovica shared with students their views on entrepreneurship, and their experiences as successful entrepreneurs.

In front of students with different ethnicities, the opportunities that result from youth involvement in entrepreneurship were discussed. The executive director of the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo, Arian Zeka, encouraged the students to become oriented towards entrepreneurship, given that the private sector offers numerous career development opportunities, and at the same time contributes to the economic development of the country.
Agon Gashi from Meridian Express, talked about his journey of creating a store chain, discussing the challenges he faces, and also the success of Meridian Express. Whereas Bojan Slavkovic from PIXEL Mitrovica, discussed the risks he has undertaken by resigning from a secure job to develop the successful business he runs today. In this way, he urged young people not to limit themselves despite the challenges they may face.

1.68. Kosovo’s success in the digital services must be maintained with further commitments

November 19, 2019 – As part of the Global Entrepreneurship Week, AmCham in partnership with Kosovo American Education Fund (KAEF) organized the roundtable “Innovation and Outsourcing in Kosovo: Challenges and Opportunities” with panelists Armend Ukshini, Jeta Zagragja, Ermal Sadiku, Diedon Kica and Egzon Halili. The successful performance of the digital services in Kosovo has identified the existence of an ecosystem which must be maintained from many angles – was said at this roundtable discussion. Ermal Sadiku, KAEF Board Member and Founder at LinkPlus, by summarizing his journey as an entrepreneur in the field of information technology, considered qualified workforce as one of the key challenges in the sector. Sadiku added that in this regard, there should be a change of the education system according to the current technology dynamics. Egzon Halili, KAEF alumnus and Chief Executive Officer in Monego, stated that workforce profiling and the compilation of long-term strategies with sustainable actions are two factors that should be in focus. Jeta Zagragja, KAEF Board Member and UCX representative, particularly emphasized the need for continuous research and learning as a key condition for successful development in these sectors, where she considers that similar practices should also be done within companies. Armend Ukshini, Director of Operations at Kosbit, spoke about the importance of investments and access to global knowledge for the furtherance of Kosovo’s potential. In this regard, Ukshini emphasized the importance of keeping up with contemporary technological trends as the main prerequisite for cooperation in international levels. Diedon Kica, KAEF alumnus and BP Home representative, said that the common denominator in the success of the digitalization sector is the continued enthusiasm of Kosovo and its capabilities, which should be pushed even further.

1.69. Hakif Gashi shares his journey as an Entrepreneur

November 21, 2019 – As part of the Global Entrepreneurship Week, AmCham has organized the event “Growing Big in Kosovo”, where Hakif Gashi, owner of Meridian Corporation, and at the same time an incredibly successful entrepreneur, shared his journey since 1992 to date, and discussed among the challenges and opportunities of expanding entrepreneurial activities in the country. Gashi stated that the great passion and the continuous efforts have been key factors for the growth of the corporation he leads. Furthermore, he expressed that in order to be a successful and modern entrepreneur, one should constantly work towards offering high quality products, which enhance the wellbeing of the society. According to him, success is a journey in which one should have clear objectives and work hard regardless of eventual obstacles that they might encounter. Moreover, he gave an important message, especially for the youth, emphasizing the fact that the state and businesses are trade partners, where the latter help in generating revenues and creating vacancies, as key elements of economic development.

1.70. The youth of Drenas learn about the advantages of Entrepreneurship in Kosovo

Drenas, November 21, 2019 – The Municipality of Drenas was the next destination of AmCham activities for the Global Entrepreneurship Week. At a roundtable organized in partnership with the Regional Development Agency – Centre, and the Municipality of Drenas, “Becoming an Entrepreneur: Prospects of Self-Employment”, the entrepreneur Mergim Prishtina shared with the youth of Drenas the story behind creating TrePharm, emphasizing that he has chosen to invest in the pharmaceutical industry, seeing it as an underdeveloped industry in the country. He encouraged young people to take the risk of choosing a specific unexplored area, because they have the potential to contribute to the growth of entrepreneurship in Kosovo. The Executive Director of RDA-Centre, Mrika Macula, stated that as part of the Global Entrepreneurship Week, the Regional Development Agency – Centre is working towards training young people in soft skills, as well as advising entrepreneurs on applying for grants. The Mayor of Drenas, Ramiz Lladrovci, stated that by empowering entrepreneurship we
also empower the development of Kosovo, and with institutional support the youth should create perspectives for their future through entrepreneurship.

Executive Director of the American Chamber of Commerce, Arian Zeka, stated that the purpose of AmCham during this week is to share as many encouraging success stories as possible with Kosovo's youth. He added that today there are more favorable circumstances for being an entrepreneur in Kosovo, while the private sector offers the greatest opportunities for career development. Zeka encouraged the young people participating in the event to start setting their goals from now, so that in the future they can contribute to the society.

1.71. RIT Kosovo students and Ardian Hoxha discuss about the role of education in Entrepreneurship

November 21, 2019 – As part of the Global Entrepreneurship Week, AmCham in cooperation with RIT Kosovo organized the event "Boosting Entrepreneurship through Education" where Ardian Hoxha, as a very successful entrepreneur, shared with the students of RIT Kosovo the impact of education in his journey as an entrepreneur.

Hoxha motivated the students with his story, focusing on the fact that success is achievable for anyone who believes they can succeed, of course by setting goals and working hard to achieve them. According to him, every person follows the same path to success, regardless of the profession he chooses and in essence everything is easy, while things get complicated only when we do not have the right information or knowledge. In this regard, genuine education, whether by institutions or experience, is indispensable.

He encouraged students to start including themselves in the labor force, even voluntarily, as they would gain more experience and increase their professional skills. Ardian Hoxha emphasized that students do not have to put age-constraints to themselves, because there is no such thing as too early or too late to become successful. Meanwhile, during the discussion, students asked Hoxha different questions about time management, the impact of economic and social background on becoming successful, as well as the failures he has had and the messages he has learned from them.

1.72. Are you a champion of success?

November 21, 2019 – Another interesting and highly interactive activity was organized as part of the Global Entrepreneurship Week, by AmCham in partnership with the successful entrepreneur, Ardian Hoxha. "Are you a champion of success?" was the event where beyond 200 young people learned about the challenges through which successful entrepreneurs go.

Arian Zeka, Executive Director of AmCham, at the opening of this event stated that entrepreneurship and the engagement in the private sector should be appreciated from individuals as optimal opportunities for career advancement. He emphasized that the youth should aim to become entrepreneurs and give their contribution on the economic development and social welfare in Kosovo. The successful entrepreneur, Ardian Hoxha, in front of the attendees narrated his experience over the years by also sharing how he managed to achieve his goals and objectives. Hoxha stated that the path towards success is the same for all and the changes are noticeable only on the respective fields. Moreover, he added that the dedication to learn more helps in growing as an entrepreneur and in lowering business insecurities. Ardian Hoxha gave a message to the audience by encouraging them to be brave, work hard, and to use their time in an adequate manner. Furthermore, Hana Qerimi from Digital School, Arta Shehu – Zaimi from Labbox and Mergim Prishtina from TrePharm, revealed in front of the audience their experiences since the establishment to the development of their businesses, mentioning the challenges they faced as well as their achievements so far, thus proving to the youth that even in Kosovo success is achievable.

1.73. AAB Students discuss upon the role of education in Entrepreneurship

November 22, 2019 – As part of the Global Entrepreneurship Week 2019, AmCham in partnership with AAB University organized a round-table discussion with AAB students about boosting entrepreneurship through education.
The successful entrepreneur Shemsije Dërmaku from GrandDekor shared with the students her journey as an entrepreneur from 1999 to date, discussing among the challenges she faced in expanding her business. She stated that to become a successful entrepreneur it is more important to invest in yourself than in the business capital, while advising young people to surround themselves with positive and successful people so that their ideas are not left behind.

Pranvera Dalloshi from Bliss Cosmetics stated that today we live an era of continuous learning, and with various technological developments it has never been easier to access information and learn new things. She added that we need to constantly advance in order to adapt to the latest changes taking place in the market. Dalloshi suggested that in Kosovo the education system should be oriented towards entrepreneurship in order to create an entrepreneurial culture, given that it is one of the main actors in the country’s economic development. On the other hand, Pleurat Mustafa, lecturer in the field of entrepreneurship, said that the education system plays a significant role in the development and empowerment of entrepreneurship in the country, however, there is still place for improvement, given that it is incompatible to meet market needs. He added that modifying educational practices is crucial to arousing an entrepreneurial spirit among young people, and to bridge the gap between the skills offered by the education system and those required by the labor market. According to him, accelerating the application of these ideas in practice affects solving citizens’ problems and therefore contributes to their well-being.

1.74. Young people learn about the steps of developing a start-up business

November 22, 2019 – As part of the Global Entrepreneurship Week, the American Chamber of Commerce organized the event “Startup Success Stories” where successful entrepreneurs Agon Avdimetaj from Zombie Soup and Rron Cena from Formon talked about their experiences since the establishment until the development of their businesses.

Agon Avdimetaj, founder of Zombie Soup, shared with the audience his journey towards the development of the company and the many challenges he faced. He stated that start-up is a very unsafe and unstable field but one has to be passionate and committed because everything is achieved while possessing these traits. He stated that one's potential is seen when they try to create something in order to help the others.

Whereas, Rron Cena, founder of Formon, stated that before starting a business it is very important to define the market because every entrepreneur should focus on developing a business in a field that is not present or is underdeveloped. He added that the team plays a crucial role in the success of a business and advised young people to be careful when selecting their teams. Cena also emphasized that Kosovo offers advantageous conditions to establish a business considering that taxes are extremely favorable.

1.75. The youth of Vitia learn about the prospects of Entrepreneurship

November 22, 2019 – Following the activities organized as part of the Global Entrepreneurship Week, the youth of Vitia had the opportunity to discuss upon the challenges and opportunities of doing business with the entrepreneur Ardian Hoxha. This occurred in the activity “Becoming an Entrepreneur: Prospects of Self-employment” organized in partnership with the Regional Development Agency – East, where the mayor of Vitia, Sokol Haliti, was also present.

In this event, the successful entrepreneur Ardian Hoxha, motivated the youth of Vitia to establish their goals and to put as much effort as possible to achieve them. Furthermore, he shared his story as an entrepreneur, while mentioning the many challenges he had overcome in order to be successful. Arian Zeka, the Executive Director of AmCham, stated that although Kosovo is a developing country, it still offers big opportunities. He encouraged the youth to contribute in the economic growth of the country in the future, by choosing entrepreneurship as an option that would increase job creation.

1.76. EWE participants meet with members of AmCham Women Leaders Committee

November 22, 2019 – Following the activities organized as part of the Global Entrepreneurship Week, AmCham organized a round-table discussion with guest speakers Aferdita Mekuli from DAI Global
and Afrore Rudi from Deloitte Kosovo who shared their stories with 30 women participants of AmCham’s Enhancing Women’s Employment Program.

Aferdita Mekuli, Deputy Director of DAI Global after sharing her journey and discussing among the many challenges she faced, advised the participants that in order to be successful, besides proper education they should immediately get involved in practical work because according to her, to become professional requires constant training and commitment. Moreover, Afrore Rudi, Director in the Tax & Legal Department at Deloitte Kosovo, stated that education is the first aspect that influences the opening of career opportunities and afterwards everything depends on how dedicated you are. She added that there are always different challenges in the path of developing a career but we must see these challenges as an impetus to move forward.

1.77. The youth learn about the digital aspects of starting a business

November 23, 2019 – The 14th and therefore concluding event of AmCham for the Global Entrepreneurship Week, was the round-table on the digital aspects of starting a business, where Mentor Latifi from Sutherland, and Arianit Fazliu from Kutia discussed among other things about Kosovo’s competitive advantages in this regard, as well as further opportunities for improving the sector.

In this round-table, Arianit Fazliu as a successful entrepreneur, narrated the creation of the software development company, Kutia, where he is a co-founder. Fazliu emphasized that Kosovo is in its best moments of developing digitalization, and within a few years the awareness on the importance of this sector and the benefits it brings, have grown substantially. Whereas, Mentor Latifi explained the reasons why a global company such as Sutherland has seen the Kosovar market as attractive for investment, and also discussed the path of this company since its establishment in Kosovo until today. As the country’s leading digital advantage, he cited the favorable time zone as well as the cheap prices of this market.

Whereas, both speakers emphasized that one of the main challenges of the digital sector remains the qualification of the workforce in this regard, considering that the education system needs reforms that comply with the dynamic developments of technology.

Global Entrepreneurship Week in Kosovo is organized under the leadership of the Innovation Centre Kosovo (ICK), a week during which 180 countries worldwide organize various entrepreneurship related events.

1.78. Amplifying the impact of corporate social responsibility

November 26, 2019 – AmCham CSR Committe discussed upon increasing the corporate social responsibility and its impact in a way that creates a multiplier effect on the society.

Naxhije Arifaj, Communications Director in KEDS, mentioned KEDS’ activities in CSR, focusing on KEDS Academy as one of the biggest projects of the company in this regard, which is being implemented for seven years in a row. Arifaj stated that the academy’s goal is to support local electric engineering students in further academic and professional development. Moreover, this academy supports local initiatives to promote a healthy environment and energy saving. Arifaj encouraged businesses to continue with CSR projects, especially because the main beneficiary from such projects is the society.

Valentina Gara, Public Relations and Complaints Manager at the International Airport of Prishtina has focused on education and medicine with various projects that serve the citizens. Gara stated that it is important for CSR investments to not be only financial, but also focusing on human resources, considering investment on youth education as one of the most important corporate social responsibilities.

Ariel Shabani, Head of AmCham CSR Committee, Director for Business Development and Quality Manager at Kivo, stated that companies must initially identify the need for CSR projects in order to focus on a long-term plan. Furthermore, he mentioned that KIVO’s first efforts in CSR have been charity related, while afterwards they have also focused on culture, sports and education.

Artan Ramaj, Human Resources and Marketing Manager at Al-Trade Center, while informing on projects and initiatives taken from the company, also supported the idea of needs identification.
Ramaj added that all citizens should be held responsible for the projects that are implemented to benefit society, therefore offering Al-Trade’s willingness to cooperate with other companies for organizing any project of this kind.

1.79. **AmCham and Gjirafa.com establish earthquake relief initiative for Albania**

*December 6, 2019* – Four trucks containing food, clothes and other elementary items have left for Albania, thanks to the contribution and solidarity of Kosovo businesses and citizens, under the joint initiative of the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo and Gjirafa.com. The amount of all the donated items amounts close to €40,000. At the same time businesses and citizens, AmCham and Gjirafa.com, have also donated a monetary contribution of €42,490.

Under this initiative, monetary contribution has been provided by Coca-Cola HBC Kosovo (€15,000), Limak – Prishtina International Airport (€10,000), FINCA (€5,000), KEP Trust (€5,000), KIVO (€1,000), Delfin LTD (€1,000), Asseco (€1,000), American Clinic (€500), AS Travel (€200), Indeson WBC (€100), Melita&Partners (€100), Contour Global staff (€340) as well as citizens Burim Cena (€100), Xhevat Dedina (€100) and Fiknete Balaj (€50). AmCham Kosovo has donated €1,000, while Gjirafa staff and clients have donated €2,000.

In addition to the monetary contribution, Delfin LTD has also donated food items in an amount of €13,048, whereas the supermarkets chain Interex has donated food and hygienic items in amount of €6,500. Buçaj company has donated food and hygienic items as well as kitchenware and clothes in amount of €5,000. The following companies have also donated food and hygienic items in amount of €15,000: Al Trade Center, Pestova, Albatros, Auto Servis Fatosi, Frutti, Sheki Bakery, Keranova, and Luga. The American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo and Gjirafa.com thank all the businesses and citizens for their contribution.

1.80. **AmCham publishes the new Corruption Perception Study**

*December 9, 2019* – Corruption continues to be one of the key problems that businesses in Kosovo face, therefore, in order to increase its reporting, state institutions should develop continuous dialogue with businesses, thus showing greater efforts on fighting corruption, and gaining the trust of the business community. This was concluded during the presentation of the findings of the
Corruption Perception Study, conducted jointly by the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo and USAID Commercial Justice Activity Program, during the International Anti-Corruption Day.

Chris Thompson, Chief of Party of the USAID-funded Commercial Justice Activity Program, while briefing the participants on the purpose of the program, stated that the main goal of the Commercial Justice Activity is to reduce opportunities for corruption and to improve the perception of corruption among businesses and citizens. The program intends to achieve this by supporting technical reforms such as the establishment of a commercial court, increasing accountability and professionalism of Kosovo’s private judgment enforcement system, as well as by raising awareness of dispute resolution outside the court system through arbitration and mediation. Furthermore, Thompson added that the study on Corruption Perception among Businesses plays a significant role in assisting the Commercial Justice Activity because the outcomes of this study will help inform the program how to carry out its work and what it emphasizes as a priority.

The Executive Director of the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo, Arian Zeka, stated that this study, despite revealing findings that should be viewed with concern by the society, is also an important document that enables the measurement of the annual progress or regress in fighting corruption. According to him, the high degree of corruption and the continuing reluctance of businesses to report it to the relevant authorities are the main worrying factors. Zeka stated that the high level of corruption inevitably affects foreign direct investment and Kosovo’s institutions should continue to work on fighting corruption, or else, any battle in the efforts to attract FDI will be lost.

AmCham Policy Officer, Ardita Hajra, and the Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning Specialist at the USAID Commercial Justice Program, Nertila Latifi, presented the main findings of the Corruption Perception Study. According to the study, which is published for the second year in a row, 72% of business respondents consider corruption as a matter that requires priority action, of which 47% of the respondents perceive it as systemic, while 33% of them perceive it as sporadic. This year’s study highlights a decline in the percentage of those who have faced corruption, as well as a slight increase in those who have reported it to the relevant authorities, even though this percentage still remains below a quarter of the respondents.

The main reasons that impede businesses from reporting corruption cases include fear of retaliation by relevant institutions in the future, lack of trust in the judicial system, and lack of concrete results from fighting corruption. It should be noted that only 14% of businesses have declared full trust in the judiciary system. The study also finds that 42% of businesses believe that corruption has increased compared to five years ago, with a double increase in this indicator compared to last year’s study. While the most prevalent forms of corruption are bribery, misuse of public wealth, and non-disclosure of conflict of interest.

Listing the three main reasons that incentivize businesses to engage in corruption, nearly half of respondents stated that they do so to avoid a penalty, followed by a large percentage of those who believe that the desire to obtain a favorable treatment in an open or competitive procedure encourages businesses to engage in corruptive affairs. Two-thirds of respondents conveyed that the weak rule of law also encourages corruption.

Approximately 83.20% of respondents stated that corruption impedes foreign direct investment in Kosovo. While stating that corruption is highly present in public procurement activities, 91% of businesses surveyed believe that e-procurement will help fight corruption, which is a very encouraging finding.

1.81. AmCham Foundation to support children with cancer in 2020

December 13, 2019 – The American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo organized the annual Gala Charity Dinner through which businesses from various sectors raised funds to support financially the organizations supporting children with cancer and the education of Roma, Ashkani and Egyptian children.

The dinner was generously supported by: Platinum Sponsors, Coca Cola Hellenic Bottling Company, Meridian Corporation and KIVO; Gold Sponsor: Finca; Silver Sponsors: Elkos, Gjirafa; and Regular Sponsors: KEP, Banka Kombetare Tregtare, HIB Corporation, Regional Development Association Centre, Innovation Centre Kosovo, Interex. Contributions were also made by Deloitte, Asseco, Boga & Associates, Banka Ekonomike, and Siguria.
AmCham Foundation has supported other important causes in the past such as the renovation of the Pediatric Hospital at the University Clinical Center of Kosovo (UCCK), organizations for visually impaired individuals, improving the conditions of elementary schools in rural areas in Kosovo, building homes for homeless families, supporting ATOMI (the organization which assembles children with extraordinary IQ), Down Syndrome Kosova, Action for Mothers and Children, SOS Children’s Village and many more, while at the same time contributing in the sustainability of these organizations.

1.82. Effective dialogue with the private sector should be emphasized in 2020

December 21, 2019 – Political developments in the second part of the year post Government resignation have inevitably led to limited achievements and non-satisfying results in what was promoted as the Year of Economic Development, whereas the new Government must further its reforms in the business environment. This was said today during a joint press conference organized by Kosovo Chamber of Commerce and the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo. During this conference, the top executives of the two chambers of commerce spoke about the economic developments during 2019 while also presenting their recommendations for the upcoming year.

Kosovo Chamber of Commerce President, Berat Rukiqi, stated that despite expectations for a more sustainable economic development in 2019, several factors have had a negative impact on this respect, citing the political crisis as one of the main factors that has negatively influenced the confidence of doing business among both internal and external investors. He added that the delay in constituting the new government could create irreparable damage to the country’s economy. Rukiqi also stressed that political topics have overshadowed fiscal and economic policy reforms, which have resulted in slowing exports and growth of FDI in the country. He also said that the new government should push for the establishment of the Commercial Court, which has already received support from both chambers of commerce.

The Executive Director of the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo, Arian Zeka, considered for pity the lack of positive results at the end-of-the year. In this regard, Zeka mentioned the downturn for several positions in Kosovo’s ranking in the World Bank Doing Business Report 2020. On the other hand, as a more positive development he mentioned the improved ranking for five positions ahead in the 2019 Index of Economic Freedom published by Heritage Foundation, which assesses developments in the field of Rule of Law, Regulatory Efficiency, Government Size and Open Markets. Concerning 2020 recommendations, and therefore the new Government, Zeka stated that one of the top priorities must be the drafting of a national strategy for economic development, as a point of reference for all government and respective ministries’ decisions. Furthermore, he added
that the closing of the agreement for Kosovo-Serbia relations normalization would affect in increasing political stability, and opportunities for attracting American and other foreign investments, not only in Kosovo, but also in the whole Western Balkans.

Other issues to be treated with priority in the agenda of the new government are the increasing of education quality, as well as the bridging of the gap between supply and demand in the labor market. A starting point in this aspect should be the alarming results of the PISA report, as well as the measures that highly ranked countries in this report have undertaken for education improvement.

1.83. Kosovo Tax Administration is committed to equal treatment of taxpayers

*December 23, 2019* – The Tax Administration of Kosovo will continue to contribute to the business environment, focusing on equal treatment of taxpayers, and continuing its cooperation with the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo. This was stated during a meeting of AmCham members with the General Director of the Tax Administration of Kosovo, Ilir Murtezaj.

The Executive Director of the American Chamber of Commerce, Arian Zeka, stated that it is to commend the approach of the Tax Administration, which even in such politically challenged circumstances, following the resignation of the Government, continues to correctly perform as an independent executive institution. He emphasized that AmCham remains committed to continue cooperating with TAK as one of the most important institutions for business operations.

The General Director of Tax Administration of Kosovo, Ilir Murtezaj, mentioned TAK's numerous developments in the last 20 years, emphasizing that, compared to previous years, this institution has advanced in many processes with the aim of equal treatment for all businesses. As an example, he mentioned the increased efficiency in the process of revenue collection, debt collection, and reforms in reviewing taxpayer demands. Murtezaj added that despite these developments, there is still room for improvement and TAK is open to recommendations. He also spoke about measures taken to increase the integrity of tax officials, for which they are receiving support from the programs of international organizations, including the United States Agency for International Development.

1.84. State institutions have a crucial role in reforming the education sector in Kosovo

*December 23, 2019* – State institutions should refer to PISA results in revising the education system in Kosovo. This was said during a roundtable organized by American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo, where the alarming results of the country in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and their impact in the private sector were discussed.

Besnik Krasniqi, Economic Researcher and University Professor, stated that the results of PISA exam are not surprising at all given that the development of the teaching program and methodology in Kosovo does not prepare students to apply practical knowledge in a specific context. He added that the inadequate development of students’ creative skills has implications for the private sector as well, which in turn cannot impact on improving the quality of education without a proactive role of state institutions for dialogue in this regard.

Gresa Statovci, Education Consultant, stated that from the economic point of view, improving the quality of education is a key parameter for the country’s further development. She added that as part of the efforts to improve the educational system, Kosovo is implementing a new curriculum framework, which with adequate improvements would bring better results in the PISA exam, and therefore a better prepared workforce. Statovci emphasized the need to include the private sector in the drafting of education policies, in order to reduce the gap between demand and supply in the labor market.

On the other hand, Naim Telaku, Psychologist and University Professor, talked from the psychological point of view and elaborated on various factors that may have contributed to poor results in the PISA exam, such as inadequate curriculum, misuse of technology, emotional difficulties and the weak relationships in the parent-child-teacher triangle. Frequently, teachers’ role and their approach as the uncontested authority results in the demotivation of students, who at the same time are under continuous pressure from their parents to achieve better results. Telaku called for the implementation of all necessary PISA guidelines, in order to improve the educational system, including here the assistance of the private sector. Moreover, he talked about the need for an approach which combines emotional intelligence with the development of cognitive abilities.
1.85.  **AmCham Foundation and President Jahjaga give presents to visually impaired children in Peja**

*Peja, December 27, 2019* – For the second year in a row, the fourth President of the Republic of Kosovo, Atifete Jahjaga, and the Executive Director of the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo, Arian Zeka, gave presents to the visually impaired children, students of the Resource Center for Education and Counselling “Xheladin Deda” in Peja. During this visit, Xheladin Deda Resource Center staff informed AmCham and President Jahjaga on the many challenges that they face, including the low level of job opportunities for this group, as well as the need for more staff and equipment to support their activities in creating better studying conditions for the students.

1.86.  **AmCham, Al-Trade Center, and Telegrafi give presents for the New Year**

*December 30, 2019* – With the joint initiative of the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo, Al-Trade Center and Telegrafi, 200 gifts were given to the children of SOS Village, patients of Infectious Disease, Surgical and Pediatric Clinic at UCCK. While representatives of AmCham, Al-Trade Center and Telegrafi were giving these gifts, SOS village staff organized lots of fun activities for the children.
2. POSITIONS AND STATEMENTS

2.1. Barriers in free trade hinder economic growth prospects in Kosovo

January 25, 2019 – The American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo reiterates its position that free trade is an important factor in enabling economic growth and any distortion in the free movement of goods may hinder Kosovo’s economic growth and investment attraction prospects. Pursuant to its mission of supporting development of mutually economic relations between the United States of America and Kosovo, AmCham believes that obstacles to regional trade hinder the operations of American businesses in the region, and make Kosovo less attractive for American and other foreign investors. American investors seek to invest in countries which provide unhindered access to larger markets and who constantly promote deregulation of markets and free movement of goods and capital. Therefore, AmCham considers that Kosovo institutions are ought to meet these expectations in order to accelerate its economic development and improve the welfare of its people.

2.2. Public wage increase threatens the budgetary stability

February 5, 2019, Prishtina – The American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo expresses its concerns regarding the approval of the draft law on wages and increasing budgetary expenses for wages. AmCham reiterates its position that further growth of wages in the public sector increases differences in wage levels between the public and private sectors which disfavors the private sector which at the same time is the pillar of filling the budget as well as economic development. AmCham believes that such actions of state institutions, without considering the burden on the private sector, are in contradiction with the discourse of the highest state officials in empowering the private sector and also in attracting investments. Public wage increase directly affects the private enterprises, specifically the fragile sector of manufacturing, as well as in increasing foreign direct investments, due to the fact that the labor force will no longer be promoted as an advantage for Kosovo. Approving the draft law on wages endangers the financial stability in the country due to the enormous increase of expenses for wages and social schemes, which negatively affects capital investments, and also risks increasing the budgetary deficit. At the same time, making decisions with long-term effects, while under pressure, and without an all-inclusive dialogue, including here private sector representatives, hinders prospects of stable development of the country. State institutions, the Government and the Assembly, should refrain from making such decisions, and warnings for other decisions which AmCham considers as intrusive in the private sector, in contradiction with constitutional and legal dispositions, as well as orienting Kosovo in empowering functional market economy.

2.3. AmCham’s statement on security of banks and businesses

February 8, 2019 – The American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo considers the banking sector in Kosovo a sector of vital importance for the economic development of the country. A stable banking system is considered a precondition for increased investments in the country as well as attracting foreign direct investments. Considering its importance, Kosovo is lucky to have a stable banking system. AmCham expresses its concern regarding the continuous robbery in banks which lately have become a threat to the whole sector and the society and are now at alarming levels. Armed robbery threatens not only the overall perception of the banking sector, but it is also a direct impact against the economic development of the country, and, consequently, against the future of Kosovo. In foreign investors’ perception, such cases give the impression of a weak system of rule of law and order, thus increasing insecurity in doing business. AmCham urges security authorities and other responsible institutions in the country to treat this issue of paramount importance by undertaking stricter measures in providing higher security for banks and other businesses, as well as maintaining the overall stability in the country.

2.4. AmCham position on Public Procurement

March 1, 2019 – The American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo voices its concerns regarding the favorable treatment of publicly owned enterprises, through erroneous implementation of the in-house purchase provisions, whereby the public authorities are purchasing services from publicly
owned enterprises, in contradiction to the constitutional provisions, Law on Public Procurement, and the Stabilization-Association Agreement. This erroneous practice which threatens equal treatment of publicly and privately owned enterprises derives from a wrongful interpretation of the Public Procurement Regulatory Commission on Article 9.4 of the Public Procurement Law, which provides that if the contracting authority is a public authority, such public authority shall take reasonable measures to ensure that objects meeting such needs are not available from another public authority. However, AmCham emphasizes that publicly owned enterprises should in no way be considered as “public authorities”, therefore, purchasing of their services by contracting authorities through “in-house procurement provisions” should be interrupted as it threatens fair competition. Favorable treatment of publicly owned enterprises as per the aforementioned terms is in contradiction to the basic principles of market economy and free competition, regulated under articles 10 and 119 of the Constitution of Republic of Kosovo. In addition, Article 13 of the Law on Publicly Owned Enterprises clearly provides that all publicly owned enterprises, with no exception, shall be subject to laws, regulations and sublegal acts, which regulate private business organizations. As stated above, the American Chamber of Commerce calls on all public authorities to interrupt the erroneous practice of favoring publicly owned enterprises, recalling that it is the responsibility of the public authorities to provide level playing field for all economic operators, public and private, through rightful implementation of the laws and Constitution.

2.5. AmCham calls for senior public appointments to be based on professionalism

March 8, 2019 – The American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo believes that public independent organizations need to be protected from political influence. In this regard, AmCham Kosovo expresses its concern over the decision of the Assembly of Kosovo to appoint the new leadership of Kosovo Property Comparison and Verification Agency contrary to the recommendation which followed a transparent and meritocratic recruitment process. Regardless of the support being received in public recruitment process, Kosovo continues to witness appointment of people in public leadership positions without having the necessary professional expertise and failing to demonstrate that they abide by the law and by the highest ethical standards. Therefore, the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo is deeply concerned over the fact that Members of the Parliament based their decision on cronyism rather than professionalism, thus urging on them to value meritocracy over political affiliation, for the best of Kosovo citizens.

2.6. AmCham and KCC welcome the decision to delay the liberalization of electricity market

March 29, 2019 – Kosovo Chamber of Commerce and the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo welcome the decision of the Energy Regulatory Office (ERO) Board in the amendment of the Guideline on Liberalization of Electricity Market which will extend the deadline for consumers to change from the 35kV voltage by March 31, 2020. KCC and AmCham express their consideration also for the members of the Parliamentary Commission for Economic Development, Trade, Industry, and Regional Development, for their recommendation to the ERO thus supporting the requests of the business community, and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kosovo in enabling the dialogue between business representatives and the Energy Regulatory Office. The decision of the ERO Board should enable better preparation even for consumers, but also for energy suppliers, and market liberalization. At the same time, KCC and AmCham urge the Energy Regulatory Office to review the boundaries for electricity self-consumption, believing that removing boundaries in this regard would attract business investments in alternative sources of generating energy and in energy efficiency growth in general.

2.7. AmCham welcomes selection of General Electric for “Kosova e Re”

May 3, 2019 – The American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo welcomes the selection of the U.S. conglomerate, General Electric (GE), for the construction and long-term maintenance of “Kosova e Re” power plant. AmCham considers that unstable energy supply has continuously caused numerous damages to the local industry making it impossible for its further development especially in the manufacturing sector. In this regard, the selection of the U.S. conglomerate General Electric for the construction and long-term maintenance of “Kosova e Re” power plant comes as a solution to businesses’ requests in increasing capacities in energy generation by securing stable energy supply.
The American Chamber of Commerce believes that, besides securing stable energy supply as a necessity for the development of the private sector in the country, the construction of this power plant will also have an impact in setting preconditions in attracting foreign direct investments. The inclusion of General Electric, which is globally known for its reputation in the energy sector, and of Contour Global, which is also a U.S. company, will create a modern technology and practices in construction and management.

2.8. AmCham calls for minimum wage to be based on private sector competitiveness

May 14, 2019 – Following the latest calls of political groups in increasing the minimum wage, the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo reiterates its position that the minimum wage must be a reflection of the economic indicators in the country and should not be changed without considering the competitiveness of the private sector. AmCham believes that free workforce is amongst the main factors that impact not only the competitiveness of the businesses, but the efforts of Kosovo in attracting foreign direct investments. In addition, increasing the minimum wage could further deteriorate the unemployment amongst youth and workers with lower skills, who usually are beneficiaries of the minimum wage, whereas, according to the Labor Force Survey of the Kosovo Agency of Statistics, Kosovo has the highest unemployment rate amongst youth with over 55%. Therefore, AmCham urges the Assembly and the Government to unconditionally avoid decisions that can lead to deterioration of such indicators despite the short-term benefits.

2.9. AmCham welcomes decision on age of imported vehicles

May 15, 2019 – The American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo considers as a positive step the decision of the Parliament in not passing the proposed amendment of the Law No. 05/L-132 on Vehicles on removing the limitation of imports of vehicles older than 10 years. This step must be seen as a reaffirmation of the commitment of Kosovo in protecting the environment and in being in line with the European Union directives. AmCham earlier had urged all members of parliament not to support this initiative which would deteriorate the situation in the country in regards to the environmental impact and traffic safety. Considering the average age of registered vehicles in Kosovo which is over 18 years and the high pollution levels registered in certain periods within a year in the country, implications from this initiative would have increased even more the concerns amongst citizens. Surely, short-term benefits from this decision would be minimal compared to the damage caused from old vehicles. Lastly, AmCham believes that the decision of not passing this amendment is in line with European Union initiatives in reducing gas emissions from light-duty and heavy-duty vehicles. The Assembly of Kosovo should now focus on working continuously in analyzing and approving laws that primarily focus on the welfare of citizens and the improvement of the business environment by taking into account the comments and recommendations of all stakeholders.

2.10. AmCham urges institutions to stop all unfair business practices

June 21, 2019 – The American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo reminds the institutions of Republic of Kosovo that the Constitution provides for an economic order which is based on a market economy with free competition. A functional liberal economy necessitates for a level playing field, whereby Government’s intervention and interference in regulating the market forces is non-existent or minimal. In this regard, exclusive control of the trade in a commodity or service, goes against the orientation of the country for a free market economy. The Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, along with arrangements that Kosovo has made with international entities, reflect the commitment of state institutions to fulfill the respective provisions that promote such lines of economy. AmCham thereby expresses its concerns on the monopolized homologation of vehicles—which impedes competition, fosters unfair practices of providing services, and increases the expenditures of businesses and citizens. Having a single homologation operator impedes free competition, and consequently, the efficiency that results with more bodies that provide the same service—both, in terms of avoiding excessive pricing as well as increasing the availability of providing that nature of service to the public. The current system of homologation of vehicles hampers the freedom to provide services, which in effect, penalizes the consumers with additional logistic expenditures needed to acquire the service in a single location. Similarly, and for many years, country’s institutions have exercised a favorable treatment of publicly owned enterprises, through erroneous
implementation of the in-house purchase provisions, whereby the public authorities are purchasing services from publicly owned enterprises without being subject to public procurement procedures, in contradiction to the constitutional provisions and the Law on Public Procurement. AmCham reiterates its position that publicly owned enterprises should in no way be considered as “public authorities”, as Law on Publicly Owned Enterprises clearly provides that these enterprises, with no exception, shall be subject to laws, regulations and sublegal acts, which regulate private business organizations, therefore purchasing of their services by contracting authorities through “in-house procurement provisions” should be interrupted as it threatens fair competition. AmCham also recalls the long period of three years when the Kosovo Competition Commission was nonfunctional and thus preventing the Competition Authority to exercise its legal duties in the area of protection of competition, urging the Government and the Assembly to ensure the proper functioning of this body at all times. The American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo states that impediment to free competition poses a breach of Constitutional provisions, which explicitly puts a prohibition on practices that restrict free competition by abusing the dominant position or practices. In this spirit, all institutions of Republic of Kosovo should identify unfair business practices and take measures to stop them, and ensure that marketplace remains free and competitive.

2.11. Furtherance of doing-business reforms should be based on a national economic strategy

September 24, 2019 – Continuation of the doing business reforms, which would enable the strengthening of the private sector and attracting of foreign direct investments, should be a priority for the new Government of Kosovo. Members of the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo believe that improved rule of law, addressing of the workforce gap, and the transportation and energy infrastructure gap should be at the heart of this reform. Meanwhile, a national strategy for economic development should be the starting point for the reform, and all Kosovo’s economic governance decisions. The new government of Kosovo should demonstrate its commitment for an accelerated economic development, by guaranteeing a free market economy as the basis of the economic regulation of Republic of Kosovo, thus engaging all the capacities of domestic and foreign enterprises for a sustainable economic development. A national strategy for economic development should be among the first documents to be drafted by the new Government, following a thorough and comprehensive study of country’s capacities and opportunities, including the strategic sectors upon which country’s sustainable development should be based. In this regard, business associations and the private sector can play a significant role through formal mechanisms of dialogue, which should be maintained and strengthened in the future. Members of the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo believe that proper implementation of the legal framework is the most important factor in doing business, whereas the establishment of a separate commercial court should be prioritized by the new Government, thus offering an efficient mechanism for businesses to dispute resolutions. The Government of the Republic of Kosovo should guarantee equal treatment of all enterprises and sectors. A precondition for guaranteeing the latter is the efficiency of the bodies responsible for protecting competition, avoiding measures and decisions that favor a particular sector, combating the informal economy and eradicating corruption. The regulation of multiple inspection bodies, as well as their discretion and powers, is vital to facilitating the operations of the businesses, and avoiding interference in the private sector. The legal basis governing market operations, both internal and external, should be in line with Kosovo’s constitutional provisions, as well as with country’s orientation for a market economy, which is also in the spirit of the international arrangements that the country had undertaken, including the Stabilization and Association Agreement. In order to measure the impact and efficiency of the new legal initiatives on the private sector and other areas of life, the new Government should continuously implement Regulatory Impact Assessment as an instrumental practice in EU countries. This practice presents a system for critically evaluating the positive and negative effects of the proposed acts, thus forming an evidence-based policy-making approach. The Government should pay a special consideration to advancing the implementation of harmonized financial reporting standards, for large corporations, as well as small and medium-sized enterprises, which in turn would enable greater efficiency and transparency. These standards would also enable greater opportunity to identify market needs, decent policymaking that takes into account the needs of the private sector, better information, increased partnerships between domestic and foreign investors, and further reduction of the cost of capital. In order for this to happen, the National Council for Financial Reporting should undertake periodic processing of electronic data. The new government should continue to support the development of transport infrastructure in place, with a strong emphasis on modernizing and expanding the railway network, but also the functionalization of Gjakova’s Airport, whereas
investments in new roads should precede careful feasibility studies. When it comes to bridging of the energy gap in the country, the new Government should support the development of new electricity generation capacities but also the diversification of energy sources in Kosovo. In this regard, the American Chamber of Commerce supports the construction of the “New Kosovo” power plant, but also promotes initiatives for development of alternative energy capacities. In addition, construction of natural gas capacities, including the connection to international gas pipelines, are of utter importance. Significant attention by the new Government should be devoted to the development of human capital, starting with an education system reform at all levels, starting at pre-school, with purpose of promoting entrepreneurship among future generations, but also improving the relationship between supply and demand in the labor market. The government should refrain from actions that further increase the pay gap between the public and private sectors, by further raising public sector wages, thus reducing labor force availability within the private sector, which is unable to follow the payment trends. On the other hand, labor legislation should be in line with the economic development of the country, without aggravating the relations between employers and employees. Educational programs should reflect the needs of the labor market and various industries in Kosovo, providing solutions to the problems of these industries, in particular for the manufacturing sector in Kosovo. Proper staffing would support country’s goals of developing an Internet-based economy, or digital economy, having in mind the benefits Kosovo can have in this regard. The development of human capital is also an important component in the implementation of international standards for financial reporting. In order to properly address issues related to human capital, the cooperation of educational institutions, including those of higher education, with the private sector should be raised to the highest possible level, focusing on analyzing the current situation and future trends, but also in structuring practical work programs, so that students in Kosovo can harmonize their practical and theoretical knowledge. Important in this regard is the promotion of vocational education among young people, but also the proper career orientation from an early age. In addition to the aforementioned, members of the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo recommend continuation of the fiscal reforms, including the rapid adoption of tax laws, such as the one on value-added tax, which would bring new incentives for businesses. Fiscal incentives, including tax holidays, should support young entrepreneurs, especially women, as well as strengthen the capacity of companies in the digital economy, but also attract foreign investors; in particular, those whom the country intends to encourage for investing in special economic zones, such as the American one in Gjakova. For young entrepreneurs, and more particularly for the producers, further facilitation of access to finance is needed, by expanding the support from the Kosovo Credit Guarantee Fund. Finally, the American Chamber of Commerce believes that the new Government should complete the country's legal base in areas in which innovation and business advancement is stiffened, such as the case with electronic transactions, with clear reference to the national strategy of economic development, which should be drafted from the very beginning of the Government term.

3. PUBLICATIONS, ANALYSES & BLUEPRINTS

In 2019, the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo has prepared and published the following documents and papers:

1. Intellectual Property in Kosovo and European Union (January)
2. Energy Monitor Issue 4 (January)
3. Energy Monitor Issue 5 (February)
4. Horizon Magazine Issue 29 (March)
5. Energy Monitor Issue 6 (March)
6. Quarterly Legal Update (March)
7. Energy Monitor Issue 7 (April)
8. Manufacturing Competitiveness Index 2019 (May)
10. Quarterly Legal Update (June)
11. Energy Monitor Issue 9 (July)
12. Energy Monitor Issue 10 (August)
13. Quarterly Legal Update (September)
14. Growth Roadmap (October)
15. Corruption Perception Study (December)
16. Horizon Magazine Issue 30 (December)
17. Quarterly Legal Update (December)
4. TRADE DELEGATIONS

1. Smart Cities, New York, USA (May 2019)
2. Select USA, Washington DC, USA (June 2019)
3. National Restaurant Association Show, Chicago, USA (May 2019)
5. Pack Expo, Las Vegas, USA (September 2019)
6. Process Expo, Chicago, USA (October 2019)

5. TRAININGS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH IEDC-BLED SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

1. Digital Transformation Strategy Training, Bled, Slovenia (April 2019)
2. Business Transformation Seminar, Belgrade, Serbia (December 2019)
## American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo

### 2019 Financial Report

15-Jan-20

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Total income | 342,000.00 | 373,219.89 |
Total Expenses | 364,928.95 | 292,394.52 |
Net Income | -22,928.95 | 80,825.37 |