

Meet our Alumni interview

In this issue we meet **Bakhtiyar Aslanbayli, Regional Tax & Customs Director, BP Group – Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey Region**



Bakhtiyar Aslanbayli

Graduated from the Baku State University, Faculty of International Law and International Relations

<i>Apr 1998:</i>	<i>Joined PwC as a Tax Assistant</i>
<i>Oct 1998:</i>	<i>Promoted to the Senior Tax Consultant at PwC</i>
<i>Apr 2002:</i>	<i>Joined BP Azerbaijan as a Tax Analyst</i>
<i>Oct 2004:</i>	<i>January 2010 - BP / Tax Advisor for BTC project, as Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey</i>
<i>Jan 2010- Apr 2012:</i>	<i>BP / Tax Compliance & Reporting Team Leader</i>
<i>Apr 2012:</i>	<i>up to date- BP / Regional Tax and Customs Director in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey</i>
<i>Sep 1999:</i>	<i>up to date -Lecturer at Baku State University</i>

1. You are the BP Azerbaijan Regional Tax and Customs Director. How long have you been leading your team and what are your main responsibilities and challenges?

I am now with BP for 10 years. I have been leading the Tax Compliance and Reporting Team for more than two years and recently took on the position of the Regional Tax and Customs Director. The Team comprises from 19 tax and customs professionals with a wide range of responsibilities providing tax and customs support to all of the BP projects on a regional basis covering Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey. We are privileged to have a wide range of activities in the region (full scale upstream and downstream, mergers and acquisitions, etc.), which makes our tax and customs engagement very challenging, unique and important. I don't think that I could have that level of exposure to business and tax matters anywhere else within the region.

2. What were your responsibilities at PwC and how did you end up in your current position?

I joined PwC in April 1998 as a Tax Assistant to work mainly on the registration of legal entities. I've started my professional career from spending my probationary period on a sick leave (2 out of 3 months of my probationary period). So, whenever managers were wondering on the location of the new joiner the response was "he is on a sick leave". Despite all those challenges, the management decided to extend my contract and I'd joined the professional world of tax advisors. My client portfolio was quite extensive at the time when I was leaving PwC. I was heavily involved in the oil and gas industry support including but not limited to the advisory, tax and legal structuring of business in the region, registration and closure of companies, leading tax audits, computation and reporting of taxes both direct, indirect and payroll, negotiations and participation in drafting of the Production Sharing Agreements and related tax protocols. So, at the time when I joined BP, my background was quite extensive and solid, which certainly helped me in passing all the important career milestones within the company's tax world taking the lead within the region and tax function in general.

3. What were your most memorable moments at PwC?

I had a lot of memorable moments at PwC. Long nights during busy seasons full of hard work, and fun and laughter. This was my first professional employment, and I had a number of "FIRSTS" there – my first business card, first business e-mail and first tax memo, my first client meeting and first tax audit, first registration project and first de-registration project, first success and first screw-up, first lessons learned and first performance appraisal, first night club visit with the client, first support by your manager in a difficult situation and first problem with your boss, and many-many other "firsts". PwC gave me an opportunity of meeting and working with great people and tax professionals as well as customers from all over the world. This indeed taught me to communicate and cooperate with different locations, cultures with their peculiarities and wide variety of personalities.

4. If you were asked to give a piece of advice to someone about to join PwC, what would it be?

In fact, this is my recommendation to many graduates asking for a piece of advice where to start their career. For someone with economic, finance and legal education the Big 4 companies are a great place to start with. And if someone is about to join the PwC Tax Practice in Baku, I would advice that person to appreciate that

he/she joined the strongest tax practice in the region and to focus all his/her efforts to learn as much as possible from being part of that practice.

5. On a more personal note, do you have any hobbies or interests that help you to relax after a busy week? What is your favourite sport?

My favourite sport is football, which I practiced during my PwC times as well.

I do enjoy lecturing at the university and grow young generation of professionals. I do enjoy that feeling of satisfaction when I see my students passing their university and life exams and achieving deserved heights in their professional and academic arena. During weekends, I love reading and spending time with my family.

6. Do you keep in touch with your former colleagues?

I certainly believe that PwC in Azerbaijan is like a big family growing excellent professionals and reliable friends. Even after leaving this company we still stay in touch. You cannot express that link and feeling with words but it is there. So, yes, we are in touch and try to gather during annual the New Year celebrations where current PwC team always invites ex-colleagues (the most of them are friends or colleagues in other firms). In my case, I have a number of PwC colleagues currently working with me in my team and in BP in general.

For business purposes, I truly believe, and it is proved every time when I refer to this Firm, that this is the leading high quality supplier of the professional tax and legal advice within the regional oil and gas industry. I tend to refer to Movlan Pashayev on number of issues whereas Arif Guliyev remains for me the "tax guru" in Azerbaijan. I certainly appreciate loyalty demonstrated by Mushfig Aliyev with whom we interacted actively while he was based in Georgia and I am very glad to see him back to the Azerbaijan team. By the way, I always see PwC as an excellent source of high quality tax professionals where I personally would prefer to go for head hunting :).

7. What can the role of alumni be in our firm? What can they give us, and what can we give them?

I trust that PwC benefits from business development perspective spreading out its professionals across the market. By doing so, PwC promotes its high quality standards. Also, PwC' ex-employees are best placed to value and appreciate services and quality provided by their ex-employer. So, this definitely brings positive remarks from the marketing perspective.

PwC tends to support its alumni (I can talk for Baku team for sure) and when required to involve in various training and/or knowledge sharing sessions or presentations which benefits both sides.

8. Do you have a message to PwC Azerbaijan alumni?

I think graduation of the PwC "school" obliges a PwC alumni to always keep up to the high benchmark established within PwC. I also would like to encourage of staying in touch which certainly helps in staying a high level professional and maintaining such network!

9. Now back to professional matters: Can you tell us about BP's wide range of products and services? Any products or services that you want to highlight?

BP's leadership in Azerbaijan's oil and gas market is indisputable. We are the operator of the giant Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli oil and Shah Deniz gas developments. After being active in the country for last 20 years, BP still has a lot to offer to Azerbaijan and the region.

10. And finally, if you were given the chance to start all over again, what would you do?

I would exactly repeat each and every step I took in my career as I have no regrets of any moment of professional life.