



ASSEMBLY OF
TURKISH AMERICAN
ASSOCIATIONS

2025 *Annual* CONFERENCE

MAY 2-3, 2025

**THE WESTIN CRYSTAL CITY
ARLINGTON, VA**



H. W. Statist

Contents

4	President's Message
6	Türkiye Caucus Co-Chairs' Message
7	Message from the US Department of State
8	Message from the President of YTB
9	About ATAA
10	History of ATAA
13	2025 Annual Conference Sponsors
14	Program
16	Biographies
24	ATAA 2025 Annual Awards Recipients
26	ATAA BOT 2024 Fundraising Campaign Sponsors
27	ATAA 2024-2025 Club Members
28	ATAA 2024-2025 Individual Members

ATAA President's Message



Dear Members of the Turkish American Community,

It is with great joy and anticipation that we welcome you to another annual conference of the Assembly of Turkish American Associations (ATAA). This year, we return to the DMV region, once again gathering with familiar faces and new friends who share in our commitment to community, heritage, and civic engagement.

Our 2024 conference in Michigan, marking the 45th anniversary of ATAA, was a resounding success—both in the richness of its discussions and the warmth of its social atmosphere. For many who visited Michigan for the first time, it was a memorable experience. We hope this year's conference in Arlington brings the same energy, inspiration, and sense of unity.

As I approach the end of my two-year term as ATAA President, I'd like to reflect on the journey we've taken together and share highlights from our collective accomplishments.

Just before my term started, we began engaging with the leadership of Turkish American associations to plan the centennial celebrations of the Republic of Türkiye in early 2023, but an unforeseen tragedy struck altering the course of our efforts. Two consecutive and devastating earthquakes hit 11 cities in Türkiye, claiming over 50,000 lives and leaving deep scars across the nation. In response, our planned celebrations—including that year's conference—were temporarily halted as the community united in relief efforts. Turkish Americans across the country demonstrated remarkable generosity and solidarity. ATAA became a proud founding partner of the **CATE Project**, supporting child survivors with prosthetics, education, and psychological care. Despite the challenges, under the leadership of then president Mazlum Koşma, we successfully held our 2023 Annual Conference in Washington, D.C., swiftly adapting to the changing circumstances—marking the beginning of my term as President.

Reflecting on Two Years of Service

- Throughout the past two years, our efforts;
 - focused on deepening **connections** within our community.
 - prioritized **partnerships** with local cultural associations,
 - **empowered our youth** through a revitalized Youth Committee,
 - **stimulated the sense of community** launching a quarterly newsletter,
 - organized **UN Day** commemorations,
 - led **charity drives**,
 - initiated a **tree-planting campaign** as a symbol of hope for a better world.
- Recognizing the importance of education, we turned our attention to **Turkish schools** in the U.S., opening dialogues around accreditation and sustainability.
- To ensure institutional memory, we undertook an archival project to digitize ATAA's rich history—now accessible on our website, thanks to the tireless efforts of our invaluable Art, Media and Communication Director, **Hakan Dakin**. This includes past **conference booklets**, a comprehensive record of **annual awardees**, and a tribute to our **past presidents**.

ATAA President's Message

- Our Youth Committee launched an impressive **10-week College Admission Program**—now held two years in a row—offering mentorship and guidance to Turkish American high schoolers.
- The **UN Committee** organized 6 to 8 events annually in collaboration with SDG-affiliated Turkish organizations, engaging young people and offering them platforms to speak and lead.
- In 2023, we proudly established the **Music and Visual Arts Committee**, which debuted with a stunning classical concert celebrating Republic of Türkiye's 100th anniversary. The **Chicago Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra**, alongside rising star pianist **Evren Özel**, performed works by Turkish composers and Mozart's Turkish March, captivating all in attendance.

More recently, developments in Türkiye- this time political in context- once again posed significant challenges to our conference planning efforts! Escalating autocratic practices and the erosion of democratic norms sparked protests both in Türkiye and across major U.S. cities—organized by Turkish Americans committed to justice, democracy, and the rule of law. In line with ATAA's mission to educate the public on issues that concern our community, we issued a statement underscoring the importance of upholding legal norms and human rights.

This principled stance, however, came with consequences. Several planned conference contributions and appearances were canceled, including a message from Turkish Ambassador H.E. Sedat Önal. Despite these obstacles, ATAA has remained **independent, principled, and uncompromising** in its values, and will continue to stand firm, guided by truth and integrity.

As my presidency concludes, I extend my deepest thanks for the support, energy, and spirit you've all brought to this community. Serving ATAA has been one of the most meaningful experiences of my life. I am proud of what we've built—and I'm confident the path ahead will be even brighter.

Our mission is far from over. Now more than ever, we must continue to advocate, educate, and amplify the Turkish American voice. I urge you to stay active, attend this important conference, and help shape a future that reflects our shared values and aspirations.

In conclusion, I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to all who sponsored and joined us in Arlington for this significant and inspiring conference. Your presence and engagement have greatly contributed to the success and impact of this important gathering.

Warmly,

Dr. Nilüfer Esen-Bilgin

President

Assembly of Turkish American Associations

Türkiye Caucus Co-Chairs' Message



Congress of the United States Washington, DC 20515

April 11, 2025

Dear Assembly of Turkish American Associations,

As co-chairs of the Congressional Caucus on US-Türkiye Relations and Turkish Americans, we extend our best wishes to the Assembly of Turkish American Associations (ATAA) as you hold your 2025 Annual Conference in Arlington, Virginia. We congratulate the Assembly for its vital role in people-to-people diplomacy between the United States and Türkiye.

Turkish Americans make significant contributions to the American economy and society, and we applaud ATAA's commitment to strengthening our ties and empowering the Turkish American community.

Sincerely,

Steve Cohen
Co-Chair
Member of Congress

Gerald E. Connolly
Co-Chair
Member of Congress

Joe Wilson
Co-Chair
Member of Congress

Message from the US State Department



Dear Officers and Members of the Assembly of Turkish American Associations,

I sincerely congratulate the Assembly of Turkish American Associations on hosting your 2025 Annual Conference. The longevity of this organization is a testament to the strength of the U.S.-Türkiye bilateral relationship and that of the Turkish-American community itself.

Turkish-Americans have made significant contributions to American society, excelling in fields such as medicine, engineering, and academia. Their entrepreneurial spirit and cultural heritage have enriched the diverse fabric of the United States, fostering greater understanding and collaboration between our two nations over our 101 years of diplomatic relations.

The U.S. partnership with Türkiye is critical to both our countries, and I have been encouraged to see the significant growth in U.S.-Türkiye bilateral trade in recent years. Our partnership facilitates mutual growth and opportunity with an overall economic relationship of over \$40 billion. I sincerely hope to see this upward trajectory continue through our presidents' mutual goal of \$100 billion in total bilateral trade.

I appreciate the ATAA's significant contributions to the U.S. Türkiye bilateral relationship and wish you a successful conference. I firmly believe that, together, we can harness the potential of our bilateral relationship for the benefit of all.

Sincerely,

Louis L. Bono
Senior Bureau Official
Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs
U.S. Department of State

Message from the President of YTB



Dear Esteemed Members of the Assembly of Turkish American Associations,
Dear Guests and Participants,

On behalf of the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities, I extend my heartfelt congratulations to ATAA on its 46th year of valuable service and the successful organization of the 41st Annual Conference.

As the key institution following the development of our diaspora across the world, our Presidency has watched the tireless efforts of ATAA over nearly half a century with great pride and appreciation. From your initiations in civic advocacy to your educational engagement, from your efforts regarding cultural preservation to the representation of our community; your work continues to build a resilient and conscious Turkish community in the United States of America.

2025 also marks the 15th anniversary of the establishment of our Presidency. Since our establishment, we have placed tremendous emphasis on strengthening the connection between Türkiye and our citizens abroad through programs focused on youth studies and Turkish language education. We have supported the Turkish education of tens of thousands of our children around the world, and we have worked to empower our youth through mobility programs, project supports, and leadership training initiatives.

We are immensely proud of the Turkish American community's exceptional growing contributions in political, academic, business and cultural life in the United States. It is a great honour to us to witness the Turkish diaspora become distinguished cornerstones of the American life and society. Yet it is without a doubt owing to the perseverance and unity of organizations such as ATAA that our diaspora continues to flourish and make its mark not only in the United States but also globally.

Though many miles may lie between us, please know that you are always in our thoughts and at the heart of our mission. We offer our deepest gratitude to all those individuals working effortlessly to strengthen our bonds and foster a strong and proud diaspora.

With sincere regards and heartfelt congratulations,

Abdullah Eren

President of Turks Abroad and Related Communities

About ATAA



ASSEMBLY OF TURKISH AMERICAN ASSOCIATIONS

Assembly of Turkish American Associations (ATAA), representing over 50 local chapters is the largest, democratically elected Turkish American membership organization in the United States. Established in 1979 to fight defamation and attacks on Turkish Americans, ATAA has evolved to be the most influential grassroots umbrella organization for the Turkish American community in the U.S.

ATAA's mission is to create cohesion and cooperation between the social/cultural Turkish American organizations around the U.S. to establish an informed national Turkish American community that can help foster U.S. – Türkiye relations and take an active part in promoting a balanced and truthful picture of Türkiye in the US.

As a non-faith-based organization, ATAA is open to people of diverse backgrounds. ATAA is governed by the Board of Directors with executive responsibility and a Board of Trustees that provides financial guidance and oversight.

ATAA is a tax-exempt, non-profit organization that relies on membership dues, private donations, as well as private and public grants.

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History of ATAA

On August 19, 1977, the President of the Maryland American Turkish Association (MATA), Dr. Ülkü Ülgür, in his letter to the members, stated “it is no news that Türkiye and Turkish-Americans in this country are beset by many problems and recently have been subjected to unfair treatment and discrimination by some other ethnic groups and their political representatives. Your new Board of Directors believe that we clearly need to intensify our efforts for better and more effective representation of our views, especially in the light of growing criticism and hostility from many quarters.” Another part of the same letter stated that, “we have reached a tentative agreement with the new president of ATA-DC, Mr. Yavuz Somen, to collaborate and work together in these crucial and vital areas.”

Similar letters and notes in the American Turkish Association of Washington, DC (ATA-DC) reflected the concern of this community about the problems faced by Turkish-Americans in this country.

On June 29, 1978, MATA President, Dr. Ülgür, in his letter to ATA-DC President Yavuz Somen stated, “In our recent Board of Directors’ meeting we have discussed the possibility of bringing our associations together by affiliating them in some official form. We, as members of the Board of Directors of the Maryland American Turkish Association, believe that such an affiliation will be a giant step forward for better representation of the Turkish community in the Mid-Eastern United States. Therefore, we have unanimously elected three of our distinguished members to form an ad-hoc committee and have instructed them to work jointly with a similar committee so that a solution can be found to realize the goal of uniting these two respected organizations.”

The ad hoc committees of ATA-DC and MATA met on November 5, 1978. ATA-DC was represented by President Yavuz Somen, Suat Başaran, and Loren Myers while MATA was represented by President Ülkü Ülgür, Cenap Kıratlı, and the late Alp Karahasan.

By 1979, there was a crying need to address the attacks, the distortions of history, and the discrimination the Turkish-American community was facing every day in their jobs, at schools their children attended, and in their daily lives. Isolated local, Turkish American organizations were unable to cope with the massive work that needed to be done nationwide. Upon his arrival in Washington to take up the post of Ambassador from Türkiye, Dr. Şükrü Elekdağ was met by members of both ATA-DC and MATA at a special reception held at the Navy Officers Club in Bethesda, Maryland on September 23, 1979. He inspired both communities with his dynamic approach to U.S.-Türkiye relations. Now the two communities were no longer talking merely about regional cooperation. Visions of a national umbrella organization were forming.

In the aftermath of threats of yet another arms embargo passing through Congress with virtually no Turkish-American voice raised in opposition, a series of meetings were held in the Washington, DC area. A steering committee was formed in November 1979, headed by ATA-DC President Yavuz Somen with the late Yurdakul Göker and Taşkın Atıl and by MATA President, the late Dr. Alp Karahasan, with Dr. Ülkü Ülgür, Cenap Kıratlı and Dr. Sengun Nuri. The advisor associates were Erol Gürün, Aydın Çağınalp, Hasan Akdemir, Tuncer Kuzay, and Özcan Tuncel. Out of their meetings came an agreement to establish the nationwide Assembly of Turkish American Associations.

Washington, DC was chosen to be the headquarters of the new organization to utilize the vast opportunities for promoting U.S. Turkish relations among policy makers. A Secretariat for the Assembly was established to coordinate the activities, publish a nationwide publication and generally be the central source of information on Turks and Türkiye. For this purpose office space was provided by Adil Araboğlu, a Washington business leader, and the Assembly was in business. Clearly the tasks that lay ahead were enormous and the resources limited.

The first ball was a fundraising activity sponsored by ATA-DC and MATA, and held on December 29, 1979 at the Turkish Embassy. One hundred and forty-six people managed to raise \$17,470 for the Assembly.

ATAA’s first publication, ATA-USA was published in February 1980 and news about Turks and Türkiye premiered nationwide. With coordinating committee members Yavuz Somen, Ekrem Bulgur, and Yurdakul Göker from ATA-DC, and the late Alp Karahasan, Ülkü Ülgür, and Cenap Kıratlı from MATA, planned for convening the general assembly on May 17-18, 1980 in the nation’s capital pressed forward with great speed.



ATAA Founders: Former President of ATA-DC, Yavuz Somen and ATAA Former President, Dr. Ülkü Ülgür (1979)



Former Presidents of ATA-DC, Engin Holmstrom, Taşkın Atıl, Yurdakul Göker and Former President of MATA, Cenap Kıratlı



Turkish Express, ATAA Annual Convention 1982

More than 120 people representing 24 organizations and 5 student associations gathered at the Embassy Row Hotel during this two-day conference and brought plans on the drawing board into reality. The delegates elected the Coordinating Committee members to a special Steering Committee. Their task was to draw up a constitution and bylaws for the Assembly to be presented to the delegates at the next annual convention. Founded to deal with issues confronting the community, the Assembly was not to be given time to grow and mature slowly, but rather would have to come on as an adult and face Armenians crying "genocide," and trying to include their grievances in a national museum dedicated to the memory of six million Jews murdered by the Nazis during World War II. The "Midnight Express" image of Turks and Türkiye was constantly being shown with even President Carter giving it free advertising.

Now there was an organization that was writing letters with the weight of the whole Turkish-American community behind it. Publications were giving the members information about the issues to enable them to set the record straight when they encountered distortions and attacks on their Turkish heritage.

2025 Annual Conference Sponsors

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**PRESIDENCY FOR
TURKS ABROAD**
AND RELATED COMMUNITIES

Program

FRIDAY, MAY 2, 2025

2:30pm - 5:30pm	Capitol Building Tour
6:00pm - 9:30pm	Reception at the Capitol House Office Building

SATURDAY, MAY 3, 2025

7:30am - 8:30am	Conference Registration & Breakfast
8:45am - 9:00am	Opening Ceremony & Welcoming Remarks Dr. Nilüfer Esen-Bilgin , President, Assembly of Turkish American Associations (ATAA)
9:15am - 10:00am	Dealing with the Armenian Diaspora: Challenges that Turkish Americans Face! Keynote Speaker: Ergün Kırlikovalı , ATAA Former President (2011-13) and Trustee
10:00am - 10:15am	Break
10:15am - 11:15am	Session 1 Political Action Committees (PACs): How They Function, Problems and Solutions Moderator: G. Lincoln McCurdy , ATAA Senior Advisor Speakers: Melih Bektaş , Chairman, Turkish American Coalition PAC Maria F. R. Çakırağa , Treasurer, Turkish Coalition California PAC Tuba Fırıncıoğlu-Apaydın , President, National Coalition of Turkish American Women PAC Hülya Erol Garvett , Treasurer, Turkish Coalition USA PAC Tülay Spicker , Treasurer, Turkish American Heritage PAC
11:15am - 11:30am	Break
11:30am - 12:30pm	Session 2 The United States and Türkiye Trade Relations Moderator: Nurten Ural , ATAA Past President (2007-9), Trustee Speakers: Onur Bülbül , Founder and President, InnoNative Advisors Faye Nemer , Founder and CEO, MENA American Chamber of Commerce Merve Hande Akmehmet Uzun , Economist and Entrepreneur
12:30pm - 1:45pm	Luncheon

Program

1:45pm - 2:00pm	Break
2:00pm - 3:00pm	Session 3 How to Engage Turkish Language Day at the UN? Moderator: Alev Wieland , ATAA President-Elect and U.N. Committee Co-Chair Speakers: Dr. Sylvia Önder , Head of the Turkish Program, Georgetown University Dr. Ebru Milci , Scholar and Library Specialist <i>Introduction by</i> Dr. Selim Erhan , ATAA Trustee and ATAA UN Committee Member Youth Speakers: Sean Özalpaşan , ATAA Youth Committee Member Yasemin Knott , UN Youth Representative, Turkish Women's League of America
3:00pm - 3:15pm	Break
3:15pm - 4:15pm	Session 4 Turkish Schools in the United States: How to Make Them Accredited! Moderator: Dr. Nilüfer Esen-Bilgin ATAA President Speakers: Ayça Ergisi , Principal of TWLA - New York Atatürk School Emre Murat Bozer , PhD Candidate/Turkish Language Instructor, University of Wisconsin-Madison Saadet Ebru Ergül , President, American Association of Teachers of Turkic Languages
4:15pm - 4:30pm	Break
4:30pm - 5:30pm	Session 5 Exploring Generational Leadership Moderator: Mehmet Efe Taşçıoğlu , ATAA Youth Committee Co-Founder and Chair Speakers: Dr. Ülkü Ülgür , ATAA Founder and First President (1979-84), and Trustee Gökhan Özalp , ATAA Former President (2018-21) Bora Özalp , ATAA Youth Committee Member Sean Özalpaşan , ATAA Youth Committee Member
5:30pm	Closing Remarks
6:30pm-7:30pm	Reception
7:30pm-11:00pm	2025 Annual Gala Welcoming Remarks Dinner Annual Awards Ceremony Live Music Performance by Z-Band

Biographies



Nilüfer Esen - Bilgin | Remarks

Dr. Esen-Bilgin was born in Giresun and raised in İstanbul, Türkiye. She graduated from Marmara University Medical School in İstanbul in 1990, and got a specialty degree in physiology at İstanbul University Cerrahpaşa Medical School in 1995. She worked as a faculty at Kocaeli University Medical School Department of Physiology. In 2002, she moved to the United States, and lived in Arkansas for 6 years and worked at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. Since 2008 she has resided in Michigan. She worked as a Research Associate at Wayne State Medical School Department of Neurology until her retirement in 2021. She has held several key leadership roles on the ATAA Board of Directors, including serving as the Mid-Central Region Vice President (2017–2019), First Vice President and Secretary General (2020–2021), and President-Elect (2022–2023). Since May 2023, she has been serving as the President of ATAA. Before joining the ATAA board, she was actively involved with the Turkish American Cultural Association of Michigan (TACAM). She served as the president of TACAM between 2015 and 19, during which her leadership increased the awareness about the Turkish culture in the community, and increased the membership to the association. She initiated and completed the Atatürk Park Project in Michigan which was opened in 2019 as the largest park named after Atatürk in the USA. In addition, she actively participates at the Michigan based Turkish folk dance group Mozaik Dance Group, and the USA branch of KAHEV (Kadın Hekimler Eğitim Destek Vakfı).



Ergün Kırlikovalı | Keynote Speaker

Mr. Kırlikovalı was born in İzmir, Türkiye. He attended Robert College, İstanbul, Türkiye. He received his BS degree in Chemistry from Boğaziçi University and MS degree in Polymer Science from the University of Manchester, England. He also conducted research on polymers in Holland and Austria. He was employed as a product development and research chemist in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York. Currently, he is the founding president of his company which conducts research and development on new materials based on interpenetrating network polymers. He found himself in need of promoting and defending Turkish culture and heritage due to a relentless barrage of unsolicited and unjustified anti-Turkish attacks by Armenian and Greek lobbies and others in America. He had written more than 5,000 letters to the editors, news programmers, panelists, politicians, academicians, and other opinion-makers. He also appeared on TV and radio shows and participated in conferences and panels in universities and colleges in an effort to present the other side of the story and fight against discrimination and censorship fostered by a surprisingly racist and dishonest version of history persistently promoted by anti-Turkish lobbies. He served as President of Assembly of Turkish American Associations (ATAA) from 2011 to 2013. He has served as President of American-Turkish Association of Southern California (ATA-SC), Public Relations Committee Chairman and later Western U.S. Regional Director for the Federation of Turkish American Associations (FTAA) in New York and ATAA in Washington DC.



Tuba Fıncioğlu-Apaydın

Dr. Fıncioğlu-Apaydın, originally from İstanbul, moved to the U.S. in 1996 to pursue a Master's in Petroleum Engineering at Stanford University and later earned her Ph.D. from Colorado School of Mines. She is currently the Managing Director of NITEC LLC, specializing in oil and gas reservoir optimization. A long-time community leader, she has been active with the Turkish American Cultural Society of Colorado for over 20 years and served as its President (2017–18). She also leads and serves on boards including the Rocky Mountain Stanford Alumni Association, the National Coalition of Turkish American Women PAC (NC-TAW PAC), and the Turkish American Leadership Forum. Her professional involvement includes roles in the Society of Petroleum Engineers.



Melih Bektaş

Mr. Bektaş was born in İstanbul, Türkiye. He received BS from Yıldız Teknik University, in Mechanical Engineering and MBA from Johnson and Wales in RI. He has been actively serving to Turkish American Community in New England and throughout the US. He is a board member of Turkish American Cultural Society of Rhode Island-TACSRI and has been actively on board for the last 10 years. He had served as President between 2019-2021. He had served to community as Representative, Board Member and as a Co-Chair to Turkish American National Steering Committee-TASC from 2021-2024. Currently, he is the Chairman of Turkish American Coalition Political Action Committee-TAC PAC. He is a licensed builder, contractor, landlord, small business owner and also started a project recently in entertainment business.



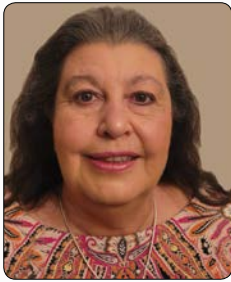
Emre Murat Bozer

Mr. Bozer is a PhD candidate in Second Language Acquisition at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. His research focuses on language education and multilingualism, with a particular emphasis on heritage language education in community-based heritage schools. His dissertation is a linguistic ethnographic study that takes an ecological approach to examining language ideologies and language socialization practices at a Turkish heritage school in the United States. Emre also holds a minor in Japanese Linguistics and teaches both Japanese and Turkish courses at UW–Madison.



Onur Bülbül

Mr. Bülbül holds a BSc. in International Relations from the Middle East Technical University (METU) in Türkiye, M.A. in European Competition Law from Sussex University, and a Ph.D. in International Political Economy from METU. He has served as a commercial diplomat at the Turkish Embassy in Washington D.C., advisor to the Turkish Minister of Economy and a free trade agreement (FTA) negotiator and foreign trade specialist for Türkiye. He has worked in bilateral FTA negotiations with countries in various regions including Chile, Serbia, Albania, Montenegro, Ukraine, Canada, Jordan, Lebanon, and the Gulf Cooperation Council. He is the recipient of Jean Monnet Scholarship grant from the EU, Order of Bernardo O'Higgins from the Republic of Chile, and is a published author on topics such as trade policy, competition policy, Türkiye-U.S. and Türkiye-E.U. relations.



Maria F. R. Çakırağa

Mrs. Çakırağa is a Bostonian who has lived in Southern California for 43 years. She has a BSME from Tufts University where she met her husband of 43 years – Turgut Çakırağa. They have one son, William. Maria has been involved with the Turkish Community in Southern California and through the USA since getting married. She has held positions from social activity chair to Turkish School Coordinator to board member of both Association of Turkish Americans of Southern California (ATASC) and Assembly of Turkish American Associations (ATAA) ATAA. Her current role is treasurer of Turkish Coalition California Political Action Committee (TC-Cal PAC) since 2016.



Ayça Ergisi

Ms. Ergisi graduated from Ankara Gazi University Faculty of Communication. She worked as an elementary school teacher and assistant principal in Şanlıurfa and İstanbul in Türkiye for many years. She was certified as an expert teacher by the Ministry of National Education in Türkiye. She studied languages at Baruch and La Guardia in New York. She has been the principal of New York Atatürk School since September 2021. She has created the New York Atatürk School curriculum that combines the teaching of Turkish language (in accordance with international standards of foreign language education) with the teaching of Turkish culture and Turkish history for Turkish children growing up abroad with Atatürk School teachers. And The New York State Seal of Biliteracy and World Languages department recognized the Atatürk School with this curriculum. She is currently working on the recognition of New York Atatürk School in other states.



Saadet Ebru Ergül

Ms. Ergül serves as the Special Language Program Coordinator at Stanford University Language Center where more than 25 LCTL (Less Commonly Taught Languages) are offered. Besides her administrative work, she also teaches both graduate and undergraduate Turkish courses in various levels. She earned a B.A. from Bilkent University (1995), an M.B.A. from Başkent University (1998), and an M.A. in Applied Linguistics (with an additional focus on French) from Texas Tech University (2005). Ebru is a writing proficiency rater (WPT) and oral proficiency tester (OPI) for the Turkish Language and takes part in various academic, non-academic projects as a Turkish language expert. Her research interests include oral proficiency assessment, teaching Turkish through interculturality and social justice, curriculum development, and national language standards for Turkish. She is also the co-author of advanced level Turkish language textbook 'KonuşanParagraflar'. Currently, she is serving as the president of the American Association of Teachers of Turkic Languages (AATT) and an active member of NCOLCTL (National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages).



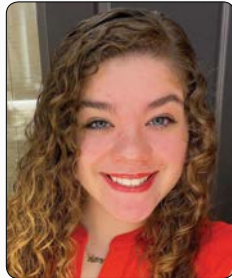
Selim Erhan

Dr. Erhan was born in İstanbul Turkey. After graduating with a chemical engineering degree from the University of İstanbul, he continued his studies at Western Michigan University with a Ph.D. in Polymer-Organic Chemistry. After teaching at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo College and Lake Michigan College, he started a research career first at the USDA's National Center for Agricultural Utilization Research in Peoria, IL. He continued his career in the private industry, working on application of bio-based products to industrial applications. He started actively working on introducing Turkey and the Turkish Culture in USA while studying at Western Michigan University in 1980. He joined the Turkish American Cultural Alliance in 2000 and became active in educational activities and in 2009. He was the co-founder of the highly successful TACA – Public Outreach Program, aiming at educating middle school, high school and university students on important issues. The Public Outreach Organization brought speakers like Prof. Justin McCarthy, Prof. Turkkaya Ataov, Emre Kongar and Lincoln McCurdy. In 2013 he joined TACA's Board of Directors and became the Director of the Atatürk School and the Adult Turkish School. Continued as the TACA Public Outreach Chair preparing seminars and conferences to reach out and enlighten the public in the Midwest region. Dr. Erhan was elected as ATAA's Midwest Region VP 2015 to 2019. He has continued working at ATAA, helped to form the UN Committee and was instrumental to form the highly successful Turkish American Presidents Group under ATAA, improving communications with the Component Associations in USA and pulling in similar Turkish organizations from Canada. In 2022, he was elected to ATAA's Board of Trustees.



Hülya Erol Garvett

Mrs. Erol-Garvett is a respected real estate professional, entrepreneur, and a leading voice in Turkish-American civic engagement. She serves as President of the Turkish Coalition USA Political Action Committee (TC-USA PAC) and Vice President of the National Coalition of Turkish American Women PAC (NC-TAW PAC), advocating for strong U.S.-Türkiye relations and active political participation within the Turkish-American community. With over two decades of experience in Southeast Michigan's real estate market, she founded The Hülya Group, a successful brand recognized for high-quality client service and agent mentorship. Her career began in international trade, where she led an import-export business and traveled to more than 100 countries, bringing a global perspective to her work. She holds a degree in International Relations and an MBA, and is committed to women's leadership, civic service, and community wellness. She has served on the North Oakland County Board of Realtors and actively mentors new professionals in her field. A passionate advocate, she also supports causes such as Relay for Life and the Muscular Dystrophy Association. Proudly Turkish-American, Hülya continues to make a meaningful impact at the local and national levels.



Yasemin Amanda Knott

Ms. Knott is a senior social work major at Siena College, Class of 2025, where she has consistently earned Dean's and President's List honors. She serves as a student representative on the Social Work Advisory Board and is the Youth Representative for the Turkish Women's League of America at the United Nations since January 2023. In this role, she has presented on a wide range of social and environmental topics at national and international forums, including ATAA's Annual Conferences. A member of the ATAA UN Youth Forum, she is also learning Turkish and American Sign Language, and holds a New York Seal of Biliteracy in Spanish and English. Her internships have focused on disability advocacy, early childhood education, and immigrant services.



G. Lincoln McCurdy | Moderator

Mr. McCurdy is an international affairs professional with over 40 years of leadership and management experience in the U.S. government, private sector, NGOs, and community service. Currently, he serves as a consultant on U.S.-Türkiye relations and grassroots organizing. Mr. McCurdy is the Senior Advisor to the Assembly of Turkish American Associations (ATAA). He also advises the Turkish American political action committees and the Turkish American Women in Leadership Initiative. He was the former president of the Turkish Coalition of America (TCA) and also served on the Board of Directors of the Turkish Philanthropy Funds. Prior to TCA, Mr. McCurdy was the president of the American-Turkish Council in Washington, DC. Earlier in his career, he worked at the U.S. Department of Commerce, served as the Consul for Commercial Affairs at the U.S. Consulate General in Istanbul, and was a consultant for the Bank of Boston in Türkiye. He has received several awards and honors throughout his career. In 2018, Mr. McCurdy was one of the laureates of the Gusi International Peace Prize in Manila, Philippines, Asia's foremost award for the attainment of peace and respect for human life. In 2023, he was honored at the 10th Turkish World Business Council (DTIK) Congress in Istanbul with a Friend of Türkiye Award presented by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Previously, the U.S. Department of State and the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce recognized Mr. McCurdy for his contributions to enhancing commercial relations between the United States and Türkiye, and he received the Turk of America Outstanding Achievement Award in Leadership & Management. To commemorate the centennial of the Turkish Republic in 2023, Mr. McCurdy wrote "A Chronicle of Turkish American Relations, 1923-2023," available on the Assembly of Turkish American Associations' website. He graduated from Hanover College in Indiana and holds an M.A. in International Management as a Wolcott Fellow from George Washington University. He and his wife have two daughters and two grandchildren.



Ebru Milci

Dr. Milci is a scholar and library specialist with deep expertise in Turkish and Turkic languages. She holds a BA from Mimar Sinan University and an MA and PhD in Turkish Philology from Marmara University. With over 15 years of teaching experience, she has worked in both high schools and at Galatasaray University. Currently at Stanford University Libraries, she catalogs Turkish and Ottoman materials as a Metadata Specialist. Her research focuses on 17th–18th century Kipchak Turkish law texts in Armenian script. She is fluent in Turkish, Ottoman Turkish, Turkic languages, and English, with working proficiency in Armenian, Arabic, and Persian.



Faye Nemer

Ms. Nemer is a financial and strategic executive with over 20 years of experience in Fortune 20 companies and startups. As CEO of Strategic Prosperity Partners, she has led major initiatives in ERP, M&A, and financial strategy. Her past roles at Fiat Chrysler and Ford involved managing multibillion-dollar portfolios and driving cost-saving and acquisition projects. She also founded and leads the MENA American Chamber of Commerce and the Izdehar Foundation, reflecting her commitment to global public service.



Sylvia Önder

Dr. Sylvia Wing Önder has taught Turkish Language and Culture at Georgetown University since 1998, where she developed courses from beginning to advanced levels. Her research focuses on Turkish TV, music videos, disability studies, and childbirth practices. She is active in Medical Humanities and Disability Studies groups and serves as Coordinator of Small Program Languages, supporting faculty in ten languages. Dr. Önder has directed State Department and Fulbright-Hays programs and currently leads the ARIT Summer Fellowships for Advanced Turkish at Boğaziçi University.



Gökhan Özalp

Mr. Özalp was born and raised in Ankara. He attended TED Ankara Koleji and later received a B.S. degree in Chemistry from Hacettepe University, Ankara. Mr. Ozalp moved to the U.S. in 1995 to pursue a master's degree in business administration. He received an MBA with a Specialization in International Business Management from Eastern Michigan University in 1999 and a M.S. in Information Systems in 2001. Professionally, Mr. Ozalp worked as a developer and a project manager in the medical device software industry. Currently, Mr. Ozalp helps medical device startups with their software development processes as an independent consultant. he

has been an involved member of Turkish-American community in Michigan and in the US. He served as a Board member for Turkish American Cultural Association of Michigan (TACAM) from 2009 to 2010, was on the Board of Trustees from 2010 to 2012 and has served as the Vice President from 2017 until today. During his term as a TACAM Board member, he chaired the organization's Grassroots and Outreach committee which was established to work on a special project with ATAA to create a Grassroots movement within the Turkish American Community in Michigan. Mr. Ozalp was involved in inspiring and training community members to participate in advocacy and outreach on issues relevant to Turkish Americans. He has been involved with the Assembly of Turkish American Associations since 2013. He first served on the ATAA Board of Directors as a Board Member from 2013-2016 and as the Assembly's President Elect from 2016-2018, the President from 2018-2020 and the Past President from 2020-2023.



Bora Özalp

Mr. Özalp is a second-year student at Detroit Country Day High School, and currently serves on the ATAA Youth Committee Event Subcommittee where he organizes, coordinates, and leads nationwide webinars and panels. He has been actively involved with the Turkish American Association of Michigan from a very young age by participating in Turkish language school, clubs, events, activities, and the youth chapter. He participates in the Turkish American Cultural Association of Washington's Turks Without Borders project as a conversation partner to high school students in Türkiye. He also volunteers with Çağdaş Yaşamı Destekleme Derneği in Türkiye to help university students in conversational English. Bora's goal is to continue his involvement in projects where he can use his skills helping students and by doing so establish friendships and connections between the Turkish-American youth in the US and in Türkiye. He plans to become an Electrical and Computer Engineer with a focus on medical applications.



Sean Özalpaşan

Mr. Özalpaşan is a 12th grader who goes to Harvard Westlake School in Los Angeles, CA. He is a proud member of the Turkish American community, and takes pride in participating in ATASC events. Because of his diligent work with ATAA, he was selected to represent all Turkish-American Youth at the Turkish World Youth Forum, held in Almaty, Kazakhstan. He also enjoys creating his own coding projects, leading his school's sailing team, and leading his school's Turkish Club. He enjoys traveling and whenever he and his family go to Türkiye, they make sure to visit UNESCO recognized ancient historical sites as well as important hallmarks of Atatürk's legacy on Türkiye.



Tülay Spicker

Mrs. Spicker is an accomplished professional with over 20 years of experience in diplomacy, international business, and project management. She began her career with the Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA), leading development initiatives across Central Asia and the Caucasus. A recipient of a prestigious EU scholarship, she represented Turkey at the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies in Malta. After earning her MBA in the U.S., she held leadership roles at JPMorgan Chase, BNY Mellon, and Cardinal Health, where she led DE&I efforts and corporate initiatives. She later joined Straife Consulting as Director of Business Development. Tulay is currently the Founder and President of Larende Strategic Partners, Chief Development Officer of the Texas Turkish Business Center, Texas Representative of the World Turkish Business Council (DTIK), Founder and Co-Chair of the Turkish American Leadership Forum, Treasurer of TurkishPAC, and Advisory Board Member of the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA), Houston Chapter. She lives in Houston with her husband Paul and their son Aaron.



Mehmet Efe Taşcıoğlu | Moderator

Mr. Taşcıoğlu is a student at Stanford University studying Management Science & Engineering. In 2019, he co-founded the Turkish American Cultural Association of Michigan's High School Chapter, serving as President from 2020 to 2021 and Past President from 2021 to 2022. In 2020, he co-founded the Assembly of Turkish American Associations Youth Committee, and currently serves as Chair. Additionally, Mehmet is the Founder & Chair of the Board of Directors for Connect Me Tutoring, the largest student-run free tutoring service in the US. On the entrepreneurial side, Mehmet is the CEO and Executive Producer of the College Treehouse, a college consulting and media company with over 10 million monthly views online, and is the Founder and Managing Partner of a Mosaic Cakes LLC, a Turkish dessert company.



Nurten Ural | Moderator

Ms. Ural is the CEO and Managing Member of the Turkish Resource Center (TRC), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with offices in Michigan, Nevada, and Istanbul. TRC's mission is to create and facilitate economic, educational, and cultural opportunities between Türkiye and the United States. In addition to leading TRC, she owns Ural LLC, a consulting firm; serves as Chief Financial Officer of Rizz Living; and acts as Chief Communications Officer for the Turkish Chambers of Commerce. She also runs a custom tourism company focused on curated travel experiences in Türkiye. Previously, she owned and operated Ural Interiors, Inc., a commercial interior architecture and construction firm, for over three decades. She served as an advisor to the President of Michigan State University for ten years. Appointed as the Honorary Consul General of the Republic of Türkiye in Detroit in 2004, she has held various leadership roles, including Director of the Turkish Cultural Foundation of Detroit, President of the Consular Corps of Michigan, and President of the Assembly of Turkish American Associations (ATAA). Her numerous accolades include the prestigious Athena Award and the Charles A. Gliozzo International Award for Public Diplomacy. She holds a B.S. in Human Environment and Design and an M.F.A. in Human Shelter and Interior Design from Michigan State University. An active supporter of women in business and civic life, she has led professional women's roundtables and contributed to major Turkish earthquake relief campaigns.



Ülkü Ülgür

Dr. Ülgür, co-founded the Assembly of Turkish American Associations in 1979 and served as its First president (1980-84). Later, during his tenure as Chairman of Board of Trustees he initiated and developed ATAA Endowment Fund. He is one of the founders and Past President of the Maryland American Turkish Association (MATA). He also served as President of Turkish American Neuropsychiatric Association. He completed his Primary Education in Darussafaka Lisesi and his undergraduate and medical education at the University of Istanbul Türkiye. He came to USA in 1959 for his specialty training in Psychiatry. After finishing, he had an additional two-year Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Fellowship at the University of Maryland School of Medicine. In 1965, following his child training he joined the University's full-time faculty serving for ten years as Director of its inpatient, outpatient, and hospital consultation services. While he continued his teaching activities as a member of clinical faculty he developed and maintained an active office and consulting practice in Maryland. He is an active teacher and lecturer who has given many regional and international talks and wrote many scientific papers and book chapters. He is a Distinguished Life Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association and American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. He also served as President of Maryland Regional Council of the AACAP. He has received awards for his services to children and families from the University of Maryland and the City of Baltimore.



Merve Hande Akmehmet Uzun

Mrs. Uzun is a Washington, DC-based economist and entrepreneur managing several ventures, including an economic consultancy and the U.S. arm of global manufacturer SANDALYECI. Recognized among the Top 100 Most Influential Economists worldwide, she specializes in economic governance, trade, and international policy. She holds degrees in Foreign Affairs and Economics from the University of Virginia and a Master's in Applied Economics from Johns Hopkins University. With 25 years of experience, she has held key roles at organizations like Oracle, Bloomberg HT, Time Life Media, Akbank, the UN, and the Turkish American Business Forum—focusing on market intelligence, valuation, and emerging markets. Hande is a founding member of the National Coalition of Turkish American Women PAC and an active voice in Turkish American politics, as well as a member of the Government Relations Association.



Alev Wieland | Moderator

Mrs. Wieland has Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering from University of Cincinnati, OH. Worked for Balcan Engineering at Proctor of Gamble as Project Engineer for 7 years. She retired from PepsiCo, Inc-AMEA Capability Director in 2012. Alev has extensive experience in Lean Manufacturing, Lean Product Life Cycle Management, Equipment and Processes Development, Project Management, Construction Management, Food Manufacturing, Paper Converting, Cosmetics and Laundry Soap Industries. She has solid understanding of Engineering, Manufacturing and Operations Processes. She is an expert in ISO 9001 and GMP Certifications and Standards. Alev is the CEO of Manufacturing Excellence Technical Services and Alev Cosmetics. She has been serving as the President-Elect of ATAA since May 2024. She served on the ATAA Board of Directors as the Southwest Region Vice President from 2020 to 2024 and as First Vice President from October 2023 to May 2024. She also serves as the co-Chair of the ATAA UN Relations Committee and Chair of the ATAA Newsletter Committee. She is the Secretary General and NGO Relations Director Contemporary Education Foundation (COEDFO) since 2013, has been responsible for organizational communication, meetings management, documentation, website management. As the Trustee and active member of the Turkish American Association of Northern Texas (TURANT), she has been providing organizational operations support to its elected board members and helping with executions of projects since 2000. Since 2008, She takes active role at her local Main Street Organization and International Community, helps with organizations of the major festivals that is proven to become the key events that provides income to the city. She served as President of Cincinnati Turkish American Association (CTAA) from 1994 to 1996. Since 2023 Alev serves as the Trustee of the Turkish American Visual and Performing Arts (TAVPA). Since March 2024, she is serving Dallas Turkish Businesswomen's Network as the Advisor.

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ATAA 2025 Annual Awards Recipients

Şükrü Elekdağ Award

Professor Edward J. Erickson

*In Recognition of His Outstanding Scholarly
Work in Revealing the Historical Facts and
Truths of Turkish History*

...

President's Special Award

**Mine Taşcı Özalp
Sezen Uysal**

*In Recognition of Their Dedicated Support and
Outstanding, Selfless Contributions to the ATAA*

...

Outstanding Achievement in Arts & Science Award

Professor Daron Acemoğlu

*In Recognition of His Outstanding Achievements
and for Bringing Honor to the Turkish Community as
the 2024 Nobel Laureate in Economic Sciences*

...

Service Award

**Turkish American Cultural Alliance of Chicago
Turkish American Cultural Association of Washington
Turkish American Cultural Association of Georgia**

*In Recognition of Their Decades Long Outstanding Dedication in
Organizing the International Children's Day Festival*

...

Component Association of the Year Award

Turkish American Association of Minnesota

*In Recognition of Its Outstanding Dedication in
Organizing the First Turkish Festival in Minnesota*

American Friend of Türkiye Award

Maria Çakırağa

*In Recognition Her Outstanding Service to
the Turkish American Community*

...

Excellence in Charity Award

Turkish American Women's Scholarship Fund

*In Recognition of Its Dedication and Commitment to
Support College Education of Women in Türkiye for 25 Years*

...

Excellence in Service Award

Ferruh Demirmen

*In Recognition of His Lifelong Dedication and Contributions to
the Enlightenment of the Turkish American Community*

...

Distinguished Service Award

Mazlum Koşma

*In Recognition of His Dedicated Service to
the Assembly of Turkish American Associations
and the Turkish-American Community*

...

UN Youth Award

Bora Özalp

Alya Rana

*In Recognition of Their Significant Contributions to
the ATAA UN Relations Committee*

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Congratulations and
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Congratulations & Best Wishes
on the Occasion of
the ATAA 2025 Annual Conference

Dr. Nilüfer Esen-Bilgin & Tayfun Bilgin

Best Wishes for
the Success of
the ATAA 2025
Annual Conference

Sema, Bülent Başol & Family



The Turkish Houston Upstream Group is deeply honored to announce that our late, esteemed member, **Dr. Ferruh Demirmen**, has been awarded the ATAA's 2025 **Excellence in Service Award**.

Dr. Demirmen's unwavering lifetime dedication to the Turkish American community was truly inspiring, and his legacy continues to resonate with us. While we miss him dearly, we are immensely proud that his contributions are being recognized with this prestigious honor.

We also extend our congratulations to ATAA for a successful conference.

I am certain that peace and democracy in our mainland will be restored and it will once again find its intended course which was set 102 years ago by its people with the leadership of Mustafa Kemal ATATÜRK!

Orhan Ilgaz Ülger

Our Thanks to
the Assembly of
Turkish American
Associations
for a Job Well Done!

Yücel Burdurlu & Dr. Selim Erhan



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