



ASSEMBLY OF
TURKISH AMERICAN
ASSOCIATIONS

2026 *Annual* CONFERENCE

MAY 1-2, 2026



WESTIN STONEBRIAR GOLF RESORT & SPA
FRISCO, TX



H. W. Atkinson

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ATAA President's Message

Stronger Together, Building Tomorrow

Dear Distinguished Members of the Turkish American Community, Esteemed Guests, and Friends of ATAA,

As we gather for the 2026 (42nd) Annual ATAA Conference, I am filled with deep gratitude and renewed determination. This past year has been one of reflection, restructuring, and bold action—guided by a single purpose: to strengthen ATAA today so we may pass on a thriving, resilient, and visionary organization to the next generations.



Our journey began with a comprehensive review and evaluation of ATAA's business operations. We identified gaps, clarified priorities, and developed strategies to close those gaps with discipline and creativity. We focused on improving organizational and operational systems, ensuring that ATAA is not only responsive to today's needs but also prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the next five to six years and beyond.

To secure ATAA's future, we created both a one year action plan and a long term strategic roadmap centered on:

- **Financial security**
- **Sustainable growth**
- **High impact, productive programs**
- **A strong, unified community voice and visibility**
- **Re building and strengthening our organizational foundation**
- **Building functional, accountable teams**
- **Refocusing and aligning committee objectives**

This work required courage, honesty, and collaboration. Together, we reformed inactive or dysfunctional committees, rebuilt essential structures, clarified and repurposed objectives, and established new operational guidelines that reflect ATAA's mission and the evolving needs of our community. We undertook these efforts to ensure that ATAA stands strong, resilient, and impactful for future generations who will continue to carry our mission forward.

Strengthening Our Committees: A Year of Renewal and Purpose

Membership Committee

This year, we re focused the Membership Committee with a clear strategy and renewed energy. The team focused on:

- **Personal connection with our community members**
- **Developed ATAA's Value Statement and a concise elevator speech**
- **Initiated personal meet and greet sessions with potential members**
- **Began sending personalized welcome letters to new members**
- **Upgraded the membership payment platform to reduce fees and improve usability**
- **Prioritized member appreciation and personal connection**

Our goal is simple yet essential: membership fees must cover ATAA's annual expenses, ensuring financial independence.

We also reaffirmed a core principle: individuals or organizations wishing to serve on a committee or participate actively in ATAA programs must be current members.

ATAA President's Message

We introduced members only programs to recognize and reward the continued commitment and support our members bring to ATAA.

Marketing & Social Media Committee

With a new and engaged team, clear strategy, and operational guidelines, this committee focused on increasing ATAA's visibility and influence. This year, to increase ATAA's visibility and more effective use of social media platforms we:

- **Created short introductory videos were produced and shared**
- **Announcement videos and posters were published regularly**
- **Meaningful activities were highlighted across platforms**
- **Our follower count increased significantly, expanding our reach and impact**

Entire ATAA community has a responsibility to follow, like, share everything we post on all social media platforms; together, this is how we can increase ATAA's, ultimately Turkish communities visibility and impact.

Arts Committee

Although not new, this committee had been inactive for years. We rebuilt it with a new chair, a new team, and a renewed mission: to introduce Turkish arts and artists to the United States in 2026. Highlights include:

- **A widely viewed webinar with Gülseren Budayıcıoğlu**
- **Planning for a Turkic Language Film Festival, first ever in USA**
- **Efforts to resurface Turkish art pieces in New York museums**
- **Upcoming concerts and exhibits**
- **Cultural showcases such as *Yadigar* and *Patchwork Art***

As a long term strategy, this committee also aims to generate revenue to support ATAA's financial stability. We have great confidence in their vision and creativity.

Council of Education

After many years of inactivity, this critical committee has been revitalized with passionate educators and experts. The Council of Education has developed a comprehensive, multi tiered strategy designed to reach every segment of the Turkish American community. This structured approach ensures that each stage builds upon the previous one, creating a sustainable and far reaching educational impact.

First Stage – Language Foundation - The first stage focuses on teaching Turkish to children, helping them build a strong linguistic and cultural foundation from an early age. Preserving language is essential to preserving identity, and this stage ensures that our youngest generation grows up with a meaningful connection to their heritage.

Second Stage – Youth Engagement - This stage focuses on high school students through youth committees. Around age 14 and beyond, retaining students in Atatürk schools and keeping them engaged in the Turkish community becomes more challenging. Strengthening youth networks, leadership opportunities, and cultural programming helps foster awareness, identity, and active participation.

Third Stage – Academic Outreach - The third stage expands engagement to academics and university communities. The goal is to promote intellectual dialogue, research collaboration, and institutional partnerships that elevate Turkish American perspectives within higher education.

Fourth Stage – Broader Community & Institutional Impact - This final stage expands outreach to educators, trainers, the wider community, and local government in our regions. It is critical for long-term sustainability and broader societal impact, ensuring Turkish American voices are represented in educational discussions and decision-making.

The Importance of Self Identification and Community Visibility

A key component of this strategy is encouraging Turkish Americans to confidently self identify as Turkish in educational and civic systems. Visibility directly affects our community's voice, representation, and access to resources.

Many decisions that shape public education are made at the policy level before they reach classrooms. To participate meaningfully in these processes, our community must be visible, organized, and accurately counted. Increased visibility also allows Turkish educators to contribute to the development of textbooks and educational materials, ensuring that our history and culture are represented accurately and responsibly.

This grassroots engagement strengthens our community while safeguarding the integrity of how Türkiye's history and cultural heritage are taught.

Education on Historical Claims Related to Türkiye

The Council of Education also recognizes the need to support students who grew up in USA, may have limited knowledge about historical claims involving Türkiye. The committee plans to develop educational seminars and informational programs to help students and community members better understand these topics through factual, well sourced materials. These initiatives aim to equip our youth with the knowledge and confidence needed to engage in informed dialogue within academic environments.

U.N. Relations Committee

This committee continues to excel in informing and empowering our community while elevating Turkish heritage on the global stage.

Committee lunched NEXTGEN Webinar Series to empower and energize next generations Turkish youth.

In 2025, ATAA, along with its partners **Turkish Women League of America (TWLA)**, and **Empowering the Turkish American Community (ETAC-USA)**, worked closely with **Türkiye UNESCO and the Turkish Mission to the UN** in establishing **December 15 as World Turkic Language Family Day**. On **December 4, 2025**, ATAA, TWLA, ETAC-USA proudly co hosted the first official celebration at the Turkish House in New York.

This year, the committee expanded its cultural diplomacy efforts by introducing Turkish gastronomy and table culture. A major initiative now underway is the establishment of **March 23 as the World Yoğurt Day**, recognizing yogurt as a gift of Turkic nations to the world.

Additional gastronomy projects include:

- **Tarhana çorbası**
- **Paça çorbası**
- **İşkembe çorbası**
- **Turkish breakfast – Turkish table culture**
- **Farm to Table Sustainable Agro Tourism**

ATAA President's Message

The committee also continues to train youth in presentation, leadership, and communication skills—investing in the leaders of tomorrow.

Key sustainability projects include:

Hatay Mastic gum Tree planting – Over 300 trees planted in Hatay

On going tree planting efforts

<https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/ataa-tree-planting-donation-north-america>



Announcing New Tree Planting Projects:

Olive Tree Planting Project in İzmir & Muğla regions

<https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/ataa-tree-planting-donation>



Çeşme Lemon Tree Planting Project in Çeşme region

<https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/ataa-esme-lemon-tree-planting-donation>



Advocacy Committee

With a new, knowledgeable, and passionate team, this committee now operates with a clear strategy and a dual focus:

- **Short term actions to respond to immediate risks**
- **Long term proactive plans to educate the public and raise awareness**

The committee monitors publications and legislative proposals that could harm our community, drafts counter letters, and mobilizes leaders to take action. Their work is essential to protecting the rights and dignity of Turkish Americans.

Youth Committee

Founded by our Michigan youth and supported by the ATAA Board, this committee has grown steadily over the past five years. This year, we expanding their structure to mirror the ATAA Board, with an executive team and regional representation to ensure youth groups of complement organizations are working together.

Committee's vision is powerful: To unite and empower Turkish youth—across ATAA Component Organizations, university groups, and international youth networks—helping them grow personally, socially, and professionally through coordinated programs, inclusive leadership, mentorship, and global responsibility.

Youth Committee focus areas include:

Education - Deliver consistent, high-quality learning and development opportunities across all youth groups under ATAA umbrella.

Connection - Strengthen unity and collaboration among youth across all ATAA entities.

Culture - Build a shared, inclusive youth culture grounded in respect, accountability, and service.

Leadership - Establish a strong, representative youth leadership and governance structure.

ATAA President's Message

Mentorship - Create a unified mentorship ecosystem supporting youth across all ATAA organizations.

Global Responsibility (SDGs) - Position ATAA Youth as an active contributor to global citizenship and the UN Sustainable Development Goals by coordinating all SDG related youth initiatives through the ATAA UN Youth Representative and in close partnership with the ATAA UN Committee, ensuring alignment, visibility, and impact across all Component Organizations.

Turkish American youth are not only the cornerstone of ATAA's mission—they are the heartbeat of our future.

ATAA's Strategic Direction Going Forward

As we look to the future, our path is guided by several core principles that will shape ATAA's long-term vision and impact:

- **The Turkish-American community** cannot move forward by relying solely on defensive reactions. We must become an **agenda-setters, we must lead, shape narratives, and proactively define our own place in American civic life.**
- **The next generation of Turkish-Americans must grow** not only as successful individuals, but **as political, civic, and intellectual leaders.** Their voices will shape public discourse and representation. In this spirit, we take pride in the achievements of Turkish-American innovators and entrepreneurs who inspire our youth and elevate our community.
- **We must build a sustainable, organized presence in academia, media, and technology.** These fields shape public opinion, cultural narratives, and future innovation. A strong foothold in these areas ensures that Turkish-American perspectives are visible, respected, and influential.
- **The path to influence in the American system is critical** - citizenship, participation, and representation. When Turkish-Americans vote, serve, volunteer, organize, and lead, they strengthen both their community and the democratic fabric of this country.

A Final Reflection

As we look ahead, we must remember a simple but powerful truth: the Turkish community in America grows stronger when it organizes, when it tells its own story, and when it is represented with confidence and unity. Our collective strength comes from participation, visibility, and the determination to shape our own narrative.

When we stand together, we elevate not only ATAA, but the future of every Turkish American who will follow in our footsteps.

With respect, gratitude, and unwavering commitment,

Alev Wieland

President

Assembly of Turkish American Associations

Turkish Ambassador's Message

Sayın Başkan,

Türk-Amerikan Dernekleri Kurulu'nun Değerli Mensupları,

ATAA 2026 Yıllık Konferansı'nın tüm katılımcılarını saygıyla selamlıyorum.

ATAA'nın Türk-Amerikan toplumunun birlik ve beraberliğini pekiştirmek, görüş ve beklentilerini güçlü şekilde yansıtmak ve iki ülke arasındaki ilişkilerin geliştirilmesine katkı sağlamak yönündeki kıymetli çalışmalarını takdirle karşılıyor ve içtenlikle destekliyoruz.

Yıllık toplantılar, geçmiş dönemin muhasebesinin yapılması ve geleceğin planlanması, yeni fikirlerin ortaya çıkarılması, farklı bakış açılarının paylaşılması ve ortak aklın hakim kılınması açısından önem taşımaktadır. Ayrıca, bu tür toplantılar Türk-Amerikan toplumunun görünürlüğünün artırılması ve toplum mensuplarının düzenli olarak bir araya getirmesi bakımından da önemli bir işlev görmektedir. Bu toplantılarda ortaya konulan görüş ve öneriler, Büyükelçiliğimizin çalışmalarına da ışık tutmaktadır.



Toplum tarafından yürütülen kamu diplomasisi faaliyetleri, yakın istişare, işbirliği ve dayanışma gerektirmektedir. Zira kendi benliklerini oluşturan ortak alt paydalar ve değerler etrafında kenetlenen ve birlikte hareket edebilen toplumlar, içinde yaşadıkları ülkelerde hak ve menfaatlerini daha etkin bir şekilde savunabilmektedir. ATAA'nın 2026 Yıllık Konferansı'nın temasının bu anlayışı yansıtmasını isabetli buluyor, Türk-Amerikan toplumunun kurumsal kapasitesinin ve görünürlüğünün güçlendirilmesine yönelik özel bir oturum planlanmış olmasını memnuniyetle karşılıyorum.

Köklü bir geçmişe dayanan Türkiye-ABD ilişkileri; siyasi, ticari ve savunma başta olmak üzere, birçok alanda çok boyutlu şekilde gelişmeye devam etmektedir. İki ülke arasındaki işbirliği, bölgesel ve küresel barış ve istikrar bakımından da temel bir katma değer sağlamaktadır.

Ülkelerimiz arasındaki ilişkilerin geliştirilmesinde Türk-Amerikan toplumunun oynadığı rol son derece kıymetlidir. Dinamik ve girişimci Türk-Amerikan toplumunun; spordan sanata, iş dünyasından bilime kadar pek çok alandaki başarılarını gururla takip ediyor, toplumsal hayata katkılarını takdirle karşılıyoruz. Türk-Amerikan toplumunun, Türkiye ile bağlarını güçlü tutarken, ABD'nin sunduğu imkanlardan da en iyi şekilde yararlanarak önümüzdeki dönemde daha büyük başarılarla imza atacağına yürekten inanıyorum. Bu doğrultudaki çabaların desteklenmesi ve teşvik edilmesi önümüzdeki dönemde de önceliklerimiz arasında yer alacaktır.

Bu yılki Konferans'ta, yapay zekaya ve öğrencilerimiz arasındaki etkileşimin güçlendirilmesine yer verildiğini memnuniyetle müşahade ediyorum.

Yapay zeka, yalnızca teknolojik bir gelişme alanı olmanın ötesinde, aynı zamanda ekonomik rekabetten eğitime kadar birçok alanda geleceği şekillendiren stratejik bir başlığı teşkil etmektedir. Bu alandaki fırsatların ve ABD ile işbirliği imkanlarının değerlendirilmesinde yarar görüyorum. ABD'de öğrenim gören öğrencilerimizin yalnızca akademik başarılarıyla değil; birbirleriyle kuracakları güçlü ağlar, ortak projeler ve girişimler aracılığıyla da öne çıkmalarını önemsiyoruz.

Bu yılki konferansın, Türk-Amerikan toplumunu ilgilendiren güncel konuların ele alınması ve iki ülke ilişkilerinin geliştirilmesi bakımından verimli olmasını, her iki ülke ve toplum için somut ve olumlu sonuçlara vesile teşkil etmesini temenni ediyorum.

Tüm katılımcılara ve Konferansın düzenlenmesinde emeği geçen herkese içtenlikle teşekkür ediyor, hepinize sağlık ve esenlik dileklerimi sunuyorum.

Sedat Önal

Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Washington Büyükelçisi

Message from Congressman Pete Sessions



PETE SESSIONS
17TH DISTRICT, TEXAS

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT
AND ACCOUNTABILITY

CHAIRMAN
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT
OPERATIONS AND THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY, THE BORDER,
AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS

COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL SERVICES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
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SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT
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April 15, 2026

Dear Assembly of Turkish American Associations,

I extend my best wishes to the Assembly of Turkish American Associations (ATAA) as you convene your Annual Conference in Texas.

As Co-Chair of the Turkish Caucus for a number of years, I have been proud to engage in efforts that not only strengthen the enduring partnership between our two nations but promote the longstanding values that define our alliance.

The relationship between the United States and Turkey is rooted in shared strategic interests, mutual respect, and a common commitment to freedom. I have been to Turkey several times and experienced firsthand how a strong and stable Turkey advances the security and prosperity of the United States. Your work serves as a vital bridge between our nations at a time when close cooperation is more important than ever.

I remain committed to advancing our shared security and economic cooperation, as well as deepening the people-to-people ties that underpin this relationship. Turkish Americans make meaningful contributions to our nation's economy and civic life, and I commend ATAA for its continued leadership in empowering this community and reinforcing the bonds between the United States and Turkey.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pete Sessions", written over a circular stamp.

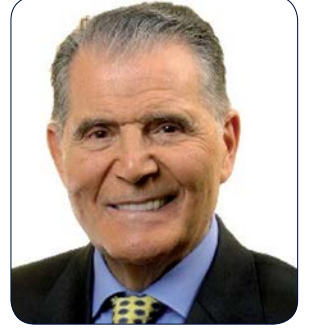
Pete Sessions
Member of Congress

Message from Ambassador (Ret.) Şükrü Elekdağ

Değerli Türk-Amerikan toplumu mensupları,
Kıymetli dostlar,
Saygıdeğer ATAA yöneticileri ve üyeleri,

Bugün, yüzyılı aşan bir ömrün tecrübesiyle, sizlerle bu yolculuğun muhasebesini paylaşmak benim için ayrı bir anlam taşıyor. Yarım asrı aşan bir vizyonun, bir iradenin ve bir inancın ulaştığı noktaya birlikte şahitlik etmek üzere burada bulunuyoruz.

1979 yılında Washington'a Büyükelçi olarak geldiğimde karşılaştığım tablo son derece endişe vericiydi: Türkiye aleyhine **organize, sistematik ve profesyonel bir iftira ve karalama kampanyası** yürütülüyor; buna karşılık Amerika'daki Türk toplumu dağınık ve siyasal sistemin dışında kalmış bir görünüm arz ediyordu.



Amerika'nın dört bir yanına yayılmış yerel Türk dernekleri, güçlü finansal ve siyasi destekle hareket eden profesyonel yapılar karşısında **PR savaşını kaybediyordu**. Üniversitelerdeki birçok Ortadoğu enstitüsü ise, sıklıkla Rum, Yunan veya Ermeni kökenli Amerikalı akademisyenlerin yönetiminde, bilimsel üretimden uzaklaşarak **Türkiye'yi hedef alan, zehir saçan sistematik propaganda merkezlerine** dönüşmüştü. Bu denli kökleşmiş ve etkili bir **yalan mekanizmasına** karşı, **kurumsal bir organizasyon** olmaksızın anlamlı bir karşılık vermek mümkün değildi.

Saptadığım bir diğer sorun, **Türklük gururundan** kaynaklanıyordu. O günlerde Amerika'da yaklaşık yarım milyon Türk kökenli nüfus bulunduğunu tahmin ediyorduk. Bu kitlenin önemli bir bölümü nitelikli, iyi eğitim almış ve meslek sahibi kişilerden oluşuyordu; kısacası bir **beyin gücüydü**. Ancak bu potansiyelin çok küçük bir kısmı Amerikan vatandaşlığına geçmişti. Çünkü o dönemde **Türklük şuru** ve gururu adeta Cebelitarık kayası gibi sertti. Amerikan vatandaşlığına geçmek, bazıları tarafından Türklüğe ihanet olarak görülüyordu. Oysa ben bunun Türkiye'ye hizmetin **stratejik bir aracı** olduğunu anlatmaya çalışıyordum.

Zira "Turkish American" olmak; seçmen olmak, oy sahibi olmak Amerikan siyasetçisinin gözünde ağırlık kazanmak anlamına geliyordu. Aksi takdirde, Kongre'deki milletvekilleri ve senatörlerle temas kurmak, ilişkiler geliştirmek ve onları etkilemek mümkün değildi. Ne var ki bu hedefi hayata geçirmek kolay değildi; zira meselenin bir de yasal boyutu vardı: Ankara'nın **çifte vatandaşlık yasasını** hayata geçirmesi gerekiyordu.

Öte yandan, bazı soydaşlarımız Türkiye'yi ziyaret edemiyor, Türkiye ile ticari ve ekonomik ilişkiler kuramıyordu. Bunun temel nedeni ise o dönemdeki **mecburi askerlik** yükümlülükleriydi.

O dönem şu teşhisi koymuştum: Amerika'daki Türk toplumu örgütlü değilse, siyasal **süreçlere katılamıyor ve kendi hikayesini kendisi anlatmıyorsa, başkalarının yazdığı bir tarihin öznesi olmaktan kurtulamaz**.

İşte Türk-Amerikan Dernekleri Kurulu — ATAA — bu **tarihsel zorunluluğun** bir ürünüdür. Benim ve **Dr. Ülkü Ülgür**'ün inisiyatifiyle, Washington Türk-Amerikan Derneği ile Maryland Türk-Amerikan Derneği, ülke çapında bir çatı kuruluş oluşturma konusunda anlaşmaya vardılar. Kısa süre içerisinde, **1980** yılının baharında ATAA, 26 kuruluş ve 5 öğrenci derneğinin katılımıyla ve Kongre üyesi Stephen Solarz'ın açılış konuşmasıyla ilk toplantısını gerçekleştirdi. Kısa sürede onlarca dernek ve öğrenci örgütünü çatısı altında toplayan **ATAA**, o günden bu yana birçok unutulmaz başarıya imza atmıştır.

Bu başarıların arkasında, artık aramızda olmayan ATAA öncülerini saygı ve sevgiyle anmak isterim: Alp Karahasanoğlu, Ali Sevin, Leon Picon, Hasan Akdemir, Adil Arapoğlu, Dr. Kemal Gökner, Tunca Iskır ve daha niceleri...

* * *

Message from Ambassador (Ret.) Şükrü Elekdağ

Washington'da kurduğumuz yapılar birçok alanda belirleyici bir rol oynadı. Elçilik bünyesinde düzenlediğimiz **kültür ve tanıtım faaliyetleri** bu sürecin en önemli araçlarından biri haline geldi. **Turkish Bazaar** gibi organizasyonlar, hem Türkiye'nin kültürel tanıtımına katkı sağladı hem de finansal sürdürülebilirlik yarattı. Elçiliği adeta bir "Küçük Kapalı Çarşı"ya dönüştürdüğümüz bu girişimler, Türk kültürünü geniş kitlelerle buluştururken aynı zamanda ATAA için **kalıcı bir kaynak** oluşturdu. İlk yıllardan itibaren her yıl büyüyen Türk ürünleri, el sanatları, hediyeleşme eşya ve mücevherat tanıtımları da **kültürel görünürlüğümüzü** önemli ölçüde güçlendirdi.

Büyük liderimiz Atatürk'ün yüzüncü doğum yılı kutlamaları; Washington National Gallery of Art, New York Metropolitan Museum of Art ve Chicago Art Institute'daki "Süleyman the Magnificent" sergileri; Wolf Trap festivalleri; Kennedy Center'da İdil Biret, Suna Kan ve Şefika Kutluer konserleri; Norfolk Azalea Festivali'nde Türkiye'nin onurlandırılan NATO ülkesi olarak yer alması... Tüm bunlar, bu **güçlü topluluğu** bir araya getiren unutulmaz etkinliklerden sadece bazılarıydı.

Chicago'da gerçekleştirdiğimiz Yıllık ATAA Convention'a gidiş, hala dün gibi tazeliğini koruyan, başlı başına unutulmaz bir hatıradır. Washington'daki Union Station'da, civar eyaletlerden gelen katılımcılarla buluşulmuş; Chicago'ya gidecek trenin bazı vagonları rezerve edilmiş, üzerlerine geniş afişlerle "Turkish Express" yazdırılmıştı. Tren yolculuğu boyunca vagonlar birer kutlama alanına dönüşmüş; coşkulu gruplar Türk bayrakları sallayarak "Yaşasın Türkiye!" ve "Ne mutlu Türküm diyene!" nidalarıyla vagonları adeta bir şenliğe çevirmişti. Tren Chicago'da perona "Dağ Başını Duman Almış" marşı eşliğinde yaklaşırken, camlardan sallanan bayraklar ve yükselen tezahüratlar kutlama coşkusunu platforma taşıyor; içerideki enerji dışarıya dalga dalga yayılıyordu. Daha Convention başlamadan yaratılan bu atmosfer, topluluğun enerjisini ve birlik ruhunu en güçlü şekilde ortaya koyuyordu.

Kıydan kıyıya yayılan kutlamalar, hatta Hawaii'ye kadar uzanan etkinlikler... Büyüyen American Friends of Turkey iş birlikleri ve ATAA'nın kültürel faaliyetleri, Amerika genelinde güçlü bir etki yarattı. Artık herkes aynı soruyu soruyordu: "**Bu Türkler şimdiye kadar neredeydi?**"

* * *

Tabii bu esnada resmi faaliyetlerimiz devam ediyordu: 1981'de Türkiye Cumhurbaşkanlığı, Dışişleri Bakanlığı ve Genelkurmay Başkanlığı nezdinde Büyükelçiliğimiz tarafından yapılan ısrarlı girişimler neticesinde iki önemli sonuç elde edilmişti. Bunların birincisi **çifte vatandaşlık** yasasının kabul edilmesiydi; böylece, "**Turkish-American**" kavramı gururla kullanılan bir ad haline geldi. İkincisi de **askerlik** konusunda geç kalanların sorunlarını hallettik. Bu gelişme, yıllardan beri ana vatanlarını ziyaret edemeyen büyük bir kitleyi sevindirdi.

Bu ortamda ATAA, güçlü ve **iyi örgütlenmiş** bir taban kazanmıştı. Başlangıçta Türkiye'nin imajına yönelik karartmalara ve asılsız tarihi iddialara cevap verme ihtiyacından doğan çabalarımız, zamanla ötesine de geçerek **Türk kimliğini** Amerika'da **saygın, görünür** ve **etkili** bir konuma taşıyacak faaliyetlere dönüştü.

Bu büyük bir **stratejik inşa projesiydi** ve bu doğrultuda üç temel sütun üzerine bir yapı kurduk:

Birincisi: Örgütlenme - Dağınık dernekleri tek bir çatı altında toplayarak kolektif bir güç oluşturduk. Yani ATAA.

İkincisi: Bilgi ve akademi - Türk Etütleri Enstitüsü (Institute of Turkish Studies - ITS) ile hakikatin akademik zeminde savunulmasını sağladık.

Üçüncüsü: Müttefik kazanımı - American Friends of Turkey (AFOT) ile yalnız olmadığımızı ve olmayacağımızı ortaya koyduk.

Bu üçlü yapı — ATAA, ITS ve AFOT — birlikte bir **diaspora hareketinin çok ötesinde**; birbirini tamamlayan, bir saatin dişlileri gibi senkronize çalışan bir **stratejik etki mimarisi** oluşturdu.

ATAA sesi yükseltti, ITS bu sesin dayandığı hakikati tartışmasız bir zemine oturttu, AFOT ise bu hakikatin Amerikan toplumundaki karşılığını ve ittifak tabanını oluşturdu.

Neticede, Türkiye'nin imajını karartmaya ve ülkemizin tarihine yönelik sistematik ve kasıtlı tahrifat kampanyası yürütmeye çalışanlara karşı bir algı mücadelesi olarak başlayan bu yolculuk, bahsettiğim bu üçlü yapı ile hedeflenenin çok ötesine geçerek, **derin bir güven zemini inşa etmiş oldu**.

Böylelikle 1980'li yıllar, Türk-Amerikan ilişkilerinde karşılıklı güvenin kurumsallaştığı nadir dönemlerden biri haline geldi. Bu süreçte sorunlar, kriz yaratmadan ve karşılıklı çıkar dengesi gözetilerek çözülmesine olanak sağlayan **istikrarlı bir siyasi atmosfer** oluştu.

Üçlü yapının eşgüdümlü faaliyetleri, Türk Hükümeti'nin Amerika'ya yönelik politikalarına da destek oldu. Bu çalışmaların gördüğü yüksek takdiri anlatmak bakımından şunu hatırlatmak isterim: Dönemin **devlet ve hükümet başkanları**, her Washington ziyaretlerinde ATAA ile kritik algı ve tarihsel iftiralarla mücadele konularında Büyükelçiliğimizde toplantılar gerçekleştirdiler.

Nitekim bu mimarinin en çarpıcı örneklerinden biri, 19 Mayıs 1985 tarihinde yaşandı. O gün, Ermeni propagandasıyla mücadelede unutulmaz bir dönemin başlangıcı oldu: The New York Times ve The Washington Post'ta yarımşar sayfa halinde yayımlanan ve 69 Amerikalı akademisyen tarafından imzalanan deklarasyon, Washington'da adeta bomba etkisi yarattı.

Söz konusu deklarasyon, Temsilciler Meclisi'ne sunulan ve Ermeni iddialarını tanımayı amaçlayan House Joint Resolution 192 tasarısının iddialarını **temelden çürütüyor**; "1915–1923 dönemine ilişkin soykırım" ifadesinin **tamamen yanlış ve tarihsel gerçeklerle bağdaşmadığını gerekçeleriyle** ortaya koyuyordu.

Bu etkinin temelinde, imzacıların **dünyanın önde gelen tarihçi ve akademisyenlerinden** oluşması yatıyordu: Bernard Lewis, Stanford Shaw, J. C. Hurewitz, Tibor Halasi-Kun, Dankwart Rustow ve Carter V. Findley gibi isimler de bu bildiride yer alıyordu.

Deklarasyon, Türkiye'ye moral ve siyasi üstünlük sağladı; Ermeni lobileriyle mesafeyi kapatma imkanı verdi ve Washington'daki görevim boyunca, kararsız milletvekillerinin Türkiye lehine karar vermesine katkı sundu. Kongre oturumlarında Türkiye'yi savunanlar, deklarasyonu sallayarak karşıtlarına "önce buradaki akademisyenlerden biriyle görüş, sonra konuş!" diyordu.

Bu başarının arkasında, Washington'daki Türk Etütleri Enstitüsü (ITS) ile ATAA'nin yürüttüğü stratejik çalışmalar bulunuyordu; deklarasyon, hem akademik hem de diplomatik bir araç olarak etkin biçimde kullanıldı. Amacımız, Türkiye hakkında doğru ve güvenilir bilginin akademik dünyada üretilmesini sağlamaktı. Bu doğrultuda ITS kapsamında doktora öğrencilerine burslar sağlandı, lise öğretmenlerine yönelik Türkiye programları düzenlendi, İstanbul'daki Robert Kolej'de yaz programları gerçekleştirildi, akademik yayınlar desteklendi ve Türkiye'ye saha ziyaretleri organize edildi. Böylece kapsamlı bir **bilgi üretim zemini oluşturuldu** ve farklı disiplinlerden beslenen, sahayla temas eden, veriye dayalı kanaat üreten **geniş bir akademik ekosistem ortaya çıktı**.

Göreve gelir gelmez ITS'in temellerini atarak algı ve akademik çalışmaları başlattık; ancak bu faaliyetlerin kalıcı ve etkili olabilmesi için kurumsal ve güçlü bir yapıya ihtiyaç vardı. Bu doğrultuda, büyük emekler sonucunda 1982'de kurduğum Türk Etütleri Enstitüsü'nün Kurucu Yönetim Kurulu, adeta bir "powerhouse Board" niteliğindeydi: Profesör Bernard Lewis, Profesör Halil İnalcık, Profesör Stanford Shaw, Profesör Kemal Karpat, Profesör Justin McCarthy, ayrıca Atlantic Records'un sahibi Ahmet Ertegün ile Denver'da Amerikan Hava Kuvvetleri'ne üretim yapan bir fabrikanın sahibi ve mucit Ahmed Kafadar. ITS'in yöneticisi ise genç tarihçi Heath Lowry idi. Bu isimler Enstitü'ye muazzam bir prestij ve kredibilite kazandırmakla kalmadı, aynı zamanda stratejik yönelimlerine rehberlik etti.

Message from Ambassador (Ret.) Şükrü Elekdağ

Bu yapı, bir yandan bilgi üretirken, diğer yandan 69 akademisyenin imzaladığı deklarasyon gibi çalışmalar aracılığıyla **tek taraflı anlatılara bilimsel bir kesinlikle güçlü bir karşılık verilmesini sağladı.**

Değerli dostlar,

Bu yıllarda **toplumlar arası bağlar** inşa ettik. Kültürel ve sosyal faaliyetler, **Türkiye'nin medeniyet kimliğini görünür** kılarak resmi diplomasinin açmadığı kapıları açtı. Bunu bana en güçlü şekilde hissettiren anlardan biri, görevimin henüz ilk aylarında yaşandı.

Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nin ilk Baro'su olma unvanını taşıyan ve tüm Amerikan hukuk camiası nezdinde tarihi öneme sahip Philadelphia Barosu'nun ev sahipliğinde, Türk-Amerikan ilişkileri hakkında konuşma yapmak üzere yemekli bir toplantıya davet edildim. Bu davet, İran İslam Devrimi sonrasında Tahran'daki Amerikan Büyükelçiliği'nin işgal edilmesi ve elliyi aşkın Amerikalı diplomatın rehin alınması gibi son derece hassas ve Türkiye'nin jeopolitik kimliğinin öne çıktığı bir döneme denk gelmişti.

Ne var ki, yemek davetinden yalnızca 10 gün önce, 12 Eylül 1980'de Türkiye'de gerçekleşen askeri darbe sonucunda Anayasa askıya alınmış, Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi feshedilmiş, yargı denetimi kaldırılmış ve sıkıyönetim ülke geneline yayılmıştı. Türkiye'nin imajını karartmak isteyen hasım lobilerin varlığı göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, bu konjonktürde Türkiye'nin Büyükelçisi olarak yapacağım konuşma bir hayli zorlaşmıştı... Zira yemeğe katılacak Ermeni ve Rum temsilcilerin, Türkiye'deki gelişmeleri toplantı sırasında istismar etmeleri kaçınılmaz görünüyordu.

Tam odak Türkiye'deyken, Philadelphia'daki yemekte, yeni patlak veren İran-Irak Savaşı haberleri, gündemi bir anda başka yöne çevirdi. Daha yemek başlamadan davetliler krizi tartışmaya koyulmuştu... Bu esnada, yanımda oturan Baro Başkanı, bir NATO üyesi ülke temsilcisi olarak İran ve Irak'a yaptığım son ziyaretler ve temasları da bildiği için, Türk-Amerikan ilişkileri yerine bu yeni gelişme hakkında konuşmamı önerdi. Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nin en büyük kamu yayın ağı olan PBS başta olmak üzere medya tarafından da canlı olarak yayımlanan bu toplantıda, bu son dakika öneriyi kabul ettim.

Soru-cevap bölümünün sonlarına doğru salonda bir hareketlilik oldu. Gizli Servis görevlileri içeri girdi ve Müsteşar Murat Sungar, dönemin Başkan Yardımcısı adayı George Bush Sr.'un konuşmamı PBS'den izlediğini ve benimle acil görüşmeyi arzu ettiğini ilettiler. Bunun üzerine yemeğin bitiminden hemen sonra, Gizli Servis eşliğinde George Bush Sr.'un Philadelphia'daki kampanyasını yürüttüğü Ritz-Carlton Otel'i'ne geçtik. Beni son derece nazik bir şekilde karşılayan Bush ve ekibine güncel ve stratejik değerlendirmeler sunduğum bir buçuk saatten uzun süren görüşmede bölgesel dengeler, Türkiye'nin konumu ve olası senaryolar ele alındı. Görüşmemiz sona erdiğinde, Mr. Bush iki eliyle elimi sıkarak ve bana içtenlikle teşekkür ederek şunları söyledi: "Eğer seçimleri kazanıp iktidara gelirsek, kapılarımız size her zaman açık olacak. Bu konuda burada bulunan tüm danışmanlarıma gerekli talimatı şimdi veriyorum."

Bu temas, görevimin henüz başında gerçekleşmiş kritik bir dönüm noktası oldu. Nitekim Ronald Reagan yönetiminin göreve gelmesi ve Bush'un Başkan Yardımcısı olmasıyla birlikte, bu görüşmenin yararlarını gördüm.

Bu şekilde yarar gösteren, inşa ettiğimiz mimarinin üçüncü sütunu olan AFOT yani **American Friends of Turkey**. AFOT'un hikayesi, diplomasinin en saf ve en etkili formunun bir örneğidir: AFOT, İzmir'de NATO karargahında görev yaparken deprem yaşayan ve bölgeye yardımlaşma göstererek Türk halkına yakınlaşan Amerikalı subay ve personelden oluşan küçük bir sosyal grup iken, Washington'daki ilk görev günlerimde, üyelerinden Albay Ralph Ropp ile kurduğum temas ve yardımlaşma sayesinde kısa sürede, Türkiye-Amerika arasındaki ittifak güçlerini kuvvetlendirmeye katkıda bulunan, Amerikalıların Türkiye'yi anlatmasını sağlayan güçlü bir müttefik ağına dönüştü.

AFOT'un en kritik katkısı şuydu: **Türklerin kendilerini anlatmasından öte, Amerikalıların Türkiye'yi anlatmaya** başlamasını sağladı. Kısa sürede yüzlerle ifade edilen katılımlar, birkaç yıl içinde binlerce kişilik toplantılara dönüştü. 1980'lerin ortasında düzenlenen AFOT etkinlikleri, 1.000 kişilik gala yemekleri, çok eyaletli katılım ve üst düzey siyasi, askeri ve iş dünyası temsilcilerinin bir araya geldiği platformlar haline dönüştü. Bu toplantılar, Kongre üyelerinin, bürokratların ve kanaat önderlerinin Türkiye ile doğrudan temas kurduğu **stratejik etki alanlarıydı**.

Bu faaliyetler neticesinde Türk-Amerikan ilişkilerinde sağlanan olumlu güven ortamı, muhakkak ki Ankara tarafından başlatılan birçok girişimin etkin şekilde yürütülmesine ve olumlu sonuç alınmasına katkıda bulunmuştur. Örneğin son derece istisnai bir mekanizmanın Türkiye lehine devreye girmesine imkan sağlamıştır: "Dependable Undertaking" sistemi. **Dependable Undertaking**, ABD'nin çok sınırlı sayıda ülkeye tanıdığı; yüksek maliyetli savunma projelerinde uzun vadeli finansman ve stratejik taahhüt içeren bir **güven mekanizmasıdır**. Türkiye'nin bu sisteme dahil edilmesi, klasik müttefikliğin ötesinde güçlü bir stratejik güven beyanıdır.

Bu güven ortamının en somut sonuçlarından biri ise **TUSAŞ'ın kurulması ve Türkiye'de 262 adet F-16 savaş uçağının montaj ve imalatı için karar alınması ve bu projenin hayata geçirilmesi** oldu. Düşünün ki, bugün Türkiye parasını vererek 40 adet F-16 Blok 70 savaş uçağı almakta zorlanırken; o dönemde 262 F-16 savaş uçağının teknoloji kazanımını elde ederek hem krediyle **üretiyor** hem de 46 adedini Mısır'a **ihraç** edebiliyordu. Bu, o dönemdeki sağlam diplomatik ilişkilerin ve güven ortamının bir eseridir. Kısacası, Türkiye bu süreçte bir "müşteri" değil, stratejik ortak olarak konumlanmıştır.

Bu başarının temelinde, devletler arası güven ve karşılıklı itimadın, sağlam bir diplomatik altyapı üzerine inşa edilmesi yatmaktadır. ATAA'nın örgütlü gücü, ITS'in akademik meşruiyeti ve AFOT'un müttefik ağı, bu diplomatik altyapının önemli sütunlarından olarak, somut siyasi ve askeri sonuçlar üretmiştir.

* * *

Bugün geriye baktığımızda açık bir tablo görüyoruz:

ATAA'nın örgütlü gücü, ITS'in entelektüel derinliği, AFOT'un müttefik kapasitesi birlikte çalıştığında stratejik sonuç üreten bir sistem ortaya çıkmıştır. Ancak ITS'in kapanmasıyla bu yapı eksilmiştir. Bugün bu eksikliği gidermenin çok faydalı olacağı inancındayım.

ATAA – ITS – AFOT üçlüsü, birbirini tamamlayan bir "etki üçgeni" oluşturmuştu. Bu üçlü birlikte çalıştığında etki katlanarak büyümüşü. **Türkiye ilk kez sadece kendini savunan değil; başkaları tarafından da savunulan bir aktör haline gelmişti.**

* * *

Bugün artık çok farklı bir dünyadayız. Mücadele artık zihinler ve anlatılar üzerinden yürütülüyor. Türkiye'nin jeostratejik önemi her zamankinden de daha büyüktür. Bu yeni dönemde şu soruyu sormalıyız: ATAA'nın **kurucu ruhu** bugün nasıl yeniden yorumlanmalıdır? Cevabım açıktır:

Birincisi: Türk-Amerikan toplumu yalnızca savunma refleksiyle hareket edemez. **Gündem belirleyen bir aktör** olmak zorundadır.

İkincisi: Yeni nesil Türk-Amerikalılar yalnızca başarılı bireyler olarak kalmamalı; aynı zamanda **siyasal ve entelektüel liderler** olarak yetişmelidir. Bu bağlamda, öne çıkan Turkish-American mucit iş insanlarımızla gurur duyuyoruz.

Message from Ambassador (Ret.) Şükrü Elekdağ

Üçüncüsü: Akademi, medya ve teknoloji alanlarında **örgütlü** ve **sürdürülebilir** bir varlık oluşturulmalıdır.

Dördüncüsü: Amerikan sistemi içinde etkin olmanın yolu hala aynıdır: **vatandaşlık, katılım ve temsil. Bu gerçek, 1980'lerde ne kadar geçerliyse, bugün de o kadar geçerlidir.**

Değerli dostlar,

Türk milleti, dünyanın neresinde olursa olsun, kendi kimliğini koruyarak bulunduğu toplumun saygın ve etkili üyeleri olabilir. Ve kendi kaderini, başkalarının yazdığı bir hikayeye bırakmadan şekillendirebilir. **Bugün burada bulunan sizler, bu fikrin yaşayan temsilcilerisiniz.**

Sözlerime son verirken şunu ifade etmek isterim:

Geçmişte başardıklarımız değer taşımaktadır; ancak bu başarıları sadece hatıralarda bırakmak **yetmez**. Onları bugünümüzü güçlendirecek ve yarınımıza taşıyacak şekilde kullanmalıyız. Böylelikle, **ATAA** önümüzdeki yarım yüzyılda da **Türk-Amerikan toplumunun en güçlü sesi olmaya devam edecektir.**

Yüzyılı aşan bir ömrün ardından şunu gördüm: Amerika'daki Türk toplumu; örgütlendikçe, kendini anlattıkça ve güçlü biçimde temsil edildikçe güç kazanır.

Hepinizi saygıyla selamlıyorum.

Şükrü M. Elekdağ (102 yıllık bir ömrün tanıklığıyla)

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 United States.

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

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, 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that relies on membership dues and donations.

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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.”



ATAA Founders: Former President of ATADC, Yavuz Somen and Former President of MATA, Dr. Ülkü Ülgür (1979)

History of ATAA

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.

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.



Turkish Express, ATAA Annual Convention (Chicago, 1982)



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

Program

FRIDAY, MAY 1, 2026

- 9:30 am **Dallas City Tour**
- 11:00 am-12:00 pm **Fort Worth Stockyards National Historic District Tour**
- 12:00 pm-1:00 pm **Lunch**
- 1:00 pm-2:00 pm **The Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza Visit**
- 3:15 pm-4:15 pm **Southfork Ranch Tour**
- 6:00 pm-7:00 pm **Student Networking Event** (Westin Stonebriar Golf Resort & Spa)
- 7:30 pm-10:30 pm **Dinner & Entertainment** (Turkish Café & Lounge)

SATURDAY, MAY 2, 2026 (Westin Stonebriar Golf Resort & Spa)

- 7:00 am-7:45 am **Registration & Breakfast**
- 8:00 am-8:45 am **Opening Ceremony & Welcoming Remarks**
Alev Wieland, President, Assembly of Turkish American Associations (ATAA)
The Honorable **Ahmet Akıntı**, Consul General of the Republic of Türkiye in Houston
The Honorable **Susan Fletcher**, County Commissioner, Precinct 1, Collin County, Texas
- 8:45 am-9:00 am **Announcement of Art Exhibits**
Vega Sankur, Ph.D., Founder & President of ATAMLA-AKM
Olca Soyman Seçilmiş, Interior Architect & Industrial Designer
- 9:00 am-9:50 am **Keynote Message**
Cengiz Şişman, Ph.D., Professor of History, University of Houston-Clear Lake
- 9:50 am-10:00 am **Break**
- Session 1** **Guardians of the Past, Architects of the Future – AI**
- 10:00 am-10:50 am
Moderator: **Yiğit Han Yıldırım**, Senior, Computer Engineering, University of Texas at Dallas
Speakers: **Cengiz Şişman**, Ph.D., Professor of History, University of Houston-Clear Lake
Dorukhan Korkut Oğuz, Esq., Founding Attorney, Oguz Law
Brian Dixon, Founder of Devolutionists, AI & Digital Transformation Advisor
Elif Özkan, M.S. (Business Analytics & AI), University of Texas at Dallas
- 10:50 am-11:00 am **Break**
- Session 2** **Building Visibility, Securing Recognition: Strategic Actions for the Turkish American Community**
- 11:00 am-11:50 am
Moderator: **Hülya Erol-Garvett**, Realtor, Treasurer, Turkish Coalition USA PAC
Speakers: **Hülya Koç**, Co-Founder & Co-President, Empowering the Turkish-American Community USA
Murat Taş, Ph.D., Past President, American Turkish Association of San Antonio
Hatice Gonca Usta, Ph.D., President, Turkish American Association of North Texas
- 12:00 pm-1:00 pm **Luncheon**

Session 3 Your Voice – Your Community – Your World

1:15 pm-2:05 pm

Moderator: **Selim Erhan**, Ph.D., Co-Chair, ATAA UN Relations Committee & ATAA Trustee

Speakers: **Kaan Güleriyüz**, Freshman, Neuqua Valley High School, IL (Video message)

Bartu Milci, Freshman, Harker School, CA

Sean Özalpaşan, ATAA UN Representative

Yasemin Knott, ATAA UN Youth Forum Member

Ece Yenigün, TWLA UN Youth Representative

Berna Gürdal, President, Turkish Women's League of America

Canan Özaktay, ATAA Southeast Region VP

Gizem Şalcıgil White, Founder & CEO, Turkish Coffee Lady

Alev Wieland, President, Assembly of Turkish American Associations (ATAA)

2:05 pm-2:15 pm Break

Session 4 Shared Roots, Shared Futures: Strengthening Turkish Student Networks in America

2:15 pm-3:05 pm

Moderator: **Nilüfer Esen-Bilgin**, M.D., Ph.D., Chair, ATAA Advocacy & Outreach Committee & Past President

Speakers: **Mehmet Taşcıoğlu**, Co-Founder & Chair, ATAA Youth Committee

Saime Atakan, Attorney at Law, GlobalB Law Firm

Bora Özalp, Vice Chair, ATAA Youth Committee

İlayda Yeni, Secretary, ATAA Youth Committee

Ela Turanhan, Member, TURANT Youth Committee

Erke Sayın, Member, TURANT Youth Committee

3:05 pm-3:15 pm Break

Session 5 Empowering Leadership for Turkish American Community Growth and Youth Engagement

3:15 pm-4:00 pm

Speakers: **Ayça Altıntığ**, Ph.D., President, Turkish Women's Initiative (TWI)

Saime Atakan, Attorney at Law, GlobalB Law Firm

4:00 pm-4:10 pm Break

Session 6 Estate Planning Session – Estate Planning and Planned Giving

4:10 pm-5:00 pm

Speakers: **Burçak Küçükusta**, Institutional Partnerships Lead, Turkish Philanthropy Funds

Todd J. Bornstein, Attorney at Law, Selzer Gurvitch Rabin Wertheimer & Polott, P.C.

5:00 pm-5:25 pm

Closing Remarks

Alev Wieland, President, Assembly of Turkish American Associations (ATAA)

6:30 pm-7:30 pm

Reception

Piano Recital – Featuring Pianists **Batu & Lila Uster**

Piano Recital – Featuring **Dalya Doğru**, Piano, & **Mine Taşçı Özalp**, Vocals

7:30 pm-11:30 pm

2026 Annual Gala

Welcoming Remarks

Dinner

Annual Awards Ceremony

Live Musical Performance and Entertainment by Nova Band Texas

2026 Annual Conference Sponsors

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Biographies

SESSION 1 | GUARDIANS OF THE PAST, ARCHITECTS OF THE FUTURE - AI



Yiğit Han Yıldırım

Yiğit Han Yıldırım is a senior Computer Engineering student at the University of Texas at Dallas with a strong focus on artificial intelligence, systems engineering, and automation. He has professional experience as a

Software Engineer, where he developed test automation frameworks, worked with APIs and embedded systems, and explored the integration of AI into real-world workflows.

He has also led independent projects in machine learning and software development, including building locally hosted AI applications and experimenting with large language models. He will be joining Palo Alto Networks as an Associate Systems Engineer where he aims to bridge deep technical knowledge with real-world business and security challenges.



Cengiz Şişman, Ph.D.

Professor Cengiz Şişman majored in Psychology at Boğaziçi University and earned his Ph.D. in Middle Eastern Studies from Harvard University. Several of his works have received international awards, and he has served on a number of

international academic committees and boards. He has taught at several leading institutions, including Harvard University, Boğaziçi University, Koç University, Bilkent University, Brandeis University, and Furman University. Since 2015, he has been teaching within the University of Houston System.

One of his works, *The Burden of Silence: Sabbatai Sevi and the Evolution of the Ottoman-Turkish Dönmes*, was published by Oxford University Press. His research and teaching are unified by a deep interest in the history of religions and civilizations, Ottoman and Turkish history, and the relationship between religion and modernity.



Dorukhan K. Oğuz, Esq.

Dorukhan K. Oğuz, Esq., a graduate of İstanbul University Faculty of Law, pursued his academic career in the United States.

He received a master's degree from UC Berkeley School of Law, where

he also served as a Research Scholar. He is currently a candidate in the SJD (Doctor of Juridical Science) program at Golden Gate University.

Professionally, Oğuz is the founding partner of Oguz Law P.C., a law firm with over 90 staff members, providing services in immigration and corporate law. He is also a co-founder of Oguz Injury Lawyers LLP. As a technology entrepreneur, he co-founded WeVisa AI, an AI-powered immigration platform.



Brian Dixon

Brian Dixon is a technology and operations leader focused on helping organizations apply artificial intelligence in practical, real-world ways.

As founder of Devolutionists, he works with companies to implement AI and automation solutions that drive measurable outcomes. With over 20 years of experience scaling technology-enabled businesses, Brian has served as COO of Zigatta, leading U.S. and LATAM operations, driving revenue growth, and building high-performing software and AI teams.

He has also led global expansion, post-merger integrations, and continues to advise companies on the future of work and technology-enabled services. Brian is particularly focused on how information is created, interpreted, and trusted in the AI era. He believes AI doesn't replace truth—it amplifies what we feed it—and is passionate about helping people become informed participants who shape these tools responsibly.



Elif Özkan

Elif Özkan is a Biomedical Engineering graduate currently pursuing a Master's degree in Business Analytics and Artificial Intelligence with a focus on data science. She works as a Quality Assurance Specialist at Abbott,

where she supports production quality and drives process improvements in medical device manufacturing. Elif is passionate about leveraging AI, medical imaging, and intelligent systems to enhance healthcare technologies and optimize workflows.

She is driven to continuously improve systems and optimize the world around her, with a strong commitment to expanding access and creating meaningful impact across communities. Her work and interests lie at the intersection of engineering, data, and real-world clinical impact.

SESSION 2 | BUILDING VISIBILITY, SECURING RECOGNITION: STRATEGIC ACTIONS FOR THE TURKISH AMERICAN COMMUNITY



Hülya Erol-Garvett

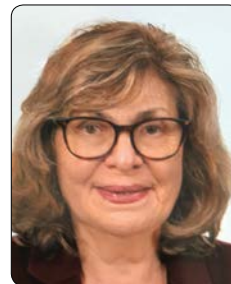
Hülya Erol-Garvett is a respected real estate professional, entrepreneur, and a leading voice in Turkish-American civic engagement. She serves as President of the Turkish Coalition USA Political Action Committee

(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.



Hülya Koç

Hülya Koç is a 3x exited Silicon Valley entrepreneur, globally accredited investor, startup mentor and judge with 40 years of experience in banking, entrepreneurship, and angel investing.

She began her career at international banks including Wells Fargo before launching and successfully exiting three for-profit companies, including a leading national employment agency in the education & childcare sector with 30+ U.S. offices across the country. Not only have her businesses received numerous awards throughout the US, but Hülya has also been recognized and awarded for her mentorship by the US Small Business Administration.

She advises startups, does presentations and seminars on angel investing while continuing her studies at Stanford University. In addition to being a co-founder of the world's largest angel investor network, Keiretsu Forum's London and Istanbul Chapters, Hülya also pioneered the angel investor group "KAYAK," to empower women investors.

A passionate community builder and an advocate for children, diversity, equity and inclusion, Hülya also co-founded two non-profit organizations. Most recently, she co-founded ETAC (Empowering the Turkish American Community) the first Turkish American Community & Activity Center in Northern California with the unique mission to pass on the Turkish heritage to generations to come.

Hülya has been awarded for her Lifetime Service to Community & Leadership by ATAA (Assembly of Turkish American Associations), TAAC- Cal Turks

(Turkish American Association of Northern California), TEF (Turkish Education Foundation) and the Alaturca Connection. She remains committed to empowering the lives of entrepreneurs and underserved children through extensive volunteer work. Hülya holds advanced degrees in business administration and education.

academic research, statistical modeling, and production-level data engineering. After several years working as a Data Engineer at JLL, Dr. Usta now serves as a Senior Software Engineer at Vizio-Walmart, where she applies rigorous statistical thinking and practical implementation to complex data and software systems.



Murat Taş, Ph.D.

Dr. Murat Taş was born and raised in Türkiye and moved to the United States in 1992. For over 30 years, he has been an active and dedicated member of the Turkish American community. He has served the American Turkish Association

(ATA) San Antonio for three decades, including many years as President. In addition, he has contributed to the Assembly of Turkish American Associations (ATAA) for more than 15 years, serving as a member, Vice President, and Secretary.

Professionally, Murat Taş has devoted more than 33 years to higher education in the United States. Throughout his distinguished academic career, he has served as a professor, program coordinator, director, and department chair across multiple universities.

He continues to serve in academic leadership roles today. Beyond academia, he has conducted international business in over 50 countries, representing both the United States and Türkiye in global engagements. He resides in San Antonio, Texas, with his wife and three daughters.



Hatice Gonca Usta, Ph.D.

Dr. Hatice Gonca Usta is an Associate Professor with deep expertise in statistics, measurement, and data analysis.

She earned her undergraduate degree in Primary Mathematics

Education her master's and doctoral degrees in Measurement and Evaluation from Ankara University. She later transitioned into industry and worked as a Data Engineer in the United States, applying advanced statistical knowledge to large-scale data pipelines and analytics systems. Her background uniquely combines

SESSION 3 | YOUR VOICE – YOUR COMMUNITY – YOUR WORLD



Selim Erhan, Ph.D.

Dr. Selim Erhan was born in Istanbul Türkiye. He has a BS in Chemical Engineering degree from the University of Istanbul, and a Ph.D. in Polymer-Organic Chemistry from Western Michigan University.

After teaching at, 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.

Dr. Erhan started actively working on introducing Türkiye 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.

In 2013 he joined TACA's Board of Directors and became the Director of the Ataturk School and the Adult Turkish School. 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.



Kaan Güleriyüz

Kaan Güleriyüz is a freshman at Neuqua Valley High School in Naperville, Illinois, who combines strong academic performance with a deep passion for athletics and environmental stewardship.

As an honors biology student, he explores complex topics such as ocean ecosystems and their global significance, which has sparked a growing interest in marine conservation and sustainability.

He is particularly motivated by the potential of science to address real-world environmental challenges and is eager to further investigate how innovative solutions can protect and restore natural habitats. He stays informed on global environmental issues and enjoys discussing climate change, biodiversity, and conservation.

He is a dedicated tennis player who develops discipline, focus, and strategy through practice and competition.



Bartu Milci

Bartu Milci is a ninth grader at The Harker School in San Jose, California. He is passionate about biology and math.

During the summer of 2025, he attended a threeweek CTY camp at Johns Hopkins University where he learned about anatomy and physiology. At school, he takes part in the medical, research, neuroscience, psychology, and bioinformatics clubs. Bartu also acts as a junior coach for Harker Middle School science bowl team while competing in science bowl himself. He enjoys conducting biology based research as well.

He competes in many math competitions, earning 1st place in HMI, a distinguished honor roll in BMT, and honors rolls in many other competitions. He is also bilingual, speaking both English and Turkish and has been studying French for over three years. In his desire to be involved in his community, he has joined the ATAA Youth Committee. Bartu also plays water polo at his school team. In his free time, he enjoys folding origami, playing piano, reading books, and traveling to new countries and learning about their cultures.

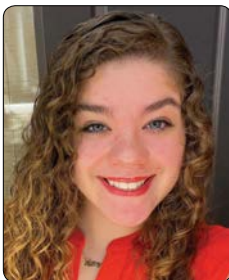


Sean Özalpaşan

Sean is a graduate of Harvard Westlake School in Los Angeles, California. Sean is a proud member of the Turkish American community, and takes pride in participating in ATASC events around LA. Because of his diligent work with ATAA,

Sean was selected to represent all Turkish-American Youth at the Turkish World Youth Forum, held in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Sean also enjoys creating his own coding projects, leading his school's sailing team, and leading his school's Turkish Club. Furthermore, Sean enjoys traveling and whenever he and his family go to Turkey, they make sure to visit UNESCO recognized ancient historical sites as well as important hallmarks of Atatürk's legacy on Türkiye.



Yasemin Knott

Yasemin Knott graduated with her Bachelor's degree in Social Work, and is currently pursuing her Master of Social Work at Siena University in New York.

She was previously the United Nations Youth Representative for the Turkish Women's League of America (TWLA), and is currently a member of the Assembly of Turkish American Associations' United Nations Youth Forum.

Through her involvement with the ATAA and TWLA, Yasemin has given many successful presentations throughout the United States and abroad; including Atatürk's Living Legacy: Not Without Him, The Language That Remembers Us, and Women in a Drop of Water. She currently works in the field of children's mental health as it relates to Social Work.



Ece Yenigün

Ece Yenigün was born in New York, New York, as the first-generation U.S. citizen in her family. She attended the United Nations International School, where she completed the International Baccalaureate Programme and earned her IB Diploma. In 2015, she graduated from the Turkish Women's League of America's (TWLA) New York Atatürk School and now serves on the TWLA United Nations Committee.

Fluent in English, Turkish, French, and Spanish, she has grown into the aspiring communicator she is today. Ece earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and French & Francophone Studies at Union College, where she studied abroad in both Italy and France and was inducted into Pi Delta Phi, the National French Honor Society. She has also pursued her interest in humanitarian work through internship opportunities with The New Neighbors Partnership at Columbia University and volunteer service with the Turkish Red Crescent Community (Türk Kızılay) in Türkiye, mentoring and teaching Syrian refugee children.

Ece is currently pursuing an M.S. in Global Affairs at New York University, with concentrations in Global Gender Studies and Human Rights & International Law, and a specialization in the United Nations.



Berna Gürdal

Berna Gürdal graduated as a dietitian from Hacettepe University's Nutrition and Dietetics Department in 1997. From 1997 to 1999, she worked as a Corporate Dietitian at Panorama Catering Company. Between 1998 and 2005, she served as a clinical dietitian in the Internal Medicine Department of Uludağ University.

During her tenure, she participated as a speaker in various conferences and presented posters at international congresses. In 2006, she contributed to the book *Diabetes Mellitus Türkiye* by writing on the topic of Nutrition and Diabetes Treatment. Since 2005, she has been residing in New York, where she earned certificates from Stanford University's Child Nutrition and

Cooking program and Cornell University's Nutrition and Healthy Living certificate program.

She has been a member of the board of directors at the American Turkish Women's Association (ATKB) since 2017 and currently provides nutrition and diet consultancy services through BG Life Style.

She is married and the mother of two children. Her son Onur graduated from Atatürk School in 2018, and her daughter Duygu graduated in 2023. She has served on the board of member for six years and has been serving as president since 2023.



Canan Özaktay

Canan Özaktay was born in Istanbul and moved to Michigan in 1969. She received her BS degree from Michigan State University in 1978 and spent most of her career through 2005 in the Automotive Industry and later moved to New Hampshire where she received her MS degree in Healthcare Management from Franklin Pierce University.

In 2007 Canan moved to Florida where she received her Real Estate license in 2012 and Broker's License 2019. Currently she is the Broker/Owner of Epic Solutions Realty, Boca Raton FL. Canan is an enthusiastic member of the community and believes in service. While she lived in Michigan, she was a member of Turkish American Cultural Association of Michigan (TACAM) and served in various positions which included the President of the organization (2004-2005). She joined Florida Turkish American Association (FTAA) as a member in 2008 and volunteered in several committees and was the President 2022-2024 term. Canan's memberships include Boca Raton Rotary Club where she serves in the Foundation Committee and also the Leadership Boca Class of 2023.

She is a proud new member of the ATAA UN Relations Committee. Living in Boca Raton, FL, Canan is married to Dr. Cüneyt Özaktay. She is mother of Crystal Smith, Brandon Hampton and Levent Özaktay. Ms. Ozaktay has been serving as ATAA Southeast Region Vice President since 2024.



Gizem Şalcıgil White

Gizem Şalcıgil-White, who served as ATAA VP Capital Region from 2013 to 2015, is the founder of Turkish Coffee Lady, an award-winning cultural ambassador, and an exemplary female entrepreneur. For 16 years, she has promoted

Turkish coffee culture in the United States, Canada, and Europe, offering Turkish coffee for the first time to over 60,000 people abroad.

She became known as the “Turkish Coffee Lady” after her cultural work was extensively featured in the September 18, 2012, issue of the leading newspaper, the Washington Post. In 2026, White was selected as Turkey’s Most Successful Young Person in the field of “culture” by JCI and was listed among Turk of America magazine’s “Most Influential Turkish Americans.” In 2022, she won Virginia’s Success Story Award. In 2020, she founded the 501(c)(3) Turkish Coffee Lady Foundation and is known for its international projects supporting women’s empowerment and its initiatives building intercultural bridges.



Alev Wieland

Alev Wieland is the President of the Assembly of Turkish American Associations (ATAA), where she leads national efforts to strengthen community engagement, cultural connection, and youth leadership across the Turkish American

diaspora. Her work focuses on building platforms that connect Turkish Community and Next Generation Turkish Youth with global issues, civic responsibility, opportunities for meaningful contribution, cultural heritage, and leadership.

Alev brings over three decades of experience in engineering, manufacturing, and operations across global industries. She holds a degree in Electrical Engineering and has held leadership roles at major organizations including Procter & Gamble and PepsiCo, where she served as Capability Director. She is also the CEO of Manufacturing Excellence Technical Services and Alev Cosmetics, with expertise in lean manufacturing, product lifecycle management, and operational excellence.

In addition to her professional career, Alev has been deeply engaged in nonprofit and community leadership for many years, serving in various roles across Turkish American organizations and international initiatives. As ATAA President, she continues to expand the organization’s impact by fostering partnerships, supporting community-driven programs, and encouraging young people to see themselves as active contributors to a more sustainable and inclusive future.

SESSION 4 | SHARED ROOTS, SHARED FUTURES: STRENGTHENING TURKISH STUDENT NETWORKS IN AMERICA



Nilüfer Esen-Bilgin, M.D.

Dr. Nilüfer Esen-Bilgin was born in Giresun and raised in İstanbul, Türkiye. She graduated from Marmara University Medical School in Istanbul in 1990, and got a specialty degree in physiology at Istanbul 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 multiple leadership roles on the ATAA Board, including Mid-Central Region Vice President (2017–2019), First Vice President/Secretary General (2020–2021), President-Elect (2022–2023), and President (2023–2025), and has served as Past President since May 2025. Previously, she was active in the Turkish American Cultural Association of Michigan (TACAM), serving as president (2015–2019), where she increased cultural awareness and membership.

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).



Mehmet Taşcıoğlu

Mehmet Taşcıoğlu is a fourth-year undergraduate at Stanford University studying Management Science & Engineering.

In 2019, he co-founded the Turkish American Cultural Association of

Michigan's High School Chapter (THSC), serving as Secretary from 2019 to 2020, President from 2020 to 2021, and Past President from 2021 to 2022.

Motivated to expand his impact nationally, he co-founded the ATAA Youth Committee in late 2020 to lead nationwide initiatives. Under his leadership, the committee has hosted 10+ webinars, launched a College Admissions Program for the past 3 summers (2023–2025), organized 4 panels at ATAA Conferences, conducted 2 data-driven Research Projects, & more. Mehmet is also the Founder and Board Chair of Connect Me Tutoring (connectmego.org) nonprofit, the largest free tutoring organization in the United States. Leading a team of 1,000+ staff across 75+ chapters, the organization has delivered over 60,000 one-on-one online tutoring sessions, providing more than \$5.7M in educational value to K-8 students. Professionally, Mehmet works as a private equity analyst at an infrastructure investment firm.



Saime Atakan, Esq.

Saime Atakan, Esq. is an attorney licensed in California, New York, and Istanbul. She graduated from Ankara University Law School, which is the first university of Turkish Republic. She received a government grant for a summer

internship in a law firm in Cologne, Germany where she learned about immigration laws and international trade regulations. She moved to the United States, Maryland for Master's degree in 2017.

She founded A & D Law Firm in Beverly Hills, CA in 2021. Besides Beverly Hills, the law firm has two more offices in New York Financial District, and Maryland Prince Frederick. Her law firm's practice areas are Personal Injury, Immigration, and Business Law.



Bora Özalp

Bora Özalp has volunteered for the Turkish American community for over a decade, fostering cultural ties and leadership at both the local and national levels. His journey began with the Turkish American Cultural Association of Michigan

(TACAM), where he served as Treasurer for the high school chapter. In this role, he managed financial oversight for youth-led initiatives, sparking a lifelong commitment to community service.

Bora joined the ATAA Youth Committee, rising to Vice Chair, where he helps lead national strategy and engage young Turkish Americans in cultural and professional development. He is graduating from Detroit Country Day School and will attend the University of Michigan this fall to pursue dual degrees in Electrical Engineering and Business Administration.



İlayda Yeni

İlayda Yeni is a second-year undergraduate student at Michigan State University under Lyman Briggs College studying Human Biology while on the pre-med track. She has been involved in her Turkish community beginning in

2020 through the Turkish American Cultural Association of Michigan's High School Chapter.

She served as treasurer (2020–2022), president (2022–2023), and past president (2023–2024), while also joining the ATAA Youth Committee in 2020. She is currently the committee's secretary (2024–2026) and Media Subcommittee chair, leading webinars, the College Admissions Program, and research projects presented at ATAA conferences.

At Michigan State University, she is an active member of the Turkish Student Association, participating in events and working to strengthen connections among Turkish students on campus, in her community, and nationwide through ATAA and future opportunities.

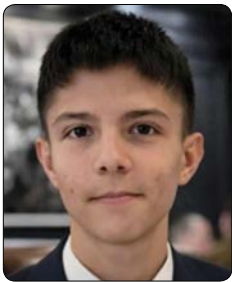


Ela Turanhan

Ela Turanhan is a 16-year-old high school senior, born in Istanbul, Turkiye, and currently based in Texas. She is a dedicated student-athlete, actively competing as both a horseback rider and a wrestler on her school's varsity team.

Beyond athletics, Ela is deeply engaged in academic and extracurricular leadership, she is the founder of Chemistry Club, Biology Club, and Model United Nations (MUN) Club, where she continues to play an active role in fostering student involvement and intellectual growth.

In addition, Ela serves as a member of the Turant Youth Committee, reflecting her passion for community engagement, leadership, and creating opportunities for young people on an international scale.



Erke Sayin

Erke Sayin is a 16-year-old student at Richland High School, currently in the 10th grade. Born in Ankara, Turkiye, he is a committed student-athlete who plays for both the varsity soccer team at his school and Solar ECNL-RL.

Alongside his athletic pursuits, he is an active member of the National Honor Society (NHS). He also volunteers with Turkish Without Borders (TWB), supporting Turkish students in developing their English skills, and serves as a member of the Turkish American Association of North Texas - TURANT Youth Committee, demonstrating his dedication to community engagement and leadership.

SESSION 5 | EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP FOR TURKISH AMERICAN COMMUNITY GROWTH AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT



Ayça Altıntığ, Ph.D.

Dr. Ayça Altıntığ is an academic in finance and a passionate leader in women's empowerment and women's financial literacy. She is an experienced academic with 20+ years of teaching experience and extensive research in corporate

financial strategy published in leading journals.

She is currently an Associate Professor of Clinical Finance at the University of Southern California. Financial literacy and empowerment is Ayça's passion.

In addition to teaching financial literacy classes at USC, she runs workshops in financial literacy to various non-profit groups ranging from African Women entrepreneurs to mid-career entertainment industry professionals. Outside of academia, Ayça works on her second passion - women's leadership and empowerment. Currently she is the president of Turkish Women's Initiative and a board member for Degisim Liderleri Dernegi in Turkiye.

She works extensively for young women's leadership development and empowerment through TWI's signature leadership programs: The "Kivilcimlar" program for young university age women leaders in Turkiye as well as the SparksUSA program in the US intended for women of multinational backgrounds to reach their full leadership potential in the US workplace.

She has an extensive history of volunteering for and serving in leadership roles for various Turkish American Associations both in her local Southern California (including as school director for OCTAA, President of ATASC) and nationally (as a Western regional VP for ATAA). Ayça has an undergraduate degree from Bogazici University in Istanbul and graduate and doctoral degrees from Louisiana State University. Ayça lives in Southern California.



Saime Atakan, Esq.

Saime Atakan, Esq. is an attorney licensed in California, New York, and Istanbul. She graduated from Ankara University Law School, which is the first university of Turkish Republic.

She received a government grant for a summer internship in a law firm in Cologne, Germany where she learned about immigration laws and international trade regulations. She moved to the United States, Maryland for Master's degree in 2017.

She founded A & D Law Firm in Beverly Hills, CA in 2021. Besides Beverly Hills, the law firm has two more offices in New York Financial District, and Maryland Prince Frederick. Her law firm's practice areas are Personal Injury, Immigration, and Business Law.

SESSION 6 | ESTATE PLANNING SESSION – ESTATE PLANNING AND PLANNED GIVING



Burçak Küçükusta

Burçak Küçükusta joined Turkish Philanthropy Funds in 2024 as Institutional Partnerships Lead, where she develops and manages strategic partnerships with corporations and their foundations, drives institutional fundraising,

and designs high-impact collaborations aligned with the organization's social impact initiatives.

She also manages TPF's scholarship programs in the U.S., supporting talented students of Turkish heritage and empowering them to become future leaders and changemakers. She builds and manages relationships with Turkish American associations, fostering meaningful collaborations, including scholarship initiatives. Burçak has over 15 years of experience in marketing and innovation. She began her career at Unilever Türkiye. She later joined her family's footwear business, where she led R&D consulting initiatives and launched the company's e-commerce operations.

Deeply committed to social impact, she has championed scholarship initiatives and led alumni engagement for Izmir American Collegiate Institute. She serves as president of the R&D committee of TASEV and is a member of ATAA and TURANT. She holds a BA degree in Economics from Sabancı University, an Executive MBA from Boğaziçi University.



Todd J. Bornstein

Todd Bornstein combines a background in both law and accounting to offer his Estate Planning clients a comprehensive, clear and effective approach to creating tailored estate plans.

He focuses on educating clients about their options, ensuring they understand both immediate and long-term benefits and fostering trust in his integrity and expertise. His growing and loyal client base is a testament to the quality of service he provides.

A former CPA, Todd's dual background enhances his work in estate planning, estate & trust administration, estate & gift Tax Returns, prenuptial agreements and estate & trust litigation. He has handled complex IRS estate tax audits, including high-value, multi-million-dollar cases. In recognition of his exceptional abilities, Todd is a fellow of the American College of Trust and Estate Counsel (ACTEC), a national organization that elects lawyers to membership who demonstrate the highest level of integrity, commitment to the profession, competence and experience as trust and estate counselors.

ATAA 2026 Annual Awards Recipients

ŞÜKRÜ ELEKDAĞ AWARD

Kürşad Doğru

In Recognition of His Exemplary Leadership and Lifelong Commitment to the ATAA and the Broader Turkish American Community

* * *

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

Erdal Sipahi

In Recognition of His Dedicated Service to the ATAA and the Turkish-American Community

* * *

TURKISH AMERICAN OF THE YEAR AWARD

Gizem Şalcıgil White

For Her Leadership in Elevating Turkish Coffee to Global Recognition and Preserving Turkish Heritage Through Cultural Bridges

* * *

PRESIDENT'S SPECIAL AWARDS

Yücel Burdurlu

In Recognition of Years of Loyal Service and Leadership to the ATAA Community, and Increasing the ATAA Membership Efforts

Dr. Selim Erhan

For Years of Loyal Service and Leadership to the ATAA Community, UN Relations Committee, and ATAA USA Magazine

Canan Özaktay

In Recognition of Empowering the Turkish Youth Through Sustainability, Innovation, Leadership, and Global Challenges Webinars

Didem Altop

In Recognition of Empowering the Turkish Youth Through Sustainability, Innovation, Leadership, and Global Challenges Webinars

Dr. Ebru Çetin Milci

For Her Outstanding Expertise and Dedication to the December 15 Turkic Language Family Day Project

Berna Gürdal

*For Her Leadership and Contributions to the ATAA Efforts in
the December 15 Turkic Language Family Day Project*

Pervin Karamete

*For Her Leadership and Contributions to the ATAA efforts in
the December 15 Turkic Language Family Day Project*

Pelin Hoşkan San

*For Her Creative Leadership in ATAA USA Magazine,
Marketing, Social Media, and the Art Committee*

Rabia Rana

*For Her Contributions to Documenting and Safeguarding
the ATAA's History for Future Generations*

* * *

COMPONENT ASSOCIATION OF THE YEAR AWARD

Turkish American Association of North Texas (TURANT)

*For Outstanding Dedication and Leadership in Strengthening
the Turkish American Community in North Texas*

* * *

YOUTH LEADERSHIP AWARD

İlayda Yeni

*In Recognition of Her Devoted Service and
Leadership Within the ATAA Youth Committee*

Melodi Taş

*In Recognition of Her Leadership in Celebrating Turkish Heritage
and Empowering Youth Through the Arts*

Bartu Milci

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

* * *

OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT IN ARTS & SCIENCES AWARD

Burak Beşir

*For His Excellence, Innovation, and Lasting Impact as a Musician,
and for His Dedicated Service to the ATAA*

Güç Birlikten Doğar!

ATAA bir ağaçtır!
Kökleri tarihe uzanan,
Hafızasıyla ayakta duran!
Kültürden kültüre
Nesilden nesile

ATAA bir köprüdür!
Gönülleri birleştiren,
Geçmişten aldığımız güçle
Geleceğe yürüyen!
Dostluklarla güçlenen

ATAA bir yolculuktur!
Birlikte yürüyenlerin!
Dayanışmayla büyüyen,
Cesaretle giden,
Umutla direnen!
Sınırları aşan inançla
79'dan beri süregelen!

ATAA bir vizyondur!
Kültürü ile inşa eden,
Zamana meydan okuyan,
Hayallere kanat takan!
Umutlara umut katan!

ATAA bir yolculuktur!
Birlikte yürüyenlerin!
Dayanışmayla büyüyen,
Cesaretle giden,
Umutla direnen !
Sınırları aşan inançla
79'dan beri süregelen!

ATAA gelecek demek!
Yürek yüreğe,
El ele,
Dallar gibi uzanarak
Gökyüzünde çiçekler açarak,
Yarını birlikte kurarak!

ATAA bir yolculuktur!
Birlikte yürüyenlerin!
Dayanışmayla büyüyen,
Cesaretle giden,
Umutla direnen!
Sınırları aşan inançla
79'dan beri süregelen!
Dayanışmayla büyüyen,
Cesaretle giden,
Umutla direnen!
Sınırları aşan inançla
79'dan beri süregelen!

Söz ve Düzenleme

Marş Uyarlaması

Beste



Alev Wieland



Rabia Rana



Berna Beşir

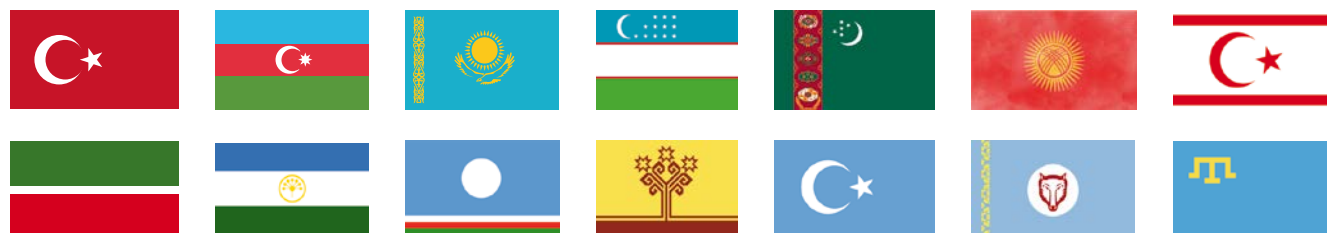


Burak Beşir



Burak Beşir

ATAA Arts Committee Presents



"Turkic Languages Film Festival is a cultural film festival designed to celebrate the shared linguistic, historical, and cultural heritage of Turkic-speaking communities through cinema"

Objectives

- To celebrate and promote Turkic languages through the medium of film
- To create a shared cultural platform connecting Turkic-speaking countries and communities
- To encourage cross-border artistic collaboration among filmmakers
- To support young and emerging filmmakers working in Turkic languages
- To raise global awareness of the diversity and richness of Turkic cultures
- To contribute to the preservation and contemporary expression of Turkic linguistic heritage

Participating Countries and Regions

The festival will be open to submissions from all Turkic-speaking countries and communities, including but not limited to:

- Türkiye
- Azerbaijan
- Kazakhstan
- Uzbekistan
- Turkmenistan
- Kyrgyzstan
- Northern Cyprus
- Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Yakutia (Sakha Republic), Chuvashia
- Uyghur, Gagauz, Crimean Tatar, and other Turkic communities

Film Categories

- Feature Films
- Short Films
- Documentaries
- Animation
- Student Films

Festival Program Components

- Official Film Screenings
- Opening and Closing Ceremonies
- Panel Discussions & Q&A Sessions
- Workshops and Masterclasses (language, storytelling, heritage in film)
- Special Focus Screenings (language preservation, oral traditions, music & poetry)

Awards and Recognition

- Best Feature Film
 - Best Documentary
 - Best Short Film
 - Best Student Film
 - Best Use of Turkic Language
 - Audience Choice Award
- Awards will emphasize artistic quality, cultural contribution and language preservation.

Expected Outcomes

- Strengthened cultural and linguistic ties among Turkic communities
- Increased visibility for films in Turkic languages
- Creation of an annual, sustainable cultural event
- Documentation and promotion of Turkic linguistic diversity through cinema
- Development of a lasting international cultural network

The ATAA Art Committee presents the Yadigar and Patchwork Art Exhibit, celebrating the richness of Turkish heritage and the creativity of Turkish-American artists. This showcase reflects our mission to elevate Turkish arts while fostering cultural pride and meaningful community connections. For more information, we invite you to visit the curator tables during the gala day. If you are interested in presenting your exhibition related to Turkish culture, please connect with us via email at artnews@ataa.org.

Pelin Hoşkan San

ATAA Art Committee Chair



The poster for the AKM - YADIGÂR (memento) exhibition features a central white panel with a black geometric logo and the title in red and black. The background is a deep red with white lace borders on the left and right sides. The left border shows a floral embroidery on a light blue fabric, and the right border shows a white lace on a dark blue fabric.

AKM - YADIGÂR (memento)
Artistic Vintage Handmade Textile Exhibition

At the ATAA Gala 2026, meet the curators and founders of AKM-Yadigar, and explore a curated selection of handcrafted works.

Since 2022, the YADIGÂR Exhibition has traveled across several cities in California, including Santa Monica, Los Angeles, Orange County, San Diego, and Palo Alto, as well as Portland, Oregon, and continues its journey toward new cities and destinations, carrying this cultural legacy to ever wider audiences.

AKM - YADIGÂR (Memento)
A Multi-Sensory Journey into Anatolia's Living Heritage

YADIGÂR (Memento) is far more than a textile and handicrafts exhibition; it is an immersive cultural experience rooted in one of Anatolia's most meaningful traditions: dowry culture, where handmade pieces are created with care and passed from mother to daughter across generations.

The project was conceived through the vision of Dr. Vega Sankur, Founder and President of ATAMLA-AKM, a chapter of the Southern California umbrella organization ATASC, and has been developed and shaped by curators Gülemdam Ece Hurmeydan and Nalan Kumrali Atahan.

At its heart, YADIGÂR finds its essence in the personal stories of women who migrated from Anatolia to the United States, carrying with them cherished handmade heirlooms passed down from their mothers. Once preserved in private spaces, these pieces are now brought into the light, transforming into a collective cultural narrative that connects memory, identity, and heritage across generations and geographies.



The poster for the Olçay Soymen Seçilmiş exhibition features a central white panel with the title in white and black text. The background is a deep blue with white lace borders on the left and right sides. The left border shows a red and black floral embroidery on a light blue fabric, and the right border shows a white lace on a dark blue fabric.

Olçay Soymen Seçilmiş
Interior Architect
Industrial Designer
from Long Island, New York

During the ATAA 2026 Gala Reception

The ATAA Art Committee is pleased to present a curated selection from Olçay's Quiltline series.

Through layered textiles and refined stitching, these works unfold as quiet vessels of memory where fragments of the past are held, felt, and gently brought into the present.

Venue: Westin Stonebriar Golf Resort & Spa
1549 Legacy Drive, Frisco, Texas 75034
Date: May 2, 2026, 6:30 pm

Olçay Soymen Seçilmiş, born in Izmir, Türkiye. Graduated from Istanbul Girls High School and entered The State Academy of Fine Arts, Fındıklı, İstanbul. Graduated with an MA in Interior Architecture and Industrial Design in 1974. Continued her studies at İstanbul University School of Business, Institute of Business Economics and received her MBA degree in 1975.

Started working in furniture design collaborating with Italian and Turkish manufacturers. Specialized with glass products design after starting to work at Pasabahce Glass Works Company. Worked at the Industrial Design Society of Türkiye and served as General Secretary.

Her hobbies include stained glass, jewelry making, drawing and painting and of course QUILTING. Specialized in replicating Ottoman era silk quilts and patchwork as well as creating her own designs. Also specializes on Japanese stitching art "Sachiko".

Member of several NGOs and civic organizations. Served as Board Member of Architects and Engineers and Scientists Association (MİM). Active member of Turkish Women's League of America and supporter of NY Atatürk School.

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I would like to invite everybody to be involved in those organizations that try to bring the Turkish community together and fight for our cause!

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