

# Biographies | Keynote Speakers

## Ambassador Hasan Murat Mercan



Ambassador Murat Mercan graduated from the Department of Industrial Engineering, Faculty of Engineering of Boğaziçi University in 1981. He received his Master's Degree from the same Department in 1984. He completed his Ph.D studies in 1989 at the Department of Decision and Information Sciences of the University of Florida.

Ambassador Mercan worked as an Assistant Professor at the Department of Quantitative Business Analysis of Cleveland State University and at the Department of Management of Bilkent University. He became an Associate Professor in 1995 and continued teaching at Bilkent University.

Ambassador Mercan is a Founding Member of AK Parti (the Justice and Development Party). He worked as a Member of the Party's Central Decision Making and Administrative Board (2001-2009).

Ambassador Mercan was Deputy for Eskişehir during the 22nd and 23rd terms of the Turkish Parliament. From 2002 until 2007, he was Chairman of the Turkish Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Interparliamentary European Defense and Security Assembly, and the Vice-President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. He served as the Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Turkish Grand National Assembly during the 23rd term of the Parliament (2007-2011).

Ambassador Mercan also served as Deputy Minister of Energy and Natural Resources of Turkey (2012-2014) and Chairman of the World Energy Council Turkish National Committee (2014-2017). In 2017, he was appointed as Turkish Ambassador to Japan and held this office until 2021.

Ambassador Mercan assumed his duties as Ambassador of Turkey to the U.S. in March 2021.

## Ambassador Şükrü M. Elekdağ



Ambassador Şükrü M. Elekdağ, an Istanbul native, is a diplomat, academician and politician. After receiving his doctorate degree on Economics from "Faculté de Droit et des Sciences Economiques - Sorbonne" in Paris, he joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey in 1951.

As a junior diplomat, he served at the United Nations Permanent Mission of Turkey in New York and at the NATO Permanent Mission of Turkey in Paris. He became Director General for NATO Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1965. In 1970, he was appointed to Ambassador of Japan. He served as Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1974-79. Thereafter, he became the Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to the United States, 1979-1989. Following his retirement from diplomatic service in 1989, he became a Senior Lecturer at Bilkent University where he taught master and doctoral courses in "International Relations" and "Contemporary Strategic Theory" until 2001. He was also the Chairman of the University's "International Security Seminars."

As a columnist, he wrote regularly for the Turkish newspaper, Milliyet. In 2002, his columns were published by Sabah newspaper. He holds the prestigious "Yellow Press Card," (Sarı Basın Kartı). In 2000-2002 he acted as a host and commentator of the "Strategic Outlook" program at TV Channel, Haber Türk.

In the general elections held on 3 November, 2002 he was elected Member of Parliament for the Republican People's Party (CHP) from the province of Istanbul. He was reelected in 2007 and served in Parliament until 2011. In Parliament, he was a member of the Foreign Relations Committee and the Turkey-EU Joint Parliamentary Committee.

He was also the President of Turkey-France Parliamentary Friendship Group. Ambassador Elekdağ is known as being the initiator of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation project. In 1994, he wrote the "Two and a Half War Strategy" about Turkey's security policy. He is the author of several publications on Black Sea economic cooperation as well as on strategic issues relating to Turkey.

He is happily married, has four children and nine grandchildren.

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## Turning Points in U.S. – Türkiye Relations During the Last 100 Years

### Moderator: Mazlum Koşma



Currently serving as the president of ATAA, Mr. Mazlum Koşma studied at Corum İlkogretmen Okulu, Ankara 19 Mayıs Gençlik ve Spor Akademisi and Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi (ODTÜ). Before he moved to the US in 1984, he worked as a teacher and administrator at Ministry of Education in Türkiye.

He received his graduate degrees from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (UNC) and Florida State University (FSU) in Tallahassee, FL. He has been living in Atlanta and working as an administrator at Georgia Institute of Technology since 1995.

He has been actively involved in Turkish American communities and organizations. This active involvement has led him to the roles of President of Turkish American Cultural Association of Georgia (TACA-GA), ATAA Vice President for Southeastern Region, ATAA Treasurer, ATAA President-Elect, and currently the President of ATAA since 2021.

Mr. Koşma will continue serving on the ATAA Board of Directors as the past president as he is completing his term as president. Besides Turkish-American organizations, he has been a member of the World Affairs Council of Atlanta and the Georgia Council for International Visitors as a Citizen Diplomat. He has also been working with Turkish-American Political Action Committees visiting local and state level elected officials, congressmen, congresswomen and senators in their local offices and Washington, DC to inform them of the view of Turkish-Americans at their districts.

He has also been an ambassador of Turkish culture as a musician, folk dancer and folk dance teacher and been involved in many international festivals in Turkey, Europe and in the USA. He is married to his ballroom dance partner, Winnie Koşma. They have one daughter, Eda, who is finishing her graduate studies in Diplomacy and Law at Tufts University.

### G. Lincoln McCurdy



G. Lincoln McCurdy is an international affairs professional with over 45 years of leadership and management experience in the U.S. government, private sector, NGOs and community service.

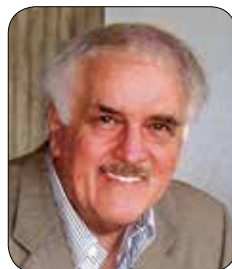
Currently, he is a consultant on U.S.-Turkey relations and grassroots organizing. He advises

five Turkish American political action committees (PACs) under the Ten Thousand Turks Campaign and previously served as an officer for the Turkish Coalition USA PAC. Until recently, he was the president of the Turkish Coalition of America (TCA), an independent not-for-profit organization in Washington, DC. He also had served on the Board of Directors of the Turkish Philanthropy Funds. Prior to TCA, Mr. McCurdy was the president and chief executive officer of the American-Turkish Council in Washington, DC. Earlier in his career, he worked at the U.S. Department of Commerce, served as the Consul for Commercial Affairs at the U.S. Consulate General in Istanbul, and was a consultant for the Bank of Boston in Turkey.

Mr. McCurdy was recognized by the U.S. Department of State for his work in enhancing commercial relations between the United States and Turkey. He was one of the 2018 laureates of the Gusi International Peace Prize in Manila, Philippines, Asia's foremost award for the attainment of peace and respect for human life. In 2019 he received the Turk of America Outstanding Achievement Award in Leadership & Management.

He graduated from Hanover College in Indiana and holds a M.A. in International Management from The George Washington University. He and his wife have two daughters and two grandchildren.

### Bülent Atalay, Ph.D.



Described by NPR, PBS, and the Washington Post as "A Modern Renaissance Man," Professor Bülent Atalay is a scientist, artist, and author. Born in Ankara, he has lived most of his life in the United States. He received his education in the United States and England, earning BA, MA, MS, and Ph.D. in theoretical physics at

Georgetown, UC-Berkeley, Princeton, and Oxford. He travels worldwide, lecturing at academic institutions,

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laboratories, and on cruise ships, speaking mostly on the “A-subjects,” art, archaeology, astrophysics, atomic physics, and Atatürk, confessing that he knows much less about the “B-subjects,” business, banking, biology, and botany.

Atalay is the author of three best-selling books on the intersection of art, science, and mathematics, where Leonardo da Vinci, the preeminent Renaissance man, serves as the focal point. He is putting the finishing touches on a new book, “Beyond Genius,” about five “transformative geniuses, who completely define their fields — Leonardo, Shakespeare, Newton, Beethoven, and Einstein. Only one national leader gets appreciable ink: Kemal Atatürk, Einstein’s personal choice for the greatest leader of the 20th century.

Between 2011-2019, Bülent Atalay was the President of the Atatürk Society of America. Working closely with Hüdai and Mirat Yavalar, the Founders of ASA, and sculptor, Jeff Hall, in 2013, he oversaw the creation of the life-size bronze statue of Atatürk that stands proudly at Sheridan Circle.

### Paolo von Schirach



Paolo von Schirach was appointed President of the Global Policy Institute, GPI, in March 2016. He is also Professor of Political Science and International Relations at Bay Atlantic University, BAU, in Washington DC. He served as Department Chair for Political Science and IR at BAU from January 2018 until June 2023. His

GPI research and BAU teaching focus on contemporary world politics and economics, international security, trade, development and energy issues.

Paolo von Schirach is the Founder and Editor of the Schirach Report, an online publication focusing on politics, economics and international security. He is a frequent lecturer, TV and radio commentator, on US foreign and domestic politics and global issues. For more than 25 years he worked in emerging markets as Team Leader and Senior Expert managing investment and trade promotion projects. Mr. von Schirach holds higher degrees from Georgetown University where he was also a Fulbright Scholar and Fellow in the Government Department, the London School of Economics, the University of Pisa, Italy, and the Scuola Universitaria Superiore Sant’Anna of Pisa. He was a Research Associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, CSIS, which was followed by

filling the role of Director of Communications, and later on Senior Research Fellow, at the Atlantic Council. He was Deputy Director of the Global Security Project at Georgetown University, and Vice President for International Programs at Intelx, an institution focusing on international education. More recently, he was an Adjunct Professor in the Graduate Program of the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, (MSFS). He has been a frequent lecturer at the Foreign Service Institute, (FSI), the U.S. Federal Government’s primary foreign affairs training institution.

### Dr. Ülkü Ülgür



Dr. Ülkü Ülgür co-founded the Assembly of Turkish American Associations (ATAA) in 1979 and served as its first president from 1980 to 1984. Later, during his tenure as Chairman of Board of Trustees he initiated and developed ATAA Endowment Fund.

Dr. Ülgür is currently a member of the ATAA Board of Trustees. Dr. Ülgür is one of the founders and Past President of the Maryland American Turkish Association (MATA). He also served as President of Turkish American Neuropsychiatric Association (TANPA). Dr. Ülgür completed his Primary Education in Darussafaka Lisesi and his undergraduate and medical education at the University of Istanbul Turkey. He came to USA in 1959 for his specialty training in Psychiatry.

After finishing, he had an additional two-year Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Fellowship at the University of Maryland School of Medicine. In 1965, following his child training he joined the University’s full-time faculty serving for ten years as Director of its inpatient, outpatient, and hospital consultation services. While he continued his teaching activities as a member of clinical faculty he developed and maintained an active office and consulting practice in Maryland.

Dr. Ülgür is an active teacher and lecturer who has given many regional and international talks and wrote many scientific papers and book chapters. He is a Distinguished Life Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP).

He also served as President of Maryland Regional Council of the AACAP. He has received awards for his services to children and families from the University of Maryland and the City of Baltimore. In recognition

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of his distinguished services and contributions to child and adolescent psychiatry, the AACAP established the “Ülkü Ülğür, MD, International Scholar Award” in order to honor international child and adolescent psychiatrists who have significantly enhanced mental health services for children and adolescents around the world.

## U.S. Immigration Policy Over the Years and its Effects on Turkish Americans

**Moderator: Nilüfer Esen-Bilgin, MD, Ph.D.**



Dr. Nilüfer Esen-Bilgin was born in Giresun and raised in Istanbul, Turkey. She graduated from Marmara University Medical School in Istanbul in 1990, and got a specialty degree in physiology at Istanbul University Cerrahpasa 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 served at the ATAA Board of Directors since 2017, first as the Mid-Central Region Vice President (V.P.), and then as the First V.P of ATAA and the Secretary General of ATAA. Since 2022 she has been serving as the President-Elect of ATAA.

Before joining the ATAA board, she was actively involved with the Turkish American Cultural Association of Michigan (TACAM). She served as the president of TACAM between 2015 and 19, during which her leadership increased the awareness about the Turkish culture in the community, and increased the membership to the association. She initiated and completed the Atatürk Park Project in Michigan which was opened in 2019 as the largest park named after Atatürk in the USA.

In addition, she actively participates at the Michigan based Turkish folk dance group Mozaik Dance Group, and the USA branch of KAHEV (Kadin Hekimler Egitime Destek Vakfi).

## Andrew F. Moore



Professor Andrew F. Moore began teaching at Detroit Mercy Law in 1998. He is an expert in immigration law and international human rights law. In 2000, he founded the immigration law clinic at Detroit Mercy Law.

He served as the law school's Associate Dean for Academic Affairs from 2011-2013. His scholarship focuses on the needs of immigrants, including articles on the intersection of criminal law and immigration law, refugee issues between the U.S. and Canada, widespread fraud in the provision of legal services and the need for improved mental health care for immigrants in the United States.

## Dr. Kağan Kocaoğlu, Esq.



Dr. Kagan Kocaoglu graduated from the University of Ankara School of Law in 1999. He was invited to the U.S. to pursue an LL.M at the University of Virginia School of Law. After completion of his LL.M at University of Virginia, Georgetown University Law Center chose him to make an original contribution to the science of law and he was

chosen for the JSD program. During his studies, he interned at the U.S. Securities & Exchange Commission and established the Turkish Law Student Association (TULSA) which now stands as the largest Turkish-American lawyer network in the US today.

He graduated from Georgetown University Law Center's JSD Program in 2008 with distinction. The bibliography of his dissertation has been published as a Georgetown University Paper and has received wide acclaims from all over the globe.

He has worked for several top American law firms. He is a member of the Ankara Bar Association and New York State Bar Association. He provides consulting services to top law firms and Fortune 500 companies on tech and business matters. He is a prolific author and appeared on media several times.



## Legacy of the 100<sup>th</sup> Years of Enlightenment of Turkish Women

### Moderator: Ayca Altıntiğ, Ph.D.



Dr. Ayca Altıntiğ is currently the president of Turkish Women's Initiative (TWI). TWI works to empower young university age women in Turkey through an immersive learning-by-doing based leadership program. TWI also works with immigrant women in the US with programs to empower them in their early careers as well

as through sharing their stories. She comes from a long background in volunteering for the Turkish American community. She has served in many roles over more than a decade in ATASC (Association of Turkish Americans in Southern California) including presidency between 2017-2019 and still continues to serve on ATASC board as immediate past president. She has also served as the Western VP for ATAA for three years (2016-2019) and volunteers with TC-CAL PAC.

In her professional life, Dr. Ayca Altıntiğ is an Associate Professor of Clinical Finance at the University of Southern California. In addition to her teaching and research in academic finance, she also runs a personal finance and investment course for young professional women with WFMIG (Women's Financial Management and Investment Group) - which she also co-founded. As a graduate of Bogazici University, she has been residing in the US since 1999. She is an avid and outspoken proponent of women's rights and empowerment and is very proud to be part of an Turkish American Community where most leaders are women.

### Selin Yıldız Nielsen, Ph.D.



Dr. Selin Nielsen is the co-founder of Glocally Connected, Founder and President of Human Migration Institute, and Professor of Global Studies. Dr. Nielsen was born in Ankara, Turkey and immigrated to California with her family in 1987. She graduated from UC Berkeley and went on to getting a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy

Studies from University of California, Riverside. She has worked in international education for the last 20 years as a director, professor, coordinator, manager, instructor, and consultant.

She has taught undergraduate and postgraduate courses in California, Iowa, Washington D.C., and Turkey.

Dr. Nielsen's work with refugees started in Iowa leading a project for the Human Rights Commission in 2009. Later on, she lead projects providing trauma management to teachers in Syrian refugee camps in Southeast Turkey.

In her non-profit work, Dr. Nielsen established numerous international aid programs and actively advocated on behalf of refugees worldwide. She has contributed to the education of refugee girls both locally and internationally establishing scholarships for several disadvantaged girls. She has also been a speaker at the United Nations Headquarters twice on the subject of refugee women and girls' education. Dr. Nielsen currently oversees both the local and international operations, and strategic planning of the organization's growth.

Throughout her career, Dr. Nielsen has published numerous articles and book chapters including the co-authored book, "Encounters in the Turkey-Syria Borderland," about the stories of refugees at the onset of the Syrian crisis.

### Sema Başol



Sema Başol, who is Turkish-American, is a global marketing and public relations executive with over 35 years of experience both in the U.S. and in Turkey.

Sema is the co-founder of Turkish Women's Initiative, a US-based non-profit, founded in 2008, that promotes the advancement of

women through innovative community-based programs. She is also the founder of Değişim Liderleri Derneği (Change Leaders Association) based in Turkey that provides leadership skills training for university women through its Sparks Program. Close to 600 young women have graduated from this program. The social change projects they have created and implemented have touched the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. The stories of the graduates are captured in Sema's first book "Sparks: transformational stories of young women who dream of a better world" published in Turkey.

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## Engaging Young Generation into Leadership

### Moderator: Gökhan Özalp



Gökhan Özalp was born and raised in Ankara. He attended TED Ankara Koleji and later received a B.S. degree in Chemistry from Hacettepe University, Ankara.

Mr. Özalp moved to the U.S. in 1995 to pursue a master's degree in business administration.

He received an MBA with a Specialization in International Business Management from Eastern Michigan University in 1999 and a M.S. in Information Systems in 2001. Professionally, he worked as a developer and a project manager in the medical device software industry. Currently, he helps medical device startups with their software development processes as an independent consultant.

He has been an involved member of Turkish-American community in Michigan and in the US. He served as a Board member for Turkish American Cultural Association of Michigan (TACAM) from 2009 to 2010, was on the Board of Trustees from 2010 to 2012 and has served as the Vice President from 2017 until today. During his term as a TACAM Board member, He chaired the organization's Grassroots and Outreach committee which was established to work on a special project with ATAA to create a Grassroots movement within the Turkish American Community in Michigan.

He was involved in inspiring and training community members to participate in advocacy and outreach on issues relevant to Turkish Americans.

He has been involved with the Assembly of Turkish American Associations since 2013. He first served on the ATAA Board of Directors as a Board Member from 2013-2016 and as the Assembly's President Elect from 2016-2018, the President from 2018-2020 and the Past President from 2020-2023. Mr. Özalp is married, has a son and lives in Michigan.

### Ela Elmas



Ela Elmas is a first-generation Turkish American from Denver, Colorado. She holds a Bachelor of Science in psychology from the University of Colorado, Denver, and is currently pursuing her Master of Arts in special education, applied behavioral analysis from Arizona State University.

Her involvement with the Turkish community extends to serving on the Turkish American Cultural Society of Colorado's (TACSCO) board as secretary, co-founding TACSCO's youth chapter (Turkish American Youth of Colorado), co-founding ATAA's youth chapter (ATTA Youth Committee), and participating as a delegate in the once Turkish Coalition of America's Youth Leadership Congress.

### Mehmet Taşcıoğlu



Mehmet Taşcıoğlu is a driven and passionate first-year undergraduate at Stanford University, where he is majoring in Science, Technology, & Society with the ultimate goal of entering the medical field and/or politics.

Recognizing the cultural assimilation of his Turkish peers in school and the community, Mehmet co-founded the Turkish American Cultural Association of Michigan's High School Chapter (THSC) in 2019, where he served as Secretary for the 2019-2020 term and was later elected President in August 2020.

During his tenure, he spearheaded more than a dozen events, ranging from career webinars to team bonding nights, and launched a successful food and clothing drive. Additionally, he organized lively celebrations of Turkish holidays, all the while preserving and promoting the Turkish heritage and culture.

Aspiring to be involved on a more national level, Mehmet co-founded the Assembly of Turkish American Associations Youth Committee (AYC) in 2020 with two close friends and serves as the current Chair. Through AYC, he aims to empower and unite Turkish American youth across the country, and has held leadership workshops, speeches, history webinars, and even a research event discussing the factors that influence cultural assimilation in Turkish American youth. Outside

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of his advocacy work, Mehmet also runs a nationwide free tutoring nonprofit (Connect Me) & a YouTube channel (The College Treehouse). Though his priority right now is on youth issues, Mehmet hopes to keep working with ATAA and serve in leadership.

### Mert Tokman, Ph.D.



Mert Tokman holds a Ph.D. degree in Marketing and Supply Chain Management from the University of Alabama, Culverhouse College of Business.

He is currently the Kenneth R. Bartee endowed professor in the marketing department at James Madison University (JMU) in

Virginia. He teaches undergraduate level Marketing and International Logistics courses at JMU and graduate level International Logistics courses at JMU's MBA and Antwerp Management School's Master of Global Management programs.

## Disasters, Solidarity, and Turkish American Organizations

### Moderator: Mehmet Erdem Yaya, Ph.D.



Dr. Mehmet E. Yaya was born and raised in Turkey. He completed his bachelor's degree in Bogazici University before he moved to the United States in 2003. He obtained his MBA from Auburn University, then received his master's and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Alabama. He moved to Michigan in 2009.

He is currently professor of economics and head of the Economics Department at Eastern Michigan University. His research focuses on immigrants, income inequality, and poverty and he has published a number of articles in well-respected academic journals. Dr. Yaya has been serving as ATAA Treasurer since 2020.

He has actively been involved with Turkish American organizations in the past. He was the founder of Turkish Student Association at the University of Alabama before he moved to Michigan. In Michigan, he has been a diligent volunteer for the Turkish American Cultural Association (TACAM); served as a board member

for 2 years and treasurer for 4 years. Currently, he is serving as the president of TACAM. His involvement with TACAM specifically encompasses the education, political outreach, Ataturk Park and fundraising activities. In his free time, he enjoys hiking, camping, playing soccer, riding his motorcycle, and spending time with his kids.

### Gül Bahtiyar, MD, MPH



Dr. Gül Bahtiyar is an accomplished medical doctor and education advocate and comes from a family who attributed great importance to education.

She was born in Erzurum and graduated from Istanbul University, Cerrahpasa Medical School and later completed her internal

medicine training in the US. Currently she holds the position of Clinical Professor of Medicine at NYU Grossman School of Medicine, and serve as the Division Chief of Endocrinology, Diabetes and Metabolism, NYC Health+Hospitals / Woodhull and Site Program Director for Woodhull, SUNY Downstate Medical Center Endocrine Fellowship Program. In addition to her professional accomplishments,

Dr. Bahtiyar is a dedicated philanthropist and an advocate for egalitarian education in Türkiye. She joined Bridge to Türkiye Fund, established NY/NJ Circle in 2014 and became a board member.

She obtained consultative status with the UN for the organization in 2016. She hosted numerous meetings with NGO Commission Status of Women (CSW) at the Church Center of the UN in NYC. She is currently the chairperson of Donor Relation and Fundraising Committee of BTF. She tirelessly volunteered for earthquake relief efforts, brought many people and organizations from different backgrounds together to volunteer and generate funding.

She continues contribute to Child Amputees of Türkiye Earthquake (CATE Project). She believes that education is a human right and will continue her efforts to support underprivileged children's education in Türkiye as a BTF volunteer.



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### Pınar Özyürek



Pınar Özyürek is a highly experienced fundraising and corporate relations professional, currently serving as the Donor Relations Lead at Turkish Philanthropy Funds (TPF) since 2021. With almost 15 years of experience in the field, she has worked in some of the most prestigious organizations in

Türkiye, including Koc University, Health and Education Foundation (SEV), and Esas Holding/ Esas Social and held managing positions in fundraising, advancement, donor and corporate relations. Her expertise includes cultivating relationships with major donors, developing fundraising strategies, and organizing successful events to promote philanthropy and social investments.

Özyürek holds a Bachelor's degree in International Relations from Koc University, a Master's degree in European Studies from Sabanci University and a MAPSS degree from the University of Chicago. In addition to her educational degrees, she holds certificates from prestigious institutions including the Lily School of Philanthropy-Indiana University and Resource Alliance and the Resource Alliance.

### Burcu Tansu



Born and raised in Istanbul, Republic of Turkey, Ms. Burcu Tansu is a graduate of University of Istanbul, California State University (CSULA), and the UBC, Bournemouth, holding B.S. in Chemistry, B.S in Economy, and M.S in Business Management. She also holds a professional certificate in Concentration in Human

Resources Management from UCLA. She is currently residing in California and working in private sector.

Ms. Tansu is the Past President of Association of Turkish Americans of Southern California (ATA-SC), and currently holding Vice President position at ATAMLA, chapter of ATASC. She is also the founding member of ATASC- Los Angeles Chapter LATAA and special interest chapter ATAMLA. Apart from local Turkish American associations in California; she also founded; Turkish Social Connections, and Fenerbahce California West Coast sports fan club.

She is currently serving as the ATAA West Region V.P. Ms. Tansu volunteered in vast number of organizations in Turkey & in the US and gained her experience through diverse non-profit associations, and international charitable foundations like: The International Lions Club (Past President of Harbiye Leo Club, Istanbul, and BOD at 118-T), The International Autistic Children's Olympics, The Orphanage Foundation – Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu in Turkey, The Hospice Home for Needy – Darulaceze in Turkey, The Six Dots Foundation of Blinds – Alti Nokta Korler Vakfi, The LA Mission – Homeless Shelter in Los Angeles, Bridge to Turkey, CYDD, and few more. She has received various awards and recognitions, among which stand out “Woman of Distinction Award 2011” by Daughters of Atatürk, “Best Leader of the Year”, by ATASC, “Best Leadership” award –twice- by ATAA on behalf of ATASC. She recently represented the Turkish Americans as the first ATAA Representative in the United Nations Civil Society Conference 2019.

Her motto is “Peace at Home, Peace in the World” and her new project concentrated on Meal Train for Elderly in local communities.

### Engin Ates



Engin Ates was born in Erzincan and raised in Tunceli and Istanbul. He completed his bachelor's degree at Bahcesehir University as a Computer Engineer. After graduation, he moved to the US and got his Master in Science Degree at Kent State University.

He is currently working at IT Cybersecurity Department as an Enterprise Cybersecurity Engineer. Mr. Ates has actively been involved with Turkish American organizations since he moved to the US. He served as VP of the Turkish American Society of Northeast Ohio (TASNO) for two years.

He is currently serving as the President of TASNO. He has been serving as ATAA Mid-Central Region VP since 2020. In the fall of 2023, they are planning to open Atatürk and Women Statues at the Turkish Cultural Garden in Cleveland.

He is married with two sons and a daughter. He is using his free time mostly at the farm with the kids.



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## Erdal Sipahi



Erdal Sipahi was born in Ankara and came to United States in 1979. He received his BBA degree in System Analysis from University of Texas at Arlington.

He has been working in Oncology Centers since 1980, namely Wadley Institutes of Molecular Medicine in Dallas, Moncrief

Radiation Center in Fort Worth, M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center in Baton Rouge and U.T. Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas. He has been consulting with Health Care facilities the past few years in electronic health records integration and implementing technology projects such as Digital Health. His specialty is Oncology Information Systems specifically in high dose radiation treatment systems and integrating workflows with hospital information systems.

He currently serves as the President of Turkish American Association of Northern Texas (TURANT). He was appointed as ATAA Secretary General on June 14, 2022. He served as ATAA Southwest Region Vice President from 2016 to 2020. He has proudly served as Vice President of TURANT-Dallas in 1992, President of TURANT in 1993, ATA Houston V.P. of social events in 1996, and Fundraising Chairman of ATA Houston in 2014.

Erdal is married to Turkan Bayulken and they have three children between them, Maddy 32, Deniz 25, and Selin 15.

## Presentations

### Alev Wieland



Alev Wieland, ATAA Southwest VP and ATAA UN Committee Co-Chair, has Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering from University of Cincinnati, Ohio.

Worked for Belcan Engineering at Proctor of Gamble as Project Engineer for 7 years. She retired from PepsiCo, Inc-AMEA Capability

Director in 2012. She is currently CEO of Manufacturing Excellence Technical Services and Alev Cosmetics Companies. Alev has extensive experience in Lean Manufacturing, Lean Product Life Cycle Management,

and Processes Development, Project Management, Construction Management in Food Manufacturing, Paper Converting and Laundry Soap Industry, and Personal Care Products. She has solid understanding of Engineering, Manufacturing and Operations Processes.

She is an expert in ISO 9001 and GMP Certifications and Standards. She has been involved in implementation of Environmental Sustainable Programs over two decades. She Serves as Secretary General for Contemporary Education Foundation (COEDFO) since 2013.

Ms. Wieland has been serving as ATAA Southwest Region VP since 2020 and co-leads ATAA UN Committee. She served as President of Cincinnati Turkish American Association (CTAA) from 1994 to 1996. An active member of the Turkish American Association of Northern Texas (TURANT), serving as Trustee since 2021.

## Yücel Burdurlu –Tavolara



Yücel Burdurlu –Tavolara, ATAA Midwest VP and ATAA UN Committee Co-Chair, was born and raised in Istanbul Turkey.

After receiving her Bachelor's degree in chemistry from Hacettepe University Ankara Turkey, she continued her graduate studies at California State University Long

Beach. After graduating, she started a career in private industry working on applied and theoretical research on coatings and coating raw materials.

Yücel worked for Imperial Chemical Industries formerly known as ICI Paints North America in their Strongsville Research Center most of her career in the international innovation team where she was involved variety of interesting projects in collaboration with their Slough Laboratory in Slough, England, ICI France in Rouge, France and ICI South America Research Center in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Next, she worked for BUNGE Oils North America where, she worked with inorganic synthesis of anticorrosive pigments and tested them in collaboration with Batelle Laboratories in Columbus Ohio, University of Southern Mississippi and Southwest Research Institute in San Antonio, Texas.

Presently, Yücel is with True Value Manufacturing in Cary Illinois as a Research Chemist. Yucel lives in the suburbs of Chicago. She joined TACA's Board of

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Directors in 2013-2015 and she was the Director of the Atatürk School and the Adult Turkish School 2014-2015. Yücel also has been a member of the Chicago Turkish Festival Planning Committee and a volunteer in the festival since 2013 and has served as the Volunteer Coordinator for the Chicago Turkish festivals in 2016 and 2018.

Yücel is planning to continue working on bringing Turkish and American groups together using her organization skills, people skills, education skills and her passion for harmony and peace.

## Ela Gökçiğdem



Ela Gökçiğdem is a passionate social entrepreneur and climate activist currently studying Economics and Sustainability at Babson College in Boston, MA.

After witnessing the impacts of urbanization on her family's home island in Avsa, Turkey, she became dedicated to youth empowerment

in order to create change. Serving on numerous leadership positions within the climate movement, she strives to use her positions to advocate for marginalized communities, like the residents of her home island, and other communities whose rich ecological intelligence goes overlooked.

After founding numerous ventures, such as The Avsa Project that provides environmental curriculum to coastal Turkish communities and Bloom, a clean-tech startup that is converting algal blooms to renewable energy sources, she aims to devote her career in business to serve her home ecosystem in Turkey

## Emre Muharremoğlu



Emre Muharremoğlu won the Middle School 1st Place Award for his "Atatürk and Science" Project at the ATAA UN Relations 2021 Science Day, The Atatürk Era & Youth Competition held for UN World Science Day for Peace and Development. Emre is a 7th grader at Seattle Country Day School. He enjoys reading, chess and sports.

## Sean Özalpaskan



Sean Özalpaskan was the ATAA 2022 Youth Competition Winner. He is a 11th grader who goes to Harvard Westlake School in Los Angeles, California.

Sean is a proud member of the Turkish American community and takes pride in participating in Association of Turkish Americans

of Southern California (ATASC) events in Los Angeles, California.

Sean enjoys taking deep dives into robotics, computers, finance, and other extracurricular activities. Sean also enjoys learning and speaking Spanish. Sean does volleyball and sailing for sports and has stayed active all through his life.

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 in Turkey.

This year, Sean wanted to join the ATAA 2022 Youth Competition because he wanted to try and educate more people about the contributions of Atatürk to the modern Turkish Republic.

## Vega Sankur



Vega Sankur has been actively working in ATASC for 18 years. She helped establish the Ventura County American Turkish association (VATAN) and was its first president. She served as the president of ATASC for 4 years.

Seeing a need to engage more with the American public, with community support she founded Atatürk Cultural Center (AKM). AKM has a choir, folklore group, BookClub, lecture series and a Cultural exhibit of Turkish arts, handicrafts and culture called Yedigöller.

Vega is a PhD chemical engineer who worked for JPL, Chevron inc and USC respectively. She is married with 2 children and one grandchild.