



ASSEMBLY OF
TURKISH AMERICAN
ASSOCIATIONS



SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
GOALS



ASSOCIATED WITH THE UNITED NATIONS DEPARTMENT OF GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS

WHY I AM SPEAKING TURKISH



KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

PROF. DR. SALİH M. ARÇIN | SAADET EBRU ERGUL | DR. ROZA EYNULA

YOUTH SPEAKERS

SEAN ÖZALPAŞAN | ECE YENİGÜN | ALİN GURDIKYAN | RESUL HUSEYNZADE | ALPARSLAN KAVAKLI



MUSICAL PERFORMANCE BY
DR. JAMILA J. -SPITZBERG



INTERVIEW BY
NY ATATÜRK SCHOOL



VIDEO PERFORMANCE BY
ETAC CHILDREN'S CHOIR



INTERPRETERS
IREM G. JAKOBSEN & EZGİ COHEN

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2025
12:00PM ET, 11:00AM CT, 9:00AM PT, 20:00 TR

ONLINE REGISTRATION www.ataa.org

In Support of “[International Mother Language Day \(A/RES/56/262\)](#)”

Turkish Women’s League of America (TWLA) NY Atatürk School,

Assembly of Turkish American Associations (ATAA),

and

Empowering the Turkish American Community (ETAC-USA)

Jointly Present a Webinar on

“Why I am Speaking Turkish”

Sunday, February 23, 2025

12:00pm ET, 11:00am CT, 9:00am PT, 20:00 TR

*** Online Registration ***

us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_ZskuaE5NT-u_vvhuY-196Q

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.

Language: English/Turkish

Background

On February 23, 2025, The Assembly of Turkish American Associations (ATAA), Turkish Women League of America (TWLA), and Empowering the Turkish American Community (ETAC-USA) formally associated with the United Nations Department of Global Communications (DGC), jointly will hold a virtual event titled **‘Why I am Speaking Turkish?’** in support of [International Mother Language Day \(A/RES/56/262\)](#) to celebrate Turkish Language Day.

Introduction

This program highlights the history of Turkish language and dialects. Turkish is very similar to other Turkic languages like Azerbaijani, Turkmen, Uzbek, Kazakh, and Kyrgyz, as they all belong to the same Altaic language family and share significant similarities in grammar and vocabulary.

Multilingual and multicultural societies thrive through the preservation of their languages, which serve as conduits for traditional knowledge and cultural heritage.

Program

Opening Remarks and Introduction by

Dr. Nilüfer Esen-Bilgin

ATAA President

Berna Gürdal

TWLA President

ETAC Children’s Choir

*“Oynaya Oynaya Gelin Çocuklar
(Come Children Sing and Dance)” video presentation*

Keynote Speakers

Prof. Dr. Salih Mehmet Arçın

“History of the Turkish Language and Related Turkic Languages”

Saadet Ebru Ergul

“Turkish Education in the USA – Past, Present and Future Predictions”

Dr. Roza Eynula

“Influence of Turkish Language on Turkic Culture”

TWLA NY Atatürk School Children’s Interview

“Why I am Speaking Turkish”

Moderators

Ebru Çetin Milci

Dr. Selim Erhan

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Youth Perspectives Panel Discussion

Dr. Selim Erhan

ATAA Trustee and ATAA UN Committee Member

*“Involvement and Influence of Turkish American Students
in the International Turkic Youth Council”*

Sean Özalpaşan

Ece Yenigün

Alin Gurdikyan

Resul Huseynzade

Alparslan Kavaklı

Musical Performance by

Dr. Jamila Javadova-Spitzberg

Principle Organist at First UMC Arlington, TX

Upcoming Program Announcement by

Yücel Burdurlu

Co-Chair, ATAA UN Committee

Closing Remarks by

Alev Wieland

Co-Chair ATAA UN Committee & ATAA President-Elect

Biographies



Prof. Dr. Salih Mehmet Arçın

Head of Turkish Language Department at Pamukkale University

Dr. Arçın was born in İnebolu, Türkiye. He completed his primary, secondary and high school education in İnebolu. He graduated from Marmara University, Faculty of Science and Letters, Department of Turkish Language and Literature in 2005. He completed his master's degree in the field of Turkish language (A Tuvan Epic: Haan-Tögüldür (Introduction-Text-Quotation-Index)) and doctorate (Pronouns in Historical Turkish Dialects and Contemporary Siberian Turkish Dialects) at Marmara University Turkic Studies Institute with Prof. Dr. It was done under the supervision of Emine Gürsoy Naskali.

At Marmara University in 2006-2007, at the Faculty of Economics and Entrepreneurship University Turkish World Social Sciences and Education (Kyrgyzstan) in 2007-2008, at Kyrgyzstan-Turkey Manas University (Kyrgyzstan) in 2008-2010, at the Naval Academy in 2012-2016, at the Naval Academy in 2016-2019. National Defense in the years He taught Turkish language and Turkish lessons to foreigners at his university. He has been working as a faculty member at Pamukkale University, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Turkish Language and Literature since 2019.

He has publications on Tuvan and Kyrgyz Turkish. He traveled to Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and the Russian Federation many times to conduct field studies. He is married and has two children.

Expertise: PhD: Pronouns in Historical Turkish Dialects and Contemporary Siberian Turkish Dialects, Advisor: Prof. Dr. Emine Gürsoy Naskali, Marmara University, Turkic Studies Institute, Department of Turkish Language and Literature, Department of Turkish Language, Istanbul 2016.



Saadet Ebru Ergul

*Special Languages Program Coordinator, Stanford University and Lecturer in Turkish
President of the American Association of Teachers of Turkic Languages (AATT)*

Saadet Ebru Ergul serves as the Special Language Program Coordinator at Stanford University Language Center where more than 25 LCTL (Less Commonly Taught Languages) are offered.

Besides her administrative work, Ebru also teaches both graduate and undergraduate Turkish courses in various levels. She earned a B.A. from Bilkent University (1995), an M.B.A. from Bařkent University (1998), and an M.A. in Applied Linguistics (with an additional focus on French) from Texas Tech University (2005). Ebru is a writing proficiency rater (WPT) and oral proficiency tester (OPI) for the Turkish Language and takes part in various academic, non-academic projects as a Turkish language expert. Her research interests include oral proficiency assessment, teaching Turkish through interculturality and social justice, curriculum development, and national language standards for Turkish.

She is also the co-author of advanced level Turkish language textbook '[KonuřanParagraflar](#)'. Currently, she is serving as the president of the American Association of Teachers of Turkic Languages (AATT) and an active member of NCOLCTL (National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages). Ebru loves figure skating and psychedelic Anatolian rock music.



Dr. Roza Eynula

Founder and President of Azerbaijani Society of New England (ASNE)

Dr. Roza Eynula is the Founder and President of Azerbaijani Society of New England (ASNE), the first Azerbaijani-American nonprofit in Massachusetts created to raise awareness of Azerbaijani culture. To further promote Azerbaijani-American perspectives, Roza became the Founder, Editor-in-Chief, and Creative Director of the magazine *Caspian Vibes*, an educational magazine that explores the topics that impact her community. Concurrently, Roza is a dual-licensed K-12 ESL teacher with over ten years of ESL teaching experience in Massachusetts and South Korea.

In May 2023, Roza graduated from Boston University with a doctorate degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. Her dissertation focused on the effect of the First Karabakh War in 1988-94 on the education and human capital accumulation of internally displaced Azerbaijani children. Roza is also an internationally titled women's FIDE WFM chess master. She represented the Azerbaijani National Girls Chess Team in 1998-2000, and currently represents the South Korean National Women's Chess Team.

She also became the first US National Girls Chess Champion U21 at the age of 16. Roza speaks fluent Azerbaijani and Russian, and Korean. Her interest areas include foreign and public policy, education, and human capital accumulation.

Youth Speakers



Sean Özalpaskan

Harvard-Westlake School, Los Angeles, CA

Sean is a 12th 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 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 Ataturk's legacy on Turkey.



Ece Yenigün

Union College in Schenectady, New York

Ece was born in New York, New York, as the first-generation U.S. citizen in her family. She is currently in her final year at Union College in Schenectady, New York, where she is pursuing a double major in Political Science and French. Throughout her elementary, middle, and high school years, Ece attended the United Nations International School, completing the rigorous International Baccalaureate Program and earning her IB Diploma with distinctions in HL biology, socio-cultural anthropology, and French. In 2015, Ece graduated from the Turkish Women's League of America's New York Atatürk School, reflecting her commitment to maintaining a connection with her Turkish heritage. Her proficiency in four languages (English, Turkish, French, and Spanish) has allowed her to become the aspiring communicator she is today. A dedicated violinist for over fourteen years, she has performed twice at Carnegie Hall and continues her passion for music as a member of the Union College String Orchestra.

Ece's commitment to humanitarian work is also reflected in her internship experiences, such as working with The New Neighbors Partnership at Columbia University, and volunteering with the Turkish Red Crescent (Türk Kızılay) in Gaziantep, Turkey, where she mentored and taught Syrian refugee children. Her academic and personal pursuits illustrate her dedication to making a meaningful impact on the world through communication, cultural engagement, and advocacy.



Alin Gurdikyan

Florida Turkish American Association – FTAA Youth Representative

Alin is a dedicated master's student in Mental Health Counseling at the University of Miami, with a Bachelor of Arts in Industrial and Organizational Psychology from Florida International University. Alin brings a wealth of experience in research, mentoring, and program development, reflecting a deep commitment to supporting diverse populations and fostering equity in education and mental health.

With hands-on experience as a Research Assistant at the S.E.L.F. Regulation Lab and the STRIPES Peer Mentoring Program, Alin has developed expertise in data analysis, behavioral coding, and participant assessments. Their leadership roles, such as serving as a Lead Counselor Intern for a behavior modification program, showcase Alin's ability to implement evidence-based strategies and collaborate effectively with interdisciplinary teams.

Alin has also made significant contributions through presentations and volunteer work, including facilitating arts and STEM programs at Lotus House and mentoring at-risk youth through Sports Konnect. Recognized for their academic excellence, Alin is a member of Psi Chi, the International Honor Society in Psychology, and the National Society of Leadership and Success (NSLS).



Resul Huseynzade

Digital Communication Liaison- Jane Goodall Institute Vancouver, Canada

Resul has Business Administration Diploma from ILAC International College in Vancouver, Canada. He is a dynamic and passionate young leader and social impact advocate with a deep commitment to creating innovative solutions for pressing global issues. With a background in youth advocacy and social justice, he has driven significant change by accelerating public policy efforts and pioneering youth involvement in decision-making processes worldwide. His work spans five years of collaboration with international organizations, leading to the development of multicultural youth networks focused on the Sustainable Development Goals.

He develops led digital campaigns to mobilize youth for climate and conservation efforts. Amplifies public engagement by creating compelling online content and driving community action. Analyzes campaign performance, optimizing outreach strategies for wider impact. Resul speaks fluently Turkish, English, and Azerbaijani; beginners level of Russian.



Alparслан Kavaklı

Undergraduate Student, Hoca Ahmet Yesevi International Turkish-Kazakh University

Alparслан Kavaklı's was born and raised in Kazakhstan. His family is originally from Turkiye. He is studying Turkology at first year undergraduate student at Hoca Ahmet Yesevi International Turkish-Kazakh University.

In his field if study, he is learning about Turkish peoples' history, language structure, literature, ethnic roots, cultural traditions and other areas.

His passion and interest area also include few of the endangered Turkic language and cultures. His future plan is to help all Turkish peoples to easily be able to communicate with each other and to strengthen the ties between them.



Dr. Jamila Javadova-Spitzberg

Principle Organist at First UMC Arlington, TX

Dr. Javadova-Spitzberg is originally from Baku, Azerbaijan. Her concert venues include the United States, countries of the former USSR and Western Europe, including the Netherlands, Germany, France, Denmark and England.

In December 2016, Dr. Javadova-Spitzberg released a CD titled Gara Garayev: Transcriptions for Organ, published by Professor Taira Yagubova of Azerbaijan that included works of the prodigious Azerbaijani composer Gara Garayev. This CD was recorded on the magnificent 85 stop Marcussen & Søn organ in Rotterdam, The Netherlands, and mastered by Grammy Award winning Tritonus Musikproduktion GmbH in Stuttgart. In 2017 she was a program annotator and presenter for two concerts at Carnegie Hall in New York. In April of 2018 she performed a solo program at the Washington National Cathedral. This was the only performance by a female organist in 2017-2018 concert series at the nation's Cathedral.

In 2017, Dr. Javadova-Spitzberg founded the Azerbaijan-American Music Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to building "classical music bridges" between her native country of Azerbaijan and the USA. The foundation announced 2018 as the Gara Garayev year, dedicating a series of programs to the centenary of the outstanding Azerbaijani composer. Dr. Javadova-Spitzberg was selected to be the artistic director of these dedicatory programs. Among them was a concert held at the College of Music of the University of North Texas that involved musicians from prestigious UNT faculty and the Dallas Symphony Orchestra. In 2018, Dr. Javadova-Spitzberg along with the editor Z. Garayeva-Baghirova, compiled and published the "Selected Piano Works" by Gara Garayev, the first American publication consisting of composer's piano oeuvres for children and adults.



Sema Oktay

Founder of ETAC Children's Choir, 2021

Sema received her Master of Arts degree in Stringed Instruments and Music Pedagogy and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Music Conservatory from Istanbul Technical University. Her career as a music teacher spans 38 years. She taught music in private schools in North Carolina, California, USA & Istanbul, Turkey. Besides coaching children's choirs, she played violin and piano in various orchestras and groups. A native Turkish speaker, she is also fluent in English and German.

ETAC Children's Club was founded in 2018 to teach Turkish language to Turkish-American children through stories, songs, and plays. Among the most important elements that bind every society together are culture, language, music, theater, choirs, and children.

Turkish-American children and their parents come to Turkish Language & Violin Classes, Choir practices every week at ETAC Turkish Community Center in San Francisco Bay Area with great excitement and enthusiasm. Every year, they perform at Turkish national holidays and social events.

Language Translators



İrem Göçgenci Jakobsen

İrem is a certified public service interpreter and court interpreter based in Hamar, Norway. She interprets in the language combinations of English-Turkish, Norwegian-Turkish and German-Turkish. İrem holds a bachelor's degree in translation and interpreting in English-Turkish and German-Turkish language pairs, from Dokuz Eylül University.

Her areas of interest were European Union and international trade, and she majored in conference interpreting. Upon moving to Norway in 2016, she has taken her second bachelor's degree in public sector interpreting in Norwegian-Turkish from Oslo Metropolitan University. She is also a licensed teacher in English, German and Turkish as a foreign language, and worked as a language instructor in Turkey and as a teacher at Norwegian upper secondary school.

İrem continues to pursue her interest in language didactics in her MA project on refugee women learners of English in Norway at the Innlandet University of Applied Sciences, as well as working full time as an interpreter for the Norwegian government institutions and municipalities.

**Ezgi Cohen**

Ezgi is Turkish-American professional with a BA in English and a pedagogical certificate, is a versatile individual excelling in the fields of acting, writing, translation, and real estate.

A graduate of Stella Adler Studio in 2009, where she completed a rigorous 2-year acting conservatory program, Ezgi has showcased her linguistic prowess by crafting and translating texts in both English and Turkish.

Currently based in New Jersey, she seamlessly balances her roles in acting and real estate with unwavering dedication and skill.

Project Team



Alev Wieland

ATAA President-Elect , ATAA UN Committee Co-Chair

Alev Wieland has Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering from University of Cincinnati, OH. Worked for Balcan Engineering at Proctor of Gamble as Project Engineer for 7 years. She retired from PepsiCo, Inc-AMEA Capability Director in 2012.

Alev has extensive experience in Lean Manufacturing, Lean Product Life Cycle Management, Equipment and Processes Development. Project Management, Construction Management, Food Manufacturing, Paper Converting, Cosmetics and Laundry Soap Industries. She has solid understanding of Engineering, Manufacturing and Operations Processes. She is an expert in ISO 9001 and GMP Certifications and Standards. Alev is the CEO of Manufacturing Excellence Technical Services and Alev Cosmetics.

Alev has been serving as the President-Elect of ATAA since May 2024. She served on the ATAA Board of Directors as the Southwest Region Vice President from 2020 to 2024 and as First Vice President from October 2023 to May 2024. Alev also serves as the co-Chair of the ATAA UN Relations Committee and Chair of the ATAA Newsletter Committee. She is the Secretary General and NGO Relations Director Contemporary Education Foundation (COEDFO) since 2013, has been responsible for organizational communication, meetings management, documentation, website management. As the Trustee and active member of the Turkish American Association of Northern Texas (TURANT), she has been providing organizational operations support to its elected board members and helping with executions of projects since 2000. Since 2008, Alev takes active role at her local Main Street Organization and International Community, helps with organizations of the major festivals that is proven to become the key events that provides income to the city. She served as President of Cincinnati Turkish American Association (CTAA) from 1994 to 1996. Since 2023 Alev serves as the Trustee of the Turkish American Visual and Performing Arts (TAVPA). Since March 2024, Alev is serving Dallas Turkish Businesswomen's Network as the Advisor



Berna Gurdal

President, Turkish Women's League of America (TWLA)

Berna Gurdal 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.

Berna Gurdal is serving as the president of ATKB for the 2023-2025 term.



Dr. Ebru Çetin Milci

Scholar and library specialist

Dr. Milci is a scholar and library specialist with deep expertise in Turkish and Turkic languages. Originally from Istanbul, Türkiye, she has lived in the San Francisco Bay Area since 2014 with her husband and son.

She earned her BA in Turkish Language and Literature from Mimar Sinan University and completed both her MA and PhD in Turkish Philology at Marmara University. With over 15 years of experience as a Turkish language and literature teacher, she has taught in public and private high schools and served as a lecturer at Galatasaray University in Istanbul. Passionate about Islamic manuscripts, bookbindings, and linguistics, Dr. Çetin Milci transitioned to a career as a Middle Eastern library specialist after moving to the U.S. She currently works at Stanford University Libraries as a Metadata Specialist for Turkish Resources & Complex Copy, where she catalogs a wide range of materials, from modern and historical Turkish texts to Ottoman world holdings.

Her expertise extends across several languages, including Arabic, Persian, Armenian, and Turkic languages, with a research focus on 17th- and 18th-century Gregorian Zone Kipchak Turkish law texts written in Armenian script. She has also applied her linguistic skills at companies such as Facebook, sharing her knowledge across industries.

Dr. Çetin Milci has full proficiency in Turkish, Ottoman Turkish, Turkic languages and English, as well as professional working proficiency in Armenian, Arabic, and Persian.



Dr. Selim Erhan

ATAA Trustee and ATAA UN Committee Member

Dr. Selim Erhan was born in Istanbul Turkey. After graduating with a chemical engineering degree from the University of Istanbul, he continued his studies at Western Michigan University with a Ph.D. in Polymer-Organic Chemistry. After teaching at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo College and Lake Michigan College, he started a research career first at the USDA's National Center for Agricultural Utilization Research in Peoria, IL. He continued his career in the private industry, working on application of bio-based products to industrial applications.

Dr. Erhan started actively working on introducing Turkey and the Turkish Culture in USA while studying at Western Michigan University in 1980. He joined the Turkish American Cultural Alliance in 2000 and became active in educational activities and in 2009. He was the co-founder of the highly successful TACA – Public Outreach Program, aiming at educating middle school, high school and university students on important issues. The Public Outreach Organization brought speakers like Prof. Justin McCarthy, Prof. Turkkaya Ataov, Emre Kongar and Lincoln McCurdy.

In 2013 he joined TACA's Board of Directors and became the Director of the Ataturk School and the Adult Turkish School. Continued as the TACA Public Outreach Chair preparing seminars and conferences to reach out and enlighten the public in the Midwest region.

Dr. Erhan was elected as ATAA's Midwest Region VP 2015 to 2019. He has continued working at ATAA, helped to form the UN Committee and was instrumental to form the highly successful Turkish American Presidents Group under ATAA, improving communications with the Component Associations in USA and pulling in similar Turkish organizations from Canada. In 2022, he was elected to ATAA's Board of Trustees.



Yücel Burdurlu

ATAA UN Committee Co-Chair and ATAA Midwest Region Past VP

Yücel Burdurlu was born and raised in Istanbul Türkiye. 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. Yucel 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, Yucel 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, Yucel 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 Directors in 2013-2015 and she was the Director of the Ataturk School and the Adult Turkish School 2014-2015.

Yucel 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. Yucel 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.

For further inquiries, please e-mail uncommittee@ataa.org, presidentelect@ataa.org (Alev Wieland, Co-Chair & ATAA President Elect)