Bilkent to Confer Honorary Doctorates on Özlem Türeci and Uğur Şahin

Last Friday, March 5, the Bilkent University Board of Trustees approved the University Senate’s proposal to bestow honorary doctorates upon Dr. Özlem Türeci and Prof. Uğur Şahin.

As two of the founders of the Germany-based biotechnology company BioNTech, Dr. Türeci and Prof. Şahin played a central role in the development of a COVID-19 vaccine in less than a year. Both Prof. Şahin and Dr. Türeci (who are married to each other) are physicians and academics with a research background in oncology and immunology, as well as entrepreneurs who have founded two companies. Prof. Şahin is BioNTech’s CEO, while Dr. Türeci, as the company’s chief medical officer, is responsible for clinical research and development. BioNTech, founded in 2008, began conducting research on a vaccine against COVID-19 in January 2020 during the early days of the pandemic. In cooperation with the pharmaceutical company Pfizer, BioNTech developed the messenger ribonucleic acid (mRNA) vaccine BNT162b2. It was authorized for emergency use in the UK in December 2020; approval in many other countries followed. The Pfizer–BioNTech vaccine is currently one of the leading vaccines being administered worldwide against COVID-19.

It is planned to hold a ceremony at Bilkent in the near future to confer the honorary doctorates.

Horizon 2020 to Fund Two Bilkent Faculty Members

Asst. Prof. Ayşeğül Dündar of the Department of Computer Engineering and Asst. Prof. Erdingir “Tatar” of the Department of Electrical and Electronics Engineering have each been awarded a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Individual Fellowship (MSCA IF) 2020 grant from the European Commission. The grants are funded under the EU’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation program; only 14 researchers from Turkey received MSCA IF grants this year.

Dr. Dündar will focus on 3D image synthesis capabilities powered by deep neural networks. 3D image synthesis is a technology in which objects can be rendered from different perspectives, enabling numerous applications in computer graphics and computer vision. By providing realistic virtual 3D environments, it can provide tools for online learning.

Music Student’s Pieces Win International Recognition

Emre Eziz, a fourth-year student in the Department of Music’s Composition and Theory program, recently received first prize in an international competition organized in China. In addition, he was awarded a second-place commission following a global call for scores by a Basel-based music duo, and has also had two pieces published online.

In the Sun River Prize New Music Composition Competition for Students, organized by the International Society for Contemporary Music and the composition department of the Sichuan Conservatory of Music in China, his string quartet was awarded first prize. The competition was open to all students of any age from around the world; Emre’s composition was chosen from among 115 pieces submitted by students in 22 countries.

A call for scores by the saxophone–trumpet/euphonium duo Signal attracted 162 entries from 44 countries. Emre’s piece “Deus Ex Machina” was chosen second among the four compositions that won commissions for their composers. He is now writing his commissioned piece, which Duo Signal will perform at a concert to be held in Switzerland in April. “Deus Ex Machina,” along with another of Emre’s pieces, “Sarcast of Symmetry,” was also published in the University of California Los Angeles’s Online Music Library as a result of the Kaleidoscope 2020 Call for Scores, an open access project.

Computer Engineering Students Make Top 10 in Programming Competition

Two teams from the Department of Computer Engineering were among the top 10 finishers in the 2020 Online Programming Competition held by Inzva, an Istanbul-based hacker society dedicated to fostering the abilities of Turkish students, with a focus on algorithms and artificial intelligence.

While a total of 585 individuals from 25 universities applied to enter the competition, 156 teams from 14 universities were deemed eligible to participate in the qualification round, held on December 12. The top three teams from each of those universities went on to the final round, held on December 26. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the entire event took place online.

A team made up of Bilkent CS students Öğuzhan Özlüç, Yusuf Nevzat Sengün and Osman Orhan Uysal took second place. Another team of CS students, with members Ziya Mükhtarov, Yusuf Ziya Özlüğil and Hasan Yıldırım, came in eighth in the competition.

University Senate Approves In-Person Midterm Exam Option

As was the case for final examinations last semester, this semester’s midterm examinations will be held online, with students logging into virtual “classrooms” to take the exams via Zoom.

Alternatively, as per a decision taken by the Bilkent University Senate on March 5, those students who wish to do so may take their midterms in a physical classroom on campus (with a proctor present), upon the student’s request and the instructor’s agreement.

Students must make the request to their instructor in advance.

The TDP Children’s Festival Will Go On – Online

Each year, to celebrate National Sovereignty and Children’s Day, the student volunteer organization TDP (Social Awareness Projects) holds a Children’s Festival on the Bilkent University Main Campus. The volunteers host approximately 400 children from the target groups served by TDP projects, most of them socioeconomically disadvantaged children. The aim is to give them a day where they can have as much fun as possible and that they will remember for a long time.

Unfortunately, the pandemic made it impossible to plan for the event to take place in its usual format this year. But the volunteers were determined that, for the children’s sake, it should still go on, and came up with an alternative way – actually two ways – to hold the festival, in part by using the online platform Zoom.

Although the volunteers are calling this year’s event the TDP Online Children’s Fest, they were well aware while making their plans that not all of the children they wanted to include would have access to Zoom. Therefore,

(Continued on Page 3)
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Build mutual respect. Don’t leave others hanging. If you can’t give the answer they want, be direct about it. Don’t give them false hopes. Tell them that you appreciate their offer very much, but unfortunately have other obligations at present.

Desiring to please others all the time
We learn from a very young age that we should do what authority figures tell us to. This core lesson makes us tend to always accept “big favors” in order not to let others down, especially if we think they may actually be artificial. Be careful what responsibilities you take on. If you feel bad about saying yes, trust your reasons for saying no in great detail, and you don’t need to make up excuses for others’ validation. Just give your reasons confidently and, of course, courteously.

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In normal times, the Turkish Classical Music Society, a Bilkent student club founded in 1999, holds a concert at the end of each semester, with club members performing as vocalists or instrumentalists. But, as in so many aspects of life, the pandemic changed that.

Since the society is unable to hold concerts for the time being, they are instead presenting lectures and seminars on Turkish classical music, as well as conducting interviews with musicians known for their work in the genre. On February 28, the club welcomed members of İncesaz, an ensemble devoted to promoting the greater recognition and further development of Turkish music.

Incesaz founders Murat Aydemir and Cengiz Onural and soloists Bora Ebeoğlu and Eski Köker talked about a variety of topics, including the establishment of the ensemble, their careers in music, the process of composing a new song and their sources of inspiration. They also answered questions that came via social media from club members and other listeners.

The members of the Bilkent Turkish Classical Music Society are eager to give a concert as soon as the pandemic is over. Meanwhile, they will continue to conduct interviews, lectures and lessons. Information about these events can be found on the GEZ201 lists, in BAIS emails and in the social media accounts of the club at linktr.ee/ktmt.bilkent.

The International Chronicles

BY YAREN SAĞLIK (TRIN/IV)

Bilkent News

Name: Yassin Mohammed Ayman Alnaam
Department: Psychology
Country of Origin: Syria

Are there any similarities between Turkey and your home country?
To me, one of the most fascinating things about Turkey is the Islamic architecture in different mosques all around Turkey.

What is your favorite place on campus, and why?
One of my favorite places on the Bilkent campus is outside the basketball court; the view from there is amazing, especially at sunset.

What’s your favorite Turkish food and/or favorite part of Turkish culture?
One of my favorite Turkish foods is dolma, which actually is a dish common to Turkey and my home country.

Where do you expect to see yourself 10 years from now?
It’s hard to predict the future and set such long-term goals; nevertheless, I see myself as a renowned academician.

What’s the hardest challenge you’ve handled in Turkey?
One of the hardest challenges I’ve faced and handled in Turkey was breaking the cultural and social barriers between me and my Turkish friends.

What cities have you visited in Turkey, and which one is your favorite?
I’ve visited Istanbul, Bursa and Ankara; Istanbul is my favorite. Each corner there tells a different story.

Describe yourself in three words.
Conscientious, understanding, curious.

What’s an interesting question or comment you hear frequently about Bilkent/Turkey?
Among the most frequently asked questions about Turkey are those concerning its interesting Ottoman history and culture.
CONCERTS

Recent Bilkent Symphony Orchestra concerts are now being broadcast online on the Bilkent Symphony Digital platform. They may be accessed at https://ticket.bilkent.edu.tr/.

“Classic Brass”
Bilkent Brass Ensemble
P. DuKas | Fanfare to precede “La Péri”
R. Piazzolla | Five Movements from Desventurado
G. Gershwin | “An American in Paris”
G. Rossini | “Largo al factotum”
G. Gershwin | “Rhapsody in Blue”
G. Bizet | “Carmen” Suite
Recording: November 29, 2020, Bilkent Concert Hall

“Vestiges of the Past”
Bilkent Symphony Orchestra
Ayrton Desimpelaere, conductor
Dritan Gani, double bass
C.P.E. Bach | Symphony in D major, H. 663 (Wq. 183/1)
C.D. von Dittersdorf | Concerto for Double Bass in E major
P.I. Tchaikovsky | “Souvenir de Florence,” Op. 70
Recording: December 10, 2020, Bilkent Concert Hall

SEMINARS

Tuesday, March 9
“Hydrazine Oxidation Electrocatalysis on Multi-Doped Carbons: Who Does What?” by David Eisenberg (Israel Institute of Technology), at 12:30 p.m. Organized by CHEM.

Tuesday, March 9
“Regional Migration Governance: Soft Law and the Diffusion of Policies on Integration and Inclusion (Focus on South America Regionalism),” by Dr. Verónica Ruiz Alou-Nigrin (University of Edinburgh School of Law), at 12:30 p.m. Organized by LAW.

Tuesday, March 9
“Still Existing From Hegemony: Why the Biden Administration Can’t Rebuild the American Global Order,” by Prof. Alexander Cooley (Columbia University), at 5:30 p.m. Organized by IR.

Wednesday, March 10
“Extraterritorality and the Capitulations in the Ottoman Empire: An Overview,” by Berke Torunoğlu (University of Tennessee, Knoxville), at 5 p.m. Organized by HIST.

Thursday, March 11
“Should Ontology be Explanatory?” by Amie L. Thomasson (Dartmouth College), at 12:30 p.m. Organized by PHIL.

Thursday, March 11
“Identifying Hybrid Spaces and ‘Makeshift’ Spatial Practices Within The Byzantine Period of Transformations (6th–9th centuries): the Potential of Archaeology and Textual Evidence,” by Myrto Veikou (University of Uppsala), at 6 p.m. Organized by HIST.

Friday, March 12
“Dynamic Asset-Backed Security Design,” by Katly Yu (London School of Economics), at 1:30 p.m. Organized by FBA.

Spring Break

Dear Bilkent News Readers,
Due to the spring break, Bilkent News will not be published next week. The next issue will appear on Tuesday, March 23. We wish you a wonderful break!