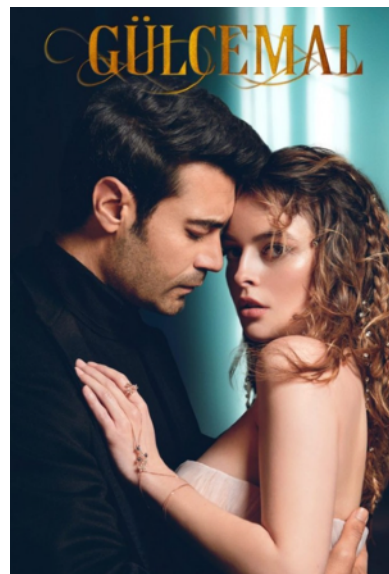


## BOOM OF TURKISH SERIES IN ITALY

Written by *M. Chiara Duranti (Editor-in-Chief of Formatbiz)*

Can we affirm that a real mania for Turkish series has exploded in Italy? In Los Angeles, during the LA Screenings of May, the Turkish company MADD Entertainment announced record sales in Europe, particularly in Italy: “*After Spain,*” said Özlem Özşümbül, Head of Sales, “*Italy has become one of the hottest countries in Europe. We sold four series to Mediaset.*” Indeed, Mediaset has already launched a promotional campaign to air these series this summer, comfortably filling prime-time slots on Canale 5 or the Mediaset Infinity platform. These series include “*The Family*” (starring Kivanç Tatlıtuğ and Serenay Sarıkaya), “*If You Love*” (starring Kerem Bürsin and Hafsanur Sancaktutan), while “*Gülcelem*” (starring Murat Ünalmiş and Melis Sezen) is broadcast on the flagship channel. Additionally, the series “*Family Secrets*” featuring Kaan Urgancıoğlu and Pınar Deniz, which won an International Emmy in New York on November 20, 2023, was aired following the previous success of MADD Entertainment's “*Love is in the Air,*” which achieved excellent results on Canale 5 with around 2 million viewers at its debut.



Undoubtedly, Mediaset is leading in an international market driven by the phenomenon of Turkish dramas, which have evolved to offer a variety of themes and stories in different formats to meet all time slot needs: from long series with over 100 episodes (“*Brave and Beautiful,*” 123x45’ on Canale 5) to prime-time miniseries with 8-10 episodes (e.g., “*Like Sisters,*” 9x120’, Canale 5 – original title: “*Kızım Gibi Kokuyorsun*”). Even Real Time has noticed, daring for the first time with the series “*Hercai*”. The hit series originally aired on ATV records on Real Time an average of 1.55% of share with about 286,000 viewers.

The Italian audience has started to become familiar with characters like Nazli, the noble-hearted but ambitious young cook, whose life intertwines with a rich man (Can Yaman) who hires her as his personal chef in *"Bitter Sweet – Ingredients of Love"* ("Bay Yanlış" - 80x45', Canale 5). Ezgi, unlucky in love, has lost hope of meeting the man of her dreams until she meets Özgür, her neighbour and a notorious womanizer (*"Mr. Wrong – Love Lessons"* 36x45', Canale 5), also starring the Turkish actor Can Yaman. The two protagonists, Ezgi and Özgür, make a pact: she pretends to be Özgür's girlfriend, and he gives her real seduction lessons until love blossoms between them.



*Can Yaman special guest at people show "C'è Posta per Te" hosted by Maria De Filippi (Canale 5)*

Period dramas set in the past have also captivated audiences used to American soaps. For example, *"The Girl and the Officer"* ("Kurt Seyit ve Şura" - 46x45', Canale 5), tells the story of Kurt, a Turkish officer serving the Tsar during the Crimean War, who falls in love with the daughter of a noble Russian family.

But the hearts of the Italian public have been thrilled by the phenomenon **"Bitter Lands"** ("Bir Zamanlar Çukurova - The Story of Zuleyla") about a young seamstress living in 1970s Istanbul. **"Bitter Lands"** in daytime slots proceeds with a 23.2% share and 2.8 million viewers, prompting Mediaset executives to also schedule it in prime time with double appointments on Sunday and Friday nights. Zuleyla's troubled story averages a 16% share, regularly winning the prime-time slot on Canale 5 and nearly reaching 3 million viewers. The actors are regular guests on Mediaset's most popular shows like **"C'è Posta per Te"** or **"Verissimo,"** boosting audience ratings during their appearances. Even during the Sanremo Festival week with its record ratings, **"Bitter Lands"** had 2.2 million viewers with a 10.13% share, while in January, an episode of **"C'è Posta per Te"** peaked at 4.7 million viewers with the arrival of their beloved stars. Mediaset schedules **"Bitter Lands"** against giants like **"Doc - In Your Hands"** or reruns of **"Montalbano,"** without losing a solid fan base that follows the series and its characters. In 2023, during the Nations Award event at the Ancient Theatre, actress Hilal Altınbilek, who plays the protagonist Zuleyha Altun Yaman, and Kerem Alışık, who portrays the beloved Ali Rahmet Fekeli, were awarded. Additionally, Aras Senol, known for his role as Cetin in the famous Turkish soap opera, won the 2024 edition of the reality show **"L'Isola dei Famosi"** (Survivor VIP).



The producers of **Tims&B Productions**, **Timur Savcı** and **Burak Sağyaşar**, in an exclusive interview with Formatbiz (cf. *"Exclusive Interview: TIMS&B Productions's Timur Savci and Burak Sağyaşar, the Masterminds of the phenomenon Bitter Lands"* – 21/05/2024), stated that thanks to a fortunate meeting with the writer Ayfer Tunç, who presented the project. *"From that meeting was conceived the idea of producing an "epic" love story in the 1970s in Çukurova, a very fertile land (hence the title "Bir Zamanlar Çukurova"), where family dramas, fierce struggles, and love intertwine. For the occasion, a huge villa was built in Adana with meticulous design, reconstructing the period settings: "a team of 300 people*

*worked for 8 months building the structure,” said Burak, “the roads were rebuilt from scratch. Our composer AYTEKİN ATAŞ recorded all the pieces live with a philharmonic-sized orchestra. Additionally, a special steam train from the State Railways of Izmir was transported to Adana for filming. For six months, we producers re-edited the episodes with our editor and director to ensure the highest quality. Great attention was given to the authenticity of the acting: “the actors underwent about a year of horseback training. Murat ÜNALMIŞ, who plays the character of Demir, received training to pilot a plane.”*

*“All this contributed to the success of a family drama that conquered the global audience thanks to careful production and the intense acting of its characters,” confirmed Burak. Remember that **"Bitter Lands"** was purchased by thirty broadcasters from Latin America to Europe by the Turkish distributor Inter Medya. The first episode aired in Turkey on September 13, 2018, on ATV, becoming the most-watched series on the channel, dominating the prime-time slot for four consecutive years with record ratings.*

*It almost seems incredible that a story set in 1970s Turkey could be so successful: “The 1970s was a period of rapid industrialization in Turkey, and Çukurova was at the peak of its agricultural prosperity thanks to its fertile land. Communication was not instant like today: people had to meet face to face rather than by phone, which greatly strengthens the internal dynamics of the scenes. Additionally, filming in Adana added significant depth to the story, as the locals are both warm and brave. It created a world reminiscent of a Western film.”*

Returning to Mediaset, with exclusive programming on Mediaset Infinity and Canale 5, it has also acquired these series:

- **"Brave and Beautiful"** ("Cesur ve Güzel"): A man returns to his hometown to take revenge on a family enemy but falls in love.
- **"Love in the Air"** ("Sen Çal Kapımı"): An aspiring architect agrees to pretend to be engaged to a charming man to resume her studies.
- **"My Home, My Destiny"** ("Zalim İstanbul"): Zeynep, a girl from humble origins, is forced into a marriage of convenience.
- **"Endless Love"** ("Kara Sevda"): Winner of the International Emmy Award as “Best Telenovela” in 2017, this is a love story hindered by social differences and family obligations. The actors underwent about a year of horseback training.
- **"Interrupted"** ("Sol Yanım"): Mediaset Infinity, 8x60’ – An unfinished love story between Ozan, a dark journalist, and his beloved Elif.
- **"Dreams and Realities – The Power of Dreams"** ("Dicle, Güneş, Setenay ve Melike"): Mediaset Infinity, 26x45’ – Four friends with big dreams, united by the pain of their friend's death under mysterious circumstances.
- **"Everywhere 60 – Coincidences of Love"** ("Her Yerde Sen"): 75x45’ – Demir, a young architect, returns to Istanbul and shares his childhood home with a stranger, the charming Selin.

In this list, we cannot forget the latest titles sold by Inter Medya to Mediaset. Also at the Los Angeles Screenings, **Beatriz Cea Okan** [in photo], VP and Head of Sales/Acquisition, announced the sale of four more titles: two films, **"My Son"** [in photo] with Kıvanç Tatlıtuğ and Büşra Develi, and **"Second Chance"** with Özcan Deniz and Nurgül Yeş.

Cea Okan confirmed that the success of these series is due to *"a captivating plot that explores human emotions in a deep and realistic way. Viewers are attracted to the complex relational dynamics and the troubled love stories that develop at a brisk pace. Moreover, despite the different cultural context, the themes addressed in Turkish series are universal: love, revenge, justice, sacrifice. These themes attract audiences worldwide, overcoming cultural and linguistic barriers. In fact, Turkish series offer a fascinating glimpse into Turkey's culture and traditions, adding an element of exoticism and novelty compared to Anglo-American ones."*



Behind these successful series are production companies like Ay Yapım, O3 Medya, and Tims Productions, which have created some of the most beloved and internationally distributed series. These companies have set new standards for quality and storytelling, contributing to the global spread of Turkish television. Ay Yapım is particularly known for its high-quality productions and compelling stories. O3 Medya, with series like **"Istanbul Bride"** ("İstanbullu Gelin") and **"You Are My Homeland"** ("Vatanım Sensin"), has shown it can create content that combines drama, romance, and historical tension. Tims Productions has achieved enormous success with series like **"Magnificent Century"** ("Muhteşem Yüzyıl"), which captured viewers' imaginations with its portrayal of the life of Suleiman the Magnificent. Some of the best-selling Turkish series worldwide include **"One Thousand and One Nights"** ("Binbir Gece"), **"Magnificent Century"** ("Muhteşem Yüzyıl"), **"What is Fatmagül's Fault?"** ("Fatmagül'ün Suçu Ne?") and **"Resurrection: Ertuğrul"** ("Diriliş: Ertuğrul"). These titles have not only had a significant impact in Turkey but have also won the hearts of international viewers.

These great classics – *Izzet Pinto*, CEO of Global Agency, explained to us during the NEM Dubrovnik market (Croatia, June 10-13, 2024) – like *"Magnificent Century"* or *"Forbidden Love"* ("Aşk-ı Memnu"), are emblematic examples of how love and betrayal stories can keep viewers on the edge of their seats episode after episode, even if set in different eras, such as the Ottoman Empire or contemporary times. But the strength also lies in the production capacity. In Turkey, there are about 50 new series per season, meaning that every week prime time offers an incredible choice of stories, and thus, capturing the audience requires raising the quality and value of serial products. *"Sure, Turkish government funding has incentivized production, but that is not enough. We, for example, have invested millions in marketing to create and consolidate our brand internationally."*

Furthermore, we must not forget the ability to address even the most sensitive issues such as violence against women, paedophilia, etc. Just think of *"What is Fatmagül's Fault?"*, the first Turkish series to tackle delicate themes such as rape and the struggle for justice, gaining acclaim in over 50 countries.

