

**Are there any other European organisations you feel connected with?**

Vuojala: I found festivals with a similar focus in San Francisco and Australia, not in Europe. I would love to network but I don't see many opportunities. Abloom's unique profile is making my work as a programmer easier. I focus on specific topics and I don't have to compete on the market. But since we want to offer only good films, we have a 'quality standard' to maintain.

**You specifically asked to combine this interview with an article about the short film TOPRAK. Why did you want us to pay extra attention to that film?**

Vuojala: It is a coming-of-age short

film, speaking about problems that minorities are confronted with. There is this boy who has to understand so many things over the course of one day, that it makes him grow up fast. Which is necessary to fully understand the tragedy threatening his family. There are so many elements in this film for our audience to relate to. We invited director Onur Yagiz for a screening supported by the Turkish embassy. They appreciated so much how their country was represented in a positive way. Now they insist on having another Turkish film in the next edition.

About the [Abloom Declaration](#)  
Watch the [festival video](#)

## Onur Yagiz about TOPRAK

### The ultrasound of an 8 year old boy

Toprak is an 8 year old boy with a Turkish background, living in Paris with his parents. His mother is expecting twins. After joining his parents on a visit to the gynaecologist, his interest shifts from his initial question 'will they be boys or girls?' to a much more important question 'will they be healthy?' As an interpreter for his parents, he is asked to pass on impactful news. Over the course of one hospital visit, Toprak turns from a boy into a man. When evening falls, the question about boys or girls is no longer on his mind.

**The hospital visit is an impactful moment for this family. Can you outline this moment in a broader time context?**

Onur Yagiz: What preceded that moment and what might happen afterwards is left to the audience's imagination. I don't want to limit their perception by giving away the details that I deliberately left out of frame. Actually, I myself served as a translator for my parents, just like Toprak, and when I was about his age, I had to

translate to my mother that my sister was suffering from a rare disability and would never be able to walk. I can't exactly recall that memory, but I still remember how I felt; powerless. The moment I started feeling that way, I knew I was no longer a child.

**How does it feel for a mother in such a moment to be surrounded by people that you don't even understand?**

Yagiz: My mother gave birth to me in France while she barely knew how to speak the language. When asking her about it, she told me the nurses were very kind. My mother would never tell me about her pain. She surely would have preferred to give birth surrounded by Turkish speaking people, but she simply had no choice.

**All adults in the film are depending upon one child.**

Yagiz: As for the parents, they are used to this situation and they accept it. The doctor at first is amused, but when he needs Toprak to translate bad news, he starts feeling embarrassed. However, neither the parents





nor the doctor fully realise that Toprak is at a place where he shouldn't be, fulfilling a role he shouldn't fulfil.

**The doctor compliments Toprak for fluently speaking two languages.**

Yagiz: That compliment I often heard as a child. But people didn't know it also can be a burden, this film was made to show how speaking two languages is not always a blessing. Being a translator grants you a privileged status, you are holding true power in your hands. But that is not something you have been asking for, it is the parents who imposed this on you. But I don't blame them, they simply have no choice. Most immigrant parents, like mine, are working so hard that

they don't have time to learn a new language.

**The family seems to be very concerned with the mother.**

Yagiz: His responsibility makes Toprak feel more involved and very concerned. I can tell this is even part of some kind of Oedipus complex, constantly arguing with his father for his mother's attention. Finally he sleeps with his mother and the twins, whom he loves dearly, even if they are not brothers. The humanity with which he comforts them, cuddling his mother's belly, strongly contrasts with the bestiality he and his father are expressing in the first frame.

**Do twins' hearts really beat as one?**

Yagiz: That sometimes happens, I was told. But I mainly used it as a metaphor. Also, I wanted to show how Toprak learns the word 'synchronized' from the doctor, then brings it home and teaches it to his mother. That is beautiful, isn't it?

**Can you describe the colour palette more precisely? It looks like black and white, but with countless shades and colours in between.**

Yagiz: When I finished writing the script and thought about the mise-en-scène, I wanted form and content to come together. The film tells about a family going to the hospital for a pregnancy ultrasound, that allows

you to observe the evolution of a baby in the mother's belly. How does an ultrasound look? It is a black and white image in a four by three aspect ratio. So I decided to use this imaging for the design, making the film itself look like an ultrasound. TOPRAK is like the ultrasound of an 8 year old boy, growing up two times the speed. I wanted the audience to witness his evolution from childhood to an age that definitely can no longer be called childhood.

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Gert Hermans