O-1 Visa: Individuals with Extraordinary Achievement

written by Mert SARICA | 7 October 2022

Until now, I have received many questions from my close circle of friends about why I have not thought about working or living abroad, and I have always responded, “I am not thinking about it much for the time being.”

As an individual who has traveled to many countries, from Germany to France, Italy to Sweden, Holland to the UK, the US to Singapore, and Thailand to Finland, I did not find it particularly attractive or warm to live in Holland, the UK, and other European countries that Turkish people tend to settle in because of gloomy buildings and weather, cold and distant people.

Since 2015, we have had a chance to visit the US so many times to attend the top-notch Cyber Security Conference called Black Hat. (#1, #2, #3) For a long time, I had been interested in the US, the cybersecurity hub for my career, regarding the cybersecurity training I received, the books I read, and the cybersecurity events I attended. Every time I traveled, I hoped that if I ever worked and lived abroad temporarily, it would be the US, but because I was comfortable living and working in Turkey, I never took a step toward the US.

However, in the past few months, I began to warm up to working and living abroad temporarily due to various factors. One day, when I saw a message on LinkedIn about the US Extraordinary Ability Visa, the spark to make this idea a reality was ignited. :)

The O-1 nonimmigrant visa; is for the individual who possesses extraordinary ability in the sciences, arts, education, business, or athletics, or who has a demonstrated record of extraordinary achievement in the motion picture or television industry and has been recognized nationally or internationally for those achievements.

We had many questions: What were the criteria for the O-1 visa? Which ones did we meet? Could we apply for this visa, commonly known as an artist visa,

even though we did not have an Oscar award? Would the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) consider us suitable candidates for the O-1A visa?

We decided to find an experienced lawyer and created a short list of 3 lawyers, including Muhammed Uzum from the Grape Law Firm, registered with the New York Bar. After sending our resumes to the lawyers we might work with, we had an initial consultation with them to determine if we were suitable candidates for the O-1A visa. Applying for an O-1A visa can be lengthy, tedious, and expensive, so having a lawyer convinced of your abilities is beneficial. After speaking with several lawyers, we decided to move forward with Muhammed due to his expertise and professional approach to the subject.

In our second meeting with Muhammed Bey and his team, they indicated that to obtain the O-1A visa, I have to meet at least 3 out of 8. Based on the information I provided, they believed that I met all 8 criteria and that they had never encountered such a qualified candidate before, expressing their satisfaction.

In summary, to qualify for the O-1A visa, you must be able to demonstrate at least three of the following eight criteria:

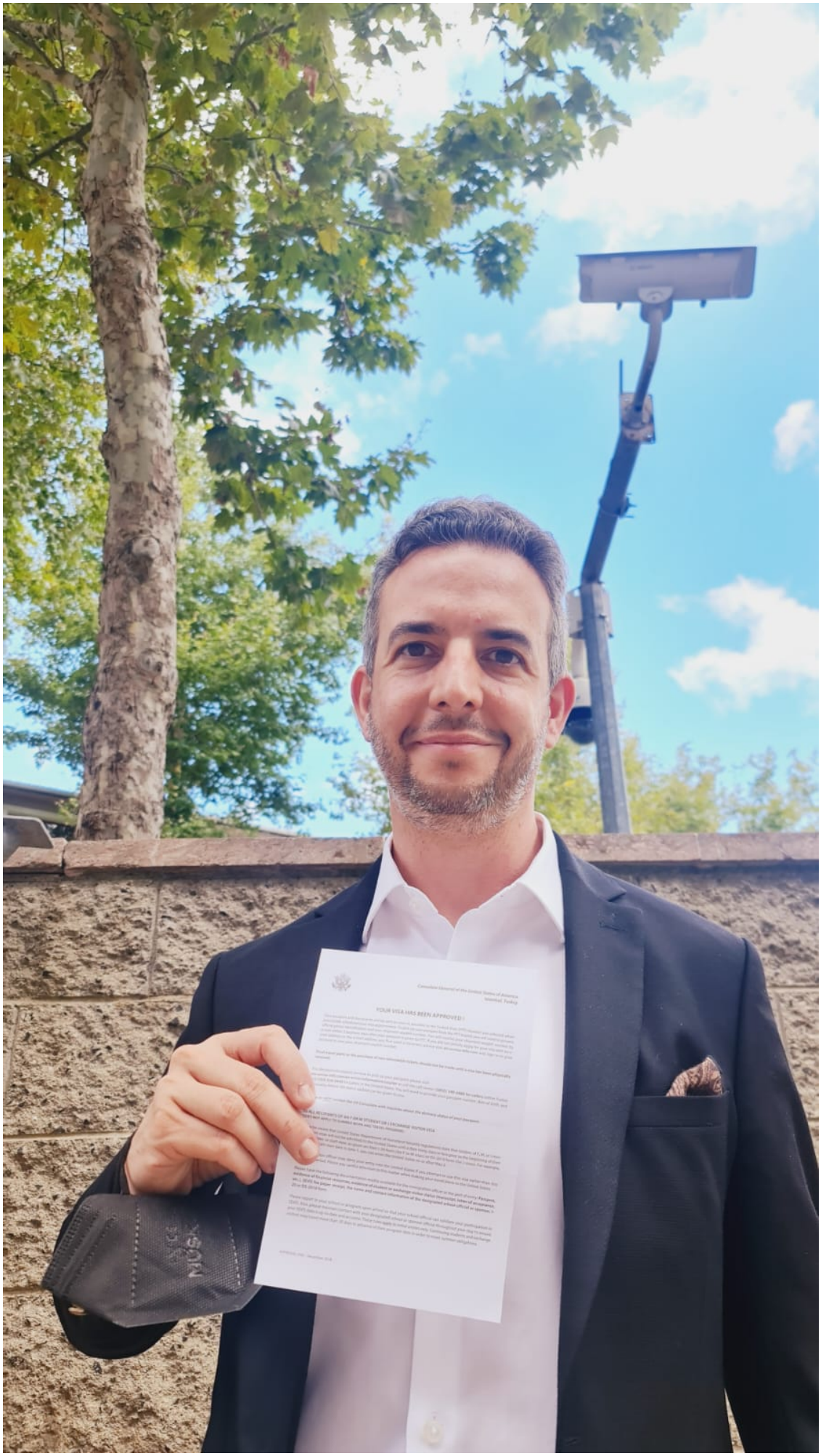
1. You have received a nationally or internationally recognized award or prize.
2. You are a member of an organization that requires specific qualifications for membership and is recognized as outstanding in your field.
3. You have been featured in major media outlets.
4. You have made original contributions of major significance to your field.
5. You have published numerous articles in academic journals related to your field.
6. You have achieved commercial success in your field through your work.
7. You have served as a judge for the work of others in your field.
8. You hold a prominent position in a highly respected organization in your field.

Before applying for a visa, I had to prepare a personal statement that shows that I meet these eight criteria with supporting evidence. It took me about three days to compile a 20-page personal statement that includes my articles, security research, references to my research articles in academic papers, awards, achievements, security certificates, teaching experience, committee memberships, and news in which I appeared.

When the time came to gather references from reputable experts in my field who could speak about my professional work and accomplishments, the first person I approached was Ahmet TASKESER, a mentor who has always guided me in my profession and who led me for many years at IBTech, the IT subsidiary of QNB Finansbank. The second person I turned to for help was Josh ELLIS, who holds an important place in my life due to his vision, strategic management style, and human side, and who I had the opportunity to work with for nearly 2 years at Akbank. The following person was Ümit NADIM, who has always been by my side with his personality and friendship, offering to help. Finally, Dr. Erdal ÖZKAYA, who I admire for the energy he brings with his books on cybersecurity (he even included me in his book Cybersecurity Leadership Demystified), his presentations, and the events he participates in, and who I have a hard time keeping up with due to his fast pace, came to my aid.

After preparing the required documents for the visa application and submitting them to Mr. Muhammed and his team, they created my official application for the O-1A visa. Approximately 10 days later, I was overjoyed to receive an email from Mr. Muhammed informing me that my visa application had been approved by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). When it came time to schedule an appointment for the visa interview at the US Consulate in Istanbul, the earliest date I could get an appointment for both myself and my spouse (O-3) was in December 2022. Of course, this was much later than I had anticipated, so I requested an emergency appointment through the appointment system and was able to get a new appointment for an earlier date.

On the day of the appointment, my spouse and I, who already had a B-1/B-2 (Tourist or Business Visit) visa to the US, took our documents and headed to the US Consulate in Istanbul for our appointment at 11:00 AM. We then passed through passport control and fingerprint control and attended the interview, finally receiving our approvals at 12:30 PM.


Consulate General of the United States of America
Istanbul, Turkey
YOUR VISA HAS BEEN APPROVED!

I am pleased and proud to have been deemed worthy of receiving the O-1A Extraordinary Ability Visa due to my years of disciplined, careful, dedicated, consistent, and successful work, which has also been recognized by the US. I assume this article will be illuminating for those who are looking for O-1A visa experience.

Hope to see you in the following articles.

Note: Those who are interested in this topic can also refer to my another article titled “How I Obtained the Green Card (EB-1A) in 5 Months” for further information.