

# The New Cabinet in Turkey:

## Who is Who?

Nov 27, 2002



### Brief Analysis

On November 28, the newly formed Justice and Development Party (AKP) government will present its twenty-five cabinet members to the Turkish Parliament for a vote of confidence. With eleven fewer members than the outgoing cabinet, the new cabinet represents AKP's commitment to smaller government. In addition to six names from the Islamist Welfare Party (RP), which was banned in 1998, the cabinet includes eleven new figures, who rose in politics with AKP. There are also six deputies formerly associated with the centrist Motherland Party (ANAP), one deputy each from center right True Path Party (DYP) and Nationalist Action Party (MHP), as well as a female member, Tourism Minister Guldal Aksit. Some analysts view this diversity as proof of AKP's desire to form a government that represents the party's voters, ranging from Islamists to moderate liberals.

### Who Will Be Running Turkey over the Next Four Years?

Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Chairman of AKP. Erdogan, the man behind AKP's overwhelming victory in the recent elections, has been banned from holding office because of a past conviction. Therefore, AKP's second man, Abdullah Gul, has filled the office of prime minister. Gul will run the country unless Erdogan replaces him at the end of his political ban in February 2003, or unless the parliament passes a constitutional amendment to let Erdogan take office before that. Nevertheless, Erdogan is expected to be the driving force behind key government decisions even in the interim.

Erdogan attended an Islamic high school before obtaining a management degree from Istanbul's Marmara University. As a student, he met Necmettin Erbakan, leader of RP. Erdogan subsequently joined the party and rose through its ranks. In 1994, he became the mayor of Istanbul, and even his critics admit that he helped make the city cleaner and greener. Following the ban on RP and its later incarnation, the Virtue Party (FP), Erdogan broke with its adherents and formed AKP with the support of reformists.

Abdullah Gul, Prime Minister. Gul was born in Kayseri, central Turkey, in 1950. Fluent in both English and Arabic, he received his doctorate from the Istanbul University School of Economics. Later, he did graduate work in London and worked in Saudi Arabia as an expert at the Islamic Development Bank, in addition to lecturing as a professor of economics. He first entered the parliament in 1991 as an RP deputy, later serving as a state minister and government spokesman in the RP-led coalition in 1996-1997. Following the ban on RP, Gul joined FP and spearheaded the party's reformist wing, eventually becoming deputy chair. After FP was banned in August 2001, he became a founding member and deputy chair of AKP.

In his first major speech since becoming prime minister, Gul declared that Turkey would remain strongly committed to its pro-American and pro-European outlook. Some analysts see him as a leader who can foster mutual respect for Western and Islamic traditions.

Abdullatif Sener, Deputy Prime Minister. Sener is expected to ensure coordination on key economic issues. He will control the State Planning Department, the Turkish Development Bank, privatization issues, and banking and stock

market commissions. Sener holds a doctoral degree in finance from Ankara University and has held various academic posts. He first entered parliament in 1991 as an RP deputy, later serving as minister of finance in the 1996-1997 coalition government. He was also one of the founding members of AKP.

Ertugrul Yalcinbayir, Deputy Prime Minister. Yalcinbayir will be in charge of European Union affairs. A lawyer hailing from Bursa in northwestern Turkey, he was elected to the parliament in 1996 and 1999, representing ANAP.

Mehmet Ali Sahin, Deputy Prime Minister. Sahin will be responsible for running the State Personnel Directorate and supervising financial audits of the government. A lawyer by profession, he entered politics through FP, serving as a party deputy in the 1999 elections. He defended FP in court against various banning attempts but later moved to AKP with the reformists. He is known to be among Gul's close circle of friends.

Besir Atalay, State Minister. Atalay will be in charge of state-run Turkish Television and Radio as well as the official Anatolian News Agency. He was the rector of Kirikkale University in central Turkey until December 15, 2001, when the Turkish Council on High Education fired him for refusing to display statues of Kemal Ataturk on campus. According to some sources, Atalay was originally nominated as minister of education for the new cabinet, but President Necdet Sezer rejected this appointment.

Ali Babacan, State Minister. Babacan, a young economist, will control the Treasury, the Central Bank, and a number of large state-owned banks, among them Halk Bankasi and Ziraat Bankasi. Babacan graduated from Middle East Technical University in Ankara with a degree in industrial engineering. In 1990, he received a Fulbright scholarship for an MBA at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Business, where he specialized in marketing and business management. He worked as a financial consultant in the United States before returning to Turkey in 1994. Since then, he has assisted AKP with its economic affairs.

Kursad Tezmen, State Minister. Tuzmen will supervise the undersecretary of foreign trade, the state-owned Eximbank, and the customs department. Previously, he studied business at the Middle East Technical University and served as foreign trade undersecretary in the outgoing MHP-led coalition government. During his three years in this post, Tuzmen worked to increase trade with Iraq and secure compensation from the United States for Turkey's \$35 billion in Gulf War losses. Following personal disagreements with the party, he resigned from this post and from MHP.

Yasar Yakis, Minister of Foreign Affairs. Yakis, a successful career diplomat, holds a political science degree from Ankara University. He entered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1962 and later attended the NATO Defense College. He also served as the Turkish ambassador to Riyadh and Cairo. Yakis entered the parliament in 2002 as an AKP deputy and currently serves as a deputy chair for the party.

Abdulkadir Aksu, Minister of Interior. Like Gonul, Aksu holds a political science degree from Ankara University and has served as a provincial governor and chief of the National Police. He first entered the parliament as an ANAP deputy, eventually becoming minister of interior from 1989 to 1991. He joined RP in 1996 and served as the party's deputy chair. Following the ban on RP, he joined FP; when FP was itself banned, Aksu joined AKP and became a deputy chair.

Cemil Cicek, Minister of Justice. Cicek, a lawyer by profession, was among the founders of ANAP. During ANAP's rule, he served as state minister and became very close to former president Turgut Ozal. After Ozal's death, Cicek left ANAP, eventually joining AKP in 2001.

Mehmet Vecdi Gonul, Minister of Defense. Gonul, who holds a political science degree from Ankara University, has served as governor of a number of Turkish provinces and as chief of the National Police. In 1991, he became the chief judge of the Court of the Accounts. Gonul entered the parliament in 1999 representing FP, eventually becoming deputy president of the Grand Turkish Assembly. He joined AKP in 2001 and served as the party's deputy chairman.

Erkan Mumcu, Minister of Education. Mumcu is a young lawyer who entered the parliament as an ANAP deputy. He served as the minister of tourism and the deputy chair of ANAP during Mesut Yilmaz's leadership, joining AKP only recently.

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