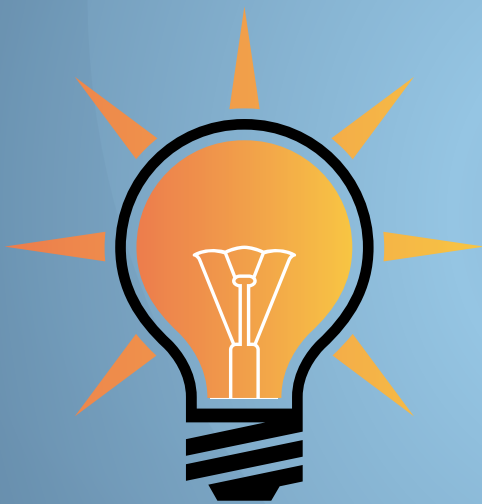


# *Who's Who* in Turkey's Justice and Development Party



**AK PARTİ**

**COMPILED BY  
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## Introduction

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On September 30, 2012, delegates from Turkey's governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) gathered from across the country for the party's fourth convention, where Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan assumed his fourth and final term as party leader. Erdogan, who has also served three terms as prime minister, will not run for a fourth, honoring the party's statute limiting members to three terms in the same elected office.

Anticipating nationwide local elections in 2013 and the 2014 presidential election, the AKP elected a new leadership at the convention to guide the party in the coming years of transition. In the 2013 elections, many AKP mayors who have held office for three terms or more will step down. In the next year's vote, Erdogan is widely expected to run for the presidency, both because of his ineligibility for the prime ministership and because the post is the coveted symbolic seat of the country's founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

At stake during the convention were selections for the Central Decision Authority Committee (MKYK), a fifty-member assembly that votes on party issues. In this vote, delegates voted in line with the prime minister's preferences. Erdogan then handpicked his slate for the twenty-one member MYK, of which he is a member and which functions as the party's day-to-day executive organ, setting the agenda for party meetings and drafting position papers for his review. The Central Executive Committee

also makes recommendations to the MKYK, the official venue for approving major party issues, and sets party lists.

Erdogan's core associates, including Huseyin Celik, Ekrem Erdem, and Omer Celik, have retained their positions in the influential Central Executive Committee. But a number of new names and transfers from other parties have given the Central Executive Committee a fresh look. The most conspicuous additions are Numan Kurtulmus and Suleyman Soylu, who come from two distinct branches of the political right: the Islamist movement is represented by the demure, well-liked Kurtulmus, former head of the smaller People's Voice Party; the center-right is represented by Suleyman Soylu, who hails from the Democrat Party, once a mother ship of the country's center-right parties.

Erdogan's inclusion of these new names atop the AKP's leadership structure suggests a push to capture the full spectrum of the conservative and right-wing votes in Turkey. This ranges from the Islamist base once held by the National Salvation, Welfare, and Virtue Parties to the center-right vote that has historically held sway under the Democrat, Justice, True Path, and Motherland Parties.

If the AKP can secure these constituencies, its electoral success will be all but assured in the decade ahead, including in the 2014 presidential election and the ensuing parliamentary vote. The following report contains biographical sketches of the members of the party's Central Executive Committee.



## Recep Tayyip Erdogan

### Chairman

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**BORN:** 1954, Istanbul

**EDUCATION:** BA, Marmara University, Istanbul

**TWITTER:** [https://fr.twitter.com/RT\\_Erdogan](https://fr.twitter.com/RT_Erdogan)



Recep Tayyip Erdogan is the prime minister of Turkey and the chairman of the Justice and Development Party. Erdogan completed his secondary schooling at Istanbul Imam Hatip Lisesi (a school with a religious curriculum) before enrolling as a business major at Marmara University. During his student years, he was involved in the rising Islamist movement in Turkey, acting as youth director for the National Salvation Party.

Following the 1980 military coup, Erdogan entered the private sector, and then returned to politics in 1983 when the Welfare Party was formed. In 1994, Erdogan ran for mayor of Istanbul and won. Several years later, in 1997, he

was imprisoned on charges of violating Turkey's laws enforcing secularism after reciting a poem in public that authorities deemed illegal. During this period, the Welfare Party was also banned, later reforming as the Virtue Party. Erdogan and a number of his colleagues broke from this camp, and decided to establish a separate party with a more reformist agenda: the AKP. After surmounting legal obstacles related to his conviction, Erdogan entered parliament as prime minister following the AKP's victory in the 2002 election.

Prime Minister Erdogan has presided over the AKP since 2003, and has just entered his final term as party chairman and prime minister.

## Mehmet Ali Sahin

Deputy Chairman, Political and Legal Affairs

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**BORN:** 1950, Karabuk, western Black Sea region

**EDUCATION:** JD, Istanbul University

**OCCUPATION:** Attorney



Upon graduation from Istanbul University's Law Faculty, Mehmet Ali Sahin established an independent legal practice in Istanbul. He began his political career with the Welfare Party (RP) and was elected mayor of the Fatih district of Istanbul before becoming a member of the Turkish parliament from Istanbul in 1995. After the closure of the RP, Sahin briefly continued under the Virtue Party (FP) before joining with his colleagues as a founding member of the Justice and Development Party.

Under the AKP, Sahin has served as a member of parliament since 2002 and has held several major posts, serving as minister of justice from 2007 to 2009 and speaker of the Turkish parliament from 2009 to 2011, preceding the current speaker, Cemil Cicek. Sahin is taking over for Abdulkadir Aksu as the deputy chairman in charge of political and legal affairs, a position informally considered the number-two post under Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the party chairman.



## Ekrem Erdem

Deputy Chairman, Organizational Affairs

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**BORN:** 1948, Sivas, central Anatolia

**EDUCATION:** BA, Istanbul University

**OCCUPATION:** NGO chairman



Ekrem Erdem is a veteran politician with a background in the Welfare Party (RP). He studied history and Ottoman civilization at Istanbul University before beginning to teach and then taking a position as a government archivist.

During the 1980s, Erdem entered politics under the RP and served in several local party posts before being elected to parliament in 1995 on the RP list from Istanbul. Erdem was part of the small

group that organized and established the AKP in 2002 after the RP split into reformist and traditionalist wings.

He is regarded as a skilled behind-the-scenes organizer and is a veteran member of the Central Executive Committee (MYK) and deputy chairman in charge of organizational affairs. Additionally, Erdem heads the Turkish Language and Literature Foundation, an NGO.

## Mustafa Sentop

Deputy Chairman, Election Affairs

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**BORN:** 1968, Tekirdag, Thrace

**EDUCATION:** JD, Istanbul University; PhD, Marmara University

**OCCUPATION:** Professor of Law

**TWITTER:** <https://twitter.com/MustafaSentop>



A legal scholar, Mustafa Sentop received his secondary schooling at the Tekirdag Imam Hatip Lisesi before entering Turkey's prestigious Bosphorus University. Sentop earned a PhD from Marmara University in Istanbul 2002, writing his dissertation on criminal codes in late-Ottoman history. Sentop worked as a legal scholar in Turkey during the 2000s, serving in the law schools of several academic institutions and publishing on comparative law and criminal law. As chairman of the Istanbul Social and Economic Research Center, a Turk-

ish think tank, Sentop has contributed to various social science journals and has refereed articles in the social sciences and law.

In 2011, Sentop was elected as a member of parliament on the Istanbul list and is a new addition to the Central Executive Committee. He has been a public proponent of constitutional reform in Turkey, writing academic and journalistic appeals in favor of replacing the 1982 constitution. He is a member of the parliamentary committee that is working on drafting a new constitution.

## Huseyin Celik

Deputy Chairman, Media Affairs

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**BORN:** 1959, Van, eastern Turkey

**EDUCATION:** BA, Istanbul University; MA, Yuzuncu Yil University; MA, University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies; PhD, Istanbul University

**OCCUPATION:** Author

**TWITTER:** [https://twitter.com/hc\\_huseyincelik](https://twitter.com/hc_huseyincelik)



Huseyin Celik is a prominent Justice and Development Party policymaker with influence over education and cultural policy. In 1977, Celik became active in the center-right Justice Party, and in 1999 he was elected to parliament as a deputy for the True Path Party, another center-right movement.

Celik is an incumbent parliamentarian from Van, a city with a large Kurdish population as well as a conservative base. His doctoral studies focused on Ali Suavi, a member of the nineteenth-

century “Young Ottoman” group of reformers who combined Islamist thought with advocacy for democracy. Celik is a well-known public figure who has published numerous books on current affairs and appears frequently in the media.

Celik joined the AKP as a founding member in 2001 and is a longstanding member of the party's Central Executive Committee. He has served as minister of education and minister of culture in the AKP governments since 2002.

## Omer Celik

Deputy Chairman, Foreign Affairs

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**BORN:** 1968, Adana, southern Turkey

**EDUCATION:** MA, Gazi University, Ankara

**OCCUPATION:** Journalist

**TWITTER:** <https://en.twitter.com/omercelik>



Omer Celik is a close advisor to Prime Minister Erdogan and a parliamentarian active on foreign policy issues. Celik has been an AKP parliamentarian from Adana since the party first stood for elections in 2002, and he is an incumbent on the Central Executive Committee (MYK). Celik was also appointed in 2010 as the deputy chairman of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in charge of foreign affairs.

Celik has a significant presence on the international stage. He has

served as the Turkish representative at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and chairman of the Turkish-U.S. Parliamentary Friendship Group, a body that facilitates dialogue between the two countries' lawmakers. Celik has been an energetic spokesman for the AKP on foreign policy issues, offering forceful articulations of the government's positions in Western publications and acting as a vocal proponent of AKP positions in the domestic debate.

## Nukhet Hotar

Deputy Chairman, Social Affairs

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**BORN:** 1961, Malatya, east-central Turkey

**EDUCATION:** PhD, Dokuz Eylul University, Izmir

**OCCUPATION:** Professor of economics



Nukhet Hotar is a professor of economics and chair of the Labor Economics Department at Dokuz Eylul University in Izmir. In 2002, she ran for parliament with the AKP, winning a seat in Izmir that she has held ever since.

During her service in parliament, Hotar has focused on social and labor issues. She has been a member of the European Union Accession Committee as well as the Health, Family, La-

bor, and Social Affairs Committee. Hotar has been in the Central Executive Committee since 2002 and is responsible for social affairs. Prior to entering politics, Hotar was involved in various NGOs, serving on the board of the Civic Thought and Democracy Movement. She has also been involved in programs to promote employment and training opportunities for underprivileged youth.

## Menderes Mehmet Tevfik Turel

Deputy Chairman, Local Governance

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**BORN:** 1964, Antalya

**OCCUPATION:** Journalist

**TWITTER:** <https://twitter.com/menderesturel>

**FACEBOOK:** <http://www.facebook.com/T.Menderes.Turel>



Menderes Mehmet Tevfik Turel, a politician and journalist, attended Antalya High School before traveling to the United Kingdom to study journalism. Upon returning to Turkey, Turel began a career as a journalist, for which he won several awards.

Turel was elected as a member of the Antalya Chamber of Commerce and Industry in 1989, and in 2001 he became the chairman of the board. Turel held leadership roles in various

organizations promoting Antalya's local economy, including the Mediterranean Development Foundation. He was also a member of the board for Antalyaspor, Antalya's soccer team.

Turel ran for mayor of Antalya in 2004 and won, serving until 2009. In 2011, Turel entered parliament on the AKP list from Antalya. In parliament, Turel has been a member of the Turkish delegation in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean.

## Numan Kurtulmus

Deputy Chairman, Economic Affairs

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**BORN:** 1959, Ordu, eastern Black Sea coast

**EDUCATION:** MA, Istanbul University; PhD, Cornell University

**OCCUPATION:** Professor of Business



Numan Kurtulmus is a veteran player in Turkey's Islamist movement. In 2001, when the AKP broke from the Welfare Party, Kurtulmus did not join the AKP. Rather, he stayed under the tutelage of Necmettin Erbakan and became a prominent member of the Welfare Party and its successors, the Virtue and Felicity Parties. It was not until 2010 that Kurtulmus left the Felicity Party to form the People's Voice Party, which announced a platform based on religious conservatism combined with a social justice agenda and a foreign policy that envisions a more distant relationship with NATO and the EU. In the 2011 parliamentary elections, the People's Voice Party won less than 1 percent of the vote and did not take any seats in

parliament, yet under Kurtulmus's leadership the party attracted ample attention with its political platform. In July 2012, Kurtulmus was invited by Erdogan to leave the the People's Voice Party and join the AKP, a proposal he accepted. In the wake of Kurtulmus's exit, the People's Voice Party has disbanded.

Kurtulmus is the grandson of Major Numan Bey, a soldier who fought under Mustafa Kemal in the Gallipoli campaign and was severely wounded. Numan Bey went on to write the first Turkish religious commentary in the new Roman-based alphabet.

Kurtulmus holds a PhD in industrial and labor relations from Cornell and has published scholarly work in the field of management.

## Salih Kapusuz

Deputy Chairman, Public Relations

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**BORN:** 1954, Kayseri, central Anatolia

**EDUCATION:** BA, Ataturk University, Erzurum

**OCCUPATION:** Private business



Salih Kapusuz is a veteran politician and an energetic public proponent of government policies. After a brief career in business, Kapusuz won a seat in parliament on the Welfare Party (RP) list in Kayseri in the 1991 elections. In 1996, he was appointed as an advisor to then-prime minister Necmettin Erbakan. Kapusuz later left the Virtue Party (FP) to join the AKP, where he won a seat from Ankara in 2002.

In the Turkish legislature, Kapusuz has chaired the Turkish-Chinese Parliamentary Friendship Group and the Turkish-Russian Parliamentary Friendship Group.

Kapusuz is a frequent personality in the media, where he explains and advocates for the government's position on current affairs. Kapusuz has held the public relations post in the Central Executive Committee (MYK) since 2009.



## Ahmet Edip Ugur

Deputy Chairman, Financial and  
Administrative Affairs

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**BORN:** 1950, Balıkesir, western Marmara

**EDUCATION:** BS, Istanbul University

**OCCUPATION:** Chemical engineer



A chemical engineer by profession, Ahmet Edip Ugur became involved in public affairs in the local business community in Balıkesir, a city in western Turkey. Ugur became chairman of the Balıkesir Chamber of Commerce as well as a branch director for the Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association, an association with conservative and Islamist affiliations.

In 1987, Ugur was elected to parliament on the center-right Motherland list from Balıkesir. After leaving parliament, he became a founding member of the AKP and a local party official for Balıkesir. Ugur rejoined parliament in 2007 on the AKP list and has since served as the deputy chairman and Central Executive Committee member in charge of financial and administrative affairs.

## Suleyman Soylu

Deputy chairman, research and development

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**BORN:** 1969, Istanbul

**EDUCATION:** BA, Istanbul University

**OCCUPATION:** Party organizer, stockbroker

**TWITTER:** <https://twitter.com/suleymansoylu>



Suleyman Soylu is a politician and local organizer with deep roots in Turkey's center-right political tradition. Soylu's father was an active member of the center-right Democrat and Justice Parties, and Soylu began his career in center-right political organizing at a young age. In 1987, Soylu joined the local ranks of the True Path Party, the successor to former Turkish prime minister and president Suleyman Demirel's Justice Party, and rose quickly through the local party ranks in Istanbul. During these years, Soylu worked closely under then prime minister Tansu Ciller.

In 2002, Soylu was asked to join the newly forming AKP, but he declined and retained his position at the forefront of the old center-right parties, even as they earned a negligible share of the popular vote. Between 2007 and 2009, the two major center-right parties of the 1990s, True Path and Mother-

land, underwent a process of consolidation to become the newly branded Democrat Party (DP), with Soylu as the party chairman. The DP took its name from the earlier Democrat Party, a popularly supported center-right party that came to power in 1950 and was brought down by a military coup.

Soylu's emotional attachment to the DP saga was recently evidenced when he broke into tears, during a nationally broadcast television appearance, while describing the trial and execution of former DP leader and Turkish prime minister Adnan Menderes (1950–1960). Soylu left the DP in 2010 after facing censure for supporting the AKP-sponsored constitutional referendum, which his colleagues in the DP had opposed. On September 1, 2012, Soylu met with Erdogan and agreed to join the AKP ahead of the September 30 party convention.

## Haluk Ipek

### General Secretary

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**BORN:** 1963, Amasya, central Black Sea

**EDUCATION:** JD, Ankara University

**OCCUPATION:** Attorney

**TWITTER:** <https://twitter.com/halukipek06>



As general secretary, Haluk Ipek is at the center of AKP organization and operations. He is a founding member of the AKP and has served as a parliamentarian since 2002. Ipek was deputy chairman responsible for election affairs before Zekif Kazdal assumed the post in 2011. After serving as deputy chairman, Ipek replaced Idris Naim Sahin as general secretary in 2011.

In addition to his party posts, Haluk Ipek holds leadership positions in numerous civil society organizations focused on law and policy, including the Institute for Law in Turkey, the Law and Democracy Foundation, and the Law and Political Strategy Institute. Ipek is chairman of the parliamentary Turkish-Azerbaijani Parliamentary Friendship Group.

## Nurettin Canikli

Deputy Group Chairman

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**BORN:** 1960, Giresun, eastern Black Sea

**EDUCATION:** MA, Sheffield University (UK)

**OCCUPATION:** Financial consultant



Nurettin Canikli is a longtime AKP member with a background in public and private finance. After studying economics at Ankara University, Canikli completed a master's degree in banking and finance at Britain's Sheffield University. Upon returning to Turkey, Canikli entered government service, where he held numerous posts in government finance, including comptroller-general of the Finance Ministry, manager of the State Revenue Office, and Istanbul vice treasurer. He later entered the private sector as a financial consultant, and he

has been a contributor on economic issues to the right-wing Yeni Safak daily newspaper. Canikli was a founding member of the AKP and entered parliament on the AKP list in 2002 from his home province of Giresun, on the Black Sea coast.

As a deputy group chairman in parliament, Canikli often articulates government positions during parliamentary debates and remarks on current affairs in the media. He has also served on the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly.

## Mustafa Elitas

Deputy Group Chairman

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**BORN:** 1957, Kayseri, central Anatolia coast

**EDUCATION:** JD, Istanbul University

**OCCUPATION:** Attorney

**TWITTER:** <https://twitter.com/mustafaelitas>



Mustafa Elitas is an industrialist and businessman with a background in center-right politics. During the 1980s, he was active in the private sector in Kayseri, a conservative commercial city in central Turkey, and as one of the “Anatolian Tigers” that have translated economic dynamism into political influence over the last decade. During the 1990s, Elitas became involved in Kayseri politics with the center-right Motherland Party. he was elected as mayor of Kayseri in 1994.

During this period, he also held leadership roles in organizations such as the Turkish Parliament for Exports, the Finance Union, the Retirement Home Foundation, and the Kayseri Industrialists and Businessmen’s Association (KAYSIAD). In 2002, he was elected to parliament for the AKP from Kayseri. Elitas is currently the deputy chairman of the Mediterranean Export Union and a member of various business and export-promotion organizations.

## Ayşe Nur Bahçekapili

Deputy Group Chairman

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**BORN:** 1954, Trabzon, eastern Black Sea coast

**EDUCATION:** JD, Istanbul University

**OCCUPATION:** Attorney



Ayşe Nur Bahçekapili is an attorney who has held positions on the board of the Istanbul Bar Association as well as the Turkish Bar Association. She then became involved in local politics, deciding to run for parliament in 2007 on the AKP list. Bahçekapili has remarked that her decision to run for office was motivated by her opposition to the

Turkish military's public pressure against Abdullah Gül's bid for the presidency in 2007. Bahçekapili has also managed the Istanbul branch of the Women-Education-Law Ateliers of the Social Democratic Movement Platform. While in parliament, she has chaired the "Turkish-Cuban" Interparliamentary Friendship Group.

## Ahmet Aydin

Deputy Group Chairman

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**BORN:** 1971, Adiyaman, southeastern Anatolia

**EDUCATION:** JD, Istanbul University

**OCCUPATION:** Attorney



An Istanbul attorney and former radiology technician, Ahmet Aydin became involved in Welfare Party politics during the 1990s. In 1999, he rose to become deputy chairman for the local branch of the Virtue Party in Adiyaman, a fast-growing city in southeastern Turkey. He then participated in the foundational

planning for the establishment of the AKP, assuming a leadership role in the local party organization. In 2007, he was elected as a representative on the Adiyaman list.

Aydin is a deputy group chairman in the parliament and an incumbent in the Central Executive Committee.

## Mahir Unal

Deputy Group Chairman

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**BORN:** 1966, Kahramanmaras, southern Turkey

**EDUCATION:** MA, Istanbul University

**OCCUPATION:** Political consultant, academic

**TWITTER:** <https://twitter.com/mahirunal>



A newcomer to elected office, Mahir Unal is a political consultant who served as a strategist for the 2007 and 2009 AKP campaigns. Unal's ongoing academic studies focus on patterns of social organization, and he has provided instruction to political practitioners at the AKP's Political Academy, the party school for training. Unal has also served as a con-

sultant on political campaigns in Malaysia, Iraq, Cyprus, and Lebanon. In 2009, Unal entered the AKP's MYK, working on research and development, and in 2011, he was elected to parliament on the list for Kahramanmaras, a city in southern Turkey. He is a new addition to the Central Executive Committee.



## Guldal Aksit

### Women's Branch

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**BORN:** 1960, Malatya, east-central Anatolia

**EDUCATION:** JD, Istanbul University

**OCCUPATION:** Attorney

**TWITTER:** <https://twitter.com/guldalaksit>



An attorney, Guldal Aksit was one of the founding members of the AKP in 2001. She served in parliament on the Istanbul list from 2002 to 2011 and during the party's early years served briefly as minister of tourism before becoming a minister of state responsible for women's and family affairs. In addition, she was the Parliamentary Constitutional Commission deputy chairman and was elected as the chair of the Parliamentary Equal Gender Opportunity Commission.

Since 2006 Aksit has played a leadership role at the AKP headquarters, working on political and legal affairs. Her area of focus has been women's equality, and her activities have included participation in panels concerning women's rights in the Muslim world and raising awareness of child homelessness in Turkey. She became chairman of the Women's Branch in 2011 and is a new addition to the AKP Central Executive Committee (MYK).

## Zafer Cubukcu

Chair, Public Relations, Youth Branch

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**BORN:** 1986, Safranbolu, western Black Sea coast

**EDUCATION:** BA, Middle East Technical University, Ankara

**OCCUPATION:** Specify

**TWITTER:** <http://twitter.com/zfrcbkc>



Zafer Cubukcu is a rising youth leader and an important figure in the AKP's youth outreach. Cubukcu completed his secondary education at Safranbolu Anadolu Lisesi, a bilingual English-Turkish high school, before entering the business program at the highly regarded Middle East Technical University in Ankara.

Upon his involvement with the AKP in 2008, Cubukcu was brought on as a deputy president for the university branches, a position he held until 2011. He has since taken charge of public relations for the youth branches and is an incumbent on the Central Executive Committee as head of the Youth Branch.



