

'More needs to be done for minorities'

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FULYA ÖZERKAN

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It is a fact that religious minorities in Turkey have some grievances and problems that await solutions, despite steps by the government to meet their needs, said [Ambassador Ömür Orhun](#).

"There have been steps to solve the problems of religious communities. For example, the need of the growing Protestant community in Turkey for places of worship have been met by the government but other communities still have some problems that need to be solved," he told the Turkish Daily News in an exclusive interview.

He said the situation in Turkey was not very tragic but underlined that more understanding needed to be shown toward religious communities. "Because it is in our tradition to be tolerant and to help religious minorities follow their traditions and customs in our country."

Ambassador Orhun is personal representative of the Chairman-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims. Asked about Turkey's role in that respect, Orhun said Turkey was one of the leading countries within the OSCE promoting greater tolerance and non-discrimination.

He also emphasized that the country's role here was very much related to its [bid](#) to become a full member of the European Union.

"Turkey's eventual membership would show that the EU is not a religious entity but is a melting of different cultures and religions," he said.

Elaborating further, Orhun said as a Western country and also a member of the Organization of the Islamic [Conference](#) (OIC), a leading Islamic body, Turkey can act as a link and gave Turkish efforts to convene OIC-EU Joint Forum and to promote the Alliance of Civilizations initiative as "very good examples of such a role."

Under the [leadership](#) of Turkish Secretary General Professor Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, the OIC is actively cooperating with international organizations including the OSCE to combat discrimination against Muslims. The OIC recently established two important bodies: The Youth Forum which is based in Istanbul and the Islamophobia Observatory, which aims to follow up developments in European and other countries where such incidents occur. The leading Muslim organization also decided to prepare

an [annual report](#) on Islamophobia that will be presented not only to OIC ministers but also to the U.N. Human Rights Commission in Geneva.

The OIC lends its support to the U.N.-led Alliance of Civilizations initiative, co-chaired by the prime ministers of Turkey and Spain. The initiative aims at preventing hatred and misunderstanding between the East and the West and urges interfaith dialogue.