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ASIA/TURKEY-A Christian lawyer elected to Parliament: new hope for the country

Istanbul (Agenzia Fides) - A Syriac Christian, lawyer Erol Dora, 47, was elected to Turkey's Parliament during the elections on June 12 and, as sources of Fides say, he has said that he will "become the voice of the Christian community in Turkey, as well as all of the other ethnicities living in the southeastern region".
Dora, in fact, was elected in the Southeast region, in Mardin, as an independent candidate for the "Labor, Democracy and Freedom bloc" which is supported by the Kurdish party " Peace and Democracy Party" (BDP).
Dora underlined that his election represents a step forward for the country because "in previous years, the minority communities living in Turkey were looked upon as foreigners ". Turkey, he added, is moving from a system of "compulsory citizenship," in which only the country's Turkishness is privileged, to a conception of citizenship that is more inclusive of diverse, non-Turkish groups". The hope is that other ethnic groups, and not just non-Muslim groups like Syriacs, Armenians and Jews, would also run in politics:
" It would be the sign that everybody in Turkey has equal rights", said Dora, "and this could contribute to the improvement of Turkey."
"The election of Dora is really a good sign for the country", said Fr. Lorenzo Pieretto OP to Fides, Vicar Delegate of the Apostolic Vicariate of Istanbul. "Dora is known for, as a lawyer, often defending the Christians involved in trials and is a point of reference for the defense of their rights. There are other Christians in city councils, but a Christian in the national parliament has not been seen for several decades", he remarks.
As far as the condition of religious minorities is concerned, Fr. Piretto says: "The AKP government, which won the elections, in the past gave good signs of openness, which we hope will continue and expand: the fundamental issue is the recognition of legal status to religious communities. A positive example was, more recently, the return of the orphanage to the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul, but there are still many open questions. We hope that soon it will reach its full legal recognition, as is configured in Europe". For this, continues the Vicar, "if Turkey joins the European Union, a project strongly supported by the current government, it should also comply with regard to the recognition of churches as non-profit organizations, provided with legal personality". Today Turkey needs to "broaden the concept of religious freedom, which cannot remain limited to freedom of worship". But "public opinion seems, in general, even more distant from these problems". The Christian community in Turkey, one year after the assassination of Monsignor Luigi Padovese, concludes Father Piretto, "continues to live his experience, working primarily in fraternal dialogue, in the hope that that tragic event will bear spiritual and practical fruit, in the field of respect and esteem among believers of different religions". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 06/14/2011)

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