

Abdulkadir Kis

Series: We in IR



© Bruno Wansing

"That was hell", "I can't even talk to people", "I want to go back"... these were the first reactions of the young 14-year-old Abdulkadir Kis when he came to Germany and Bocholt in 1973. We introduce the deputy chairman of the integration council of the city of Bocholt in our series "Wir im IR".

"Language was my biggest problem at the beginning. In Turkey I was a lively, active boy, then in Germany I found that I couldn't even speak to people," Kis tells us about his beginnings in Germany and in Bocholt. After two months in the new country, he only wanted to go back. "The school authorities were also pessimistic about my school career," Kis recalls.

Colleagues at work and sport help

"It was only when a work colleague of my father's at Flender took me to football that things got better," says Kis. As a coach at 1. FC Bocholt, he took Kis to football training and Kis then made his first acquaintances in the youth team. The language also got better and better thanks to the preparatory class. "From the ninth grade onwards, I was able to take part in normal classes and then I graduated," says Kis.

Learning for yourself and passing it on

In 1977, he began an apprenticeship as a machine fitter at the Olbrich company, which he completed after two and a half years. This was followed by a vocational baccalaureate

and studies to become a design engineer in mechanical engineering, which he completed with a degree in engineering. Since 1984, the family man, as he calls himself, has been employed at Olbrich in the design department, and since 1985 as a team leader in technical IT. "Learning has always been fun for me and I always look forward to new challenges. Learn by yourself and then pass it on, that's my motto".

Kis answered the question whether he and his family feel integrated in Bocholt with a resounding yes. "That goes for the whole family," says Kis. With his wife Eda Kis, he has two daughters. "Our children both know four languages, German, English, French and Turkish," he reports, not without pride. Yasemin Kis lives and works for a trade union in Stuttgart, Dilara is a history and French teacher and will marry in Hamburg in September.

"That's no use"

In addition to language, for him, orientation to Germany is important in order to integrate as a foreigner, refugee or migrant in Germany. "We have to deal with issues locally and not bring problems from our home country of origin to here, that doesn't help."

A much-discussed issue, the right to vote in local elections for non-EU citizens, is also an important point on the way to integration, he said. "I believe that with this right to vote, we can make the non-EU citizens who live here feel that they belong to us," Kis stresses. "I'm a German Muslim, I'm from Bocholt, and I'm fully involved in life here," Kis further emphasises. "I want to hear that from both sides".

When it comes to functioning integration, he says, parental support for the children is also very important in the school sector. "We need more parents' evenings and the parents of our foreign pupils must attend them," says Kis. "How else are the parents supposed to notice where the child is having problems at school," Kis knows. Because of the recurring problems during his children's school years, he first founded a parents' initiative and then the Turkish Parents' Association. "We helped each other and made a lot of progress, learned a lot from each other," he says proudly.

Don't isolate yourself

"A good neighbourhood is also important when it comes to integration," Kis is sure. "If you are open, if you don't isolate yourself in your own circle, you can also openly address problems and solve them," says Kis, speaking from his own experience. His work in the parents' association, which he founded and led as chairman for 20 years, also drew him to the work in the foreigners' advisory council. That is why he is also involved in the field of German-Turkish dialogue locally and founded the German-Turkish Society Bocholt in 1993 together with the then managing director of the Europa-Union Bocholt, Dr. Peter Leibenguth-Nordmann.

"We were shocked and deeply concerned by the events in Rostock, Hoyerswerde and Mölln. That's why we wanted to find a mixed group locally that would work for dialogue and understanding, bring people closer with culture and music, and also get involved in politics locally," Kis recalls. as DTG chairman, he is pleased that the association is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year.

During his involvement in the parents' association and in DTG-Bocholt, he was also interested in local integration policy in what was then the foreigners' advisory council. The SPD had applied for this in 1993. In 1994, he and some friends collected signatures so that the foreigners' advisory council in Bocholt would not be appointed but freely elected. "We collected signatures for this in accordance with the municipal code and submitted the application on 21 December 1994. In the elections on 26 March 1995, the first foreigners' advisory council in Bocholt was freely elected.

Communication hampers

"At the beginning, the relationship between the council and the foreigners' advisory board was anything but good, and communication was particularly difficult," says Kis, recalling the early days of integration work.

That is why he and his "Bocholt List" campaigned for an integration council to be elected in Bocholt instead of a foreigners' advisory council. This would have the advantage that 2/3 of the members would be directly elected by the migrants and 1/3 of the members would be appointed by the city council. In principle, this creates a link with the council. On 4 November 2009, the city council of Bocholt decided to elect an integration council in Bocholt. The first integration council was elected in 2010. Abdulkadir Kis was elected as chairman and led the body until the elections in 2014.

Professional integration work

Kis still has a number of things he would like to achieve with his work in the Integration Council. The issue of integration has become a cross-cutting task for society as a whole. This task cannot be accomplished through voluntary work alone. "As DTG-Bocholt, we have applied to the city of Bocholt for the position of an integration officer, so that integration work can be tackled professionally in our city. Jochen Methling was the first integration officer appointed by the city administration in 2012. Together with Christiana Kamps, two full-time employees would now work professionally in this area.

Four other points are still burning on his mind:

- Reviewing the history of integration and compiling it in a book.
- Draw up an integration concept with monitoring (point out deficits, problems, present possibilities for improvement).
- Language: "In the area of language, I advocate teaching in the language of origin in schools. The children should be able to speak with their grandparents, who are often still in their country of origin," Kis again shows himself to be a family man.
- Meeting place - Kis would like to see a meeting place as an intercultural meeting place. "Whether in the Kubaai area or in the future LernWerk, we need an intercultural meeting place," says Kis. He says more needs to happen in the cultural sector in particular. "The migrants will come if you speak to them," he is sure.

Since 1997 there has been, and he cites this as an example, the children's and family festival at the Aasee. In the beginning, it was organised by DTG Bocholt. As the then chairman of the integration council, he had requested that this event be organised together

with other clubs and societies. Various solutions were considered and in the end it was decided to organise it annually on 1 May in cooperation with the LWL Textile Museum. Since then, the LWL Textile Museum has provided the infrastructure and the clubs, associations and institutions present their offers. The concept has been very well received by the people of Bocholt. Every year on 1 May, thousands of visitors come to the festival and celebrate together.

Integration Council accepted

He sees the IR as accepted by both the migrants and the people of Bocholt. "Of course, the turnout at the respective elections is weak," he admits. But the associations are known and communication takes place at all levels. "The migrants come to us with their problems; as far as voter turnout is concerned, all the lists that stand for election have to work harder," says Kis.

In contrast to the acceptance of the IR among the population, Kis misses the complete dovetailing of the work with the council. "A lot more can be done there," says Kis. Above all, the IR should be asked more about topics concerning integration. "I would like to see the parties approach the IR more," says Kis. Overall, cooperation is better than in the days of the Foreigners' Advisory Council, but "bring your issues to the IR, together we can do and achieve more," Kis is sure. There are no problems with the administration. "The willingness is there, migration issues are taken seriously and the administration's public relations work on the subject is very good," Kis praises.

Interreligious dialogue

Kis, who is himself close to the Ditib, hopes that the Integration Council will succeed in advancing interreligious dialogue during the remainder of its term. "The churches and mosque communities should work together and exchange ideas in social areas, especially on the subject of care," says Kis. Both sides should invite each other. This is also a task for the integration commissioner. Kis also wanted the IR to be given more responsibility and to support integration work with a larger budget. "The integration concept we have called for is also important to me; we want to initiate this and move it forward," says Kis. It is not only about refugees.

Contact