

# **Dr Dimitrios Macheras**

## Series: We in IR



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**Dr Dimitrios Macheras is the second vice-chairman of the Integration Council of the City of Bocholt. Bruno Wansing from the mayor's office spoke with him as part of the series "We in the IR".**

Dr Macheras came to Germany in May 1977 and "landed" in Heiligenhaus after his studies. His brother had been living in Germany for some time, he was one of the "guest workers" who had ended up in Germany.

Macheras has a degree in economics. From May to September 1977, he quickly learned the German language (through self-study) and took the entrance examination in Münster. From October 1977 to February 1978, he continued learning German at the Westphalian Wilhelms University of Münster /Department of "German as a Foreign Language" and passed the relevant examination.

He fought for recognition of his Dr. degree from February 1978 - 1986. "It was incredibly difficult to be able to do a doctorate," recalls Macheras. To be admitted to the doctorate, he had to write an exam in business administration and a thesis. He then went on to do his Dr. rer. pol. in economics. "Especially in the beginning I had problems. It was difficult for me to translate the books, to understand the different learning system and, on top of that, I was still working in an iron foundry during the semester breaks," says Macheras.

In Münster as well as in Bocholt, he worked for years as a course instructor for Modern Greek at the respective adult education centres. At the VHS Bocholt he also offers cooking courses. On his initiative, the state association of the VHS of NRW became an examination centre for Greek certificates.

As early as 1987, he did an internship at his current employer, the Cooperative Association - Association of Regions e. V. After the internship, the assistant period followed and now Macheras is an association examiner. Macheras is Greek himself and feels fully integrated in Bocholt. His wife, who is a big fan of Greece, also contributes to this. He has a son who has German and Greek citizenship. "Even though he has both citizenships, he is more German and I wish he would not ignore Greece," Macheras emphasises.

### **Learn the language as quickly as possible**

For Dr. Dimitrios Macheras, too, the most important point of successful integration is the language. "Everyone who comes to Germany and does not yet speak the language should learn it as quickly as possible," demands Macheras. In addition, he says, it is particularly important to meet as many people as possible of the most diverse backgrounds. "In these contacts, it is then a must to speak German and not - once you meet a compatriot - to lapse back into the home language."

### **Just don't give up**

"Even if the German language is not easy to learn, the guideline for me has always been, just don't give up," says Macheras, "the will to make it must always be there with everyone. Then it will work out." When you take the first step in Germany, Germans tend to be rather reserved in their mentality, but if you know them for longer, the contact deepens even more. "The Greeks are different. They approach you warmly, but remain rather superficial in their contacts," is how Macheras describes his compatriots.

### **Akoc and Mascolo as role models**

Macheras had always considered passing on his own experiences and getting involved in political work himself. "My role models were Emanuele Mascolo and Azize Akoc," says Macheras. "Both were very active members of the Foreigners' Advisory Council and made a lot of things happen. I then asked Azize Akoc, 'how do I get in?' We met and I ran for the foreigners' advisory council.

### **Seeing all the people of Bocholt as one**

He still has some goals and wishes for his work in the Integration Council. "Although we get a lot of information about what happens in the council through the integration office, that's where the cooperation should be deepened," demands Macheras, who also wants people with a migration background to be heard more in the council and in Bocholt as a whole. His goal is still to support the integration process in Bocholt. "If we could make it so that all Bocholters could be seen as **one**, then we have achieved integration," Macheras is sure and goes on to say: "I want to give people who are not in any association, who are not organised, who have hardly any contacts, a voice that is heard."

That was also the reason why he ran for the IR and the chairmanship of the IR. "However, I am not attached to the board position," Macheras emphasises. He represents the Integration Council of the city of Bocholt in the various committees of the NRW State Integration Council. "I bring this info from the meetings and discuss it with my board colleagues at our regular meetings," Macheras continues. "It is more important to me if I can help and support people. Chair of the IR is something I dare to do, but I would never do it. If I take on an office, I have to be able to fulfil it to the full. But that is definitely not possible because of my work," emphasises Macheras.

### **"Every person has a God"**

Although Macheras, who is Greek Orthodox, does not see a silver bullet when it comes to improving communication and cooperation between the different religions and religious orientations, he is certain: "Every human being has a God and it is important that they practice their religion peacefully and can do so peacefully," emphasises Macheras.

Interreligious dialogue, as has already been initiated in Bocholt, is the right way to go. "Fanaticism is the wrong way," Macheras is sure. He himself also goes to the celebrations of the other religions. "I am curious, after all, how my fellow citizen, my fellow Bocholtian, how "the other" practices his religion. If we actively take a step towards the other, then it works. In Heiligenhaus, the Turkish neighbouring family used to bring us meat for their Feast of Sacrifice."

### **Majority don't know we are there**

"I see us, the IR, accepted by both the migrants and the German population. However, I am sure that the majority does not know that we are there."

### **Do not attack the power of the council**

"I do believe that the council accepts us, we have councillors in the new integration council," says Macheras. Certainly the IR is taken seriously, "we don't want to be a competing body and we certainly don't want to attack the power of the council," says Macheras. He misses a continuous flow of information from the administration on issues concerning the administration and migration. "It would be great if we could be involved in advance and not just when the decision has already been made in the council," says Macheras, wishing for earlier participation. "We have an integration office. That could take up the points, put them to a vote in the IR and then take our recommendation to the decision-making in the council," demands Macheras. "The council representatives are very supportive of us in this request."

### **City of Bocholt to keep integration council**

Macheras still wants to achieve three goals in the expiring election period. "Firstly, I would like us to succeed in presenting a positive balance sheet. This also includes that we succeed in having the administration involve us at an early stage." He also wants the city to keep the integration council. The state of North Rhine-Westphalia also provides for the formation of an integration committee as an alternative. "And finally, it would be great if

we could convince young people to join. I will pay special attention to that, to approach young people and motivate them to participate in the integration work."

## Contact