

**They don't know anything anymore about the child who is their child.
They no longer mention its name, they call it**

“THE CHILD”

Why the mediation of children from abroad for German parents often goes dramatically wrong

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They have not seen the little girl since that day in October two years ago, as they explained her with hands and feet that it "Now would leave." The child danced with joy on the table, grabbed her school map and her doll, left her children bedroom with the pink doilies and white furniture and all the frames and painting stuff behind and got happily in the car of the youth welfare office, that took her away. Presumably, she supposed she was going home. Back then she was seven years old.

Eberhard and Lola L., 57 and 52 years old, watched until the car was gone. The last thing they saw was the little hands of the girl behind the window that made some kind of goodbye waves. Or perhaps they just imagined that. The L.s went into the house. They were alone again.

Two years later they sit behind their living room table with all the files of the adoption as behind a protective wall. The house is not new anymore; they had planned and built it when the matter with the child began. On the upper floor their mattresses are lying on the floor of the, before a rocking horse. A room is not at all inhabited. They had planned a children's room. Outside in the future garden, no grass grows yet. A swing stands and a climbing frame, but the devices are not used. The L.s never arrived in this new life. The rooms seem useless, an empty shell for all the things they wanted, but could not get. The child, their adopted child, will soon be 10 years old.

They are not monsters, that's important to them. They wanted only for himself, what for many others is normal. What's wrong with that? They were full of hope, but also full of illusions. They were gullible, asked too little and too little questioning themselves. The dream of family happiness now has become a catastrophe. For L.s, the mediator, but especially for a little girl with brown hair and thin arms, which was born in Bulgaria ten years ago, grew up in homes, was brought to Germany and passed around ever since. Because it did not fit into the dreams in the heads, not to the pictures in colorful brochures. A little girl that has no reason anymore, to believe any adults any more.

It's a weird thing with the 1000 annually adopted children from abroad. For most part it are those parents who are seeking a child abroad, who because of their personal situation are not eligible to adopt a German child - whether because of their age, whether as a result of motivation for which

they want to take a child, whether due to the family situation. Then the demand for adoptive children domestically exceeds the need sevenfold.

No one denies that it is precisely the adoption a child from abroad holds special risks and therefore special requirements of the future parents are needed: children are coming who nobody wants in their countries of origin, because they're older, because they are disabled, because they are sick, because they are maladjusted or traumatized. Because since the Hague Convention, a child may only ever be adopted abroad if they cannot be placed at home.

The result: children with special difficulties and restrictions are being provided to parents who also often have particular difficulties: miscarriages, unwanted childlessness, failed hopes, sometimes difficult family situations and advanced age. The children from foreign countries have to adapt to another culture, another language, and often manage with their foreign appearance. "The idea that abroad that the homes are full of healthy babies and young children who are urgently looking for parents is a gladly spread and believed myth," says Michael Heuer from the renowned children's charity Terre des Hommes. "The opposite is true."

When Lola L. Eberhard entrusted the adoption agency Children and Parents to search for a child from Bulgaria, they are 52 and 57 years old. They moved from their hometown Ingelheim to nearby Biberach, because of the job of Eberhard L. Lola L. gives up her job as secretary, her elderly parents she brings with her, to look after them. For Lola L. it is the second marriage, she already has two sons, one out of home, on is 16 years. But the new start is difficult and lonely: She is with her elderly parents in this nest, the big son stays in Ingelheim, the 16 year old wants after two days to go back to his father and his friends and move out of the village. Just a cat comes to join them.

Then comes the idea of a child. Start fresh once more, as a family, simply turning back the clock. 'I wanted a common child. That is normal,' says Lola L. That what she has, is in fact normal, she does not see: children grow up and go their way, and the parents are getting older, and one hopes perhaps for grandchildren, but not again to have an own child.

Children and Parents is a small adoption agency, that complies with the legal minimum requirements for staff. All other licensed adoption agencies has given them not a lot of hope to find their desired child, a healthy young child, possibly not older than four. For the first information talk they drive to the old house in Aachen, where the agency is located. With two other couples they sit down at the sofa. At the walls are pictures of mediated children and parents. They all smile.

Many years in Germany only state authorities were responsible for adoption mediation. In the meantime this task was partly outsourced – private agencies are allowed to mediate, and by now they do some 90 % of all intercountry adoptions. They have to fulfill certain requirements – for example they must have an office and at least two social workers. Their costs and salaries, they have to pay from their own fees. And this means that they have to mediate children, otherwise they cannot pay the bills. Initially everything works as desired: An employee of Children and

Parents visited Lola and Eberhard L. at home and determines their suitability. They submit medical certificates, proof of income and give answers to all questions.

The L's are not people who adjust, not for good or for worse. They also say that they would feel overwhelmed with a disabled or sick. The staff of Children and Parents considers them suitable. The L.s pay for the report all in all about 2000 euros.

In May 2010, the L's go to Bulgaria to get to know 'their' child. A lawyer with dark sunglasses and driver picks them up from the airport and brings them to the children's home Nezabravka in the town of Stara Zagora. They do not know yet much about the little girl. It likes to sing and dance, say the papers, it behaves properly, is cheerful and good-natured and wears glasses. It is already seven years, but that's no longer important to the L's. The main thing, a child.

The meeting is sobering. For four days, they may spend a few hours with their future daughter. At the first meeting the little girl runs to them and falls around their necks. They are moved, even if they say afterwards that the gesture was like rehearsed. Once they go to a playground, otherwise they meet in a room in the home, try to do jigsaw puzzles and paint. The child cooperates, but it seems more of a duty. Georgi Kremenliev, the lawyer, partner of Children and Parents, acts as interpreter. They don't see much of the home. Sometimes they have trouble to pass the time. It is not easy to to be a family again. They make a lot of photos in which they all always smile. Often that looks not spontaneous.

Sometimes it looks really hard. The little girl sees badly, but it carries, different as described in the papers, no glasses. They had just been broken, says the home. They take her to the eye doctor, and then to another, one says minus seven, one says minus eleven diopters. They buy the child a pair of glasses, but apparently she still sees not much better. Direct contact is for the L's not possible because of the language.

The Ls are unsure whether they should adopt the child. You know too little, but they also do not ask. Where does the girl come from exactly, what did it go through, and how it came to this home, remains diffuse for the L's. The sparkle somehow did not jump over. They ask time for consideration, they want time to sleep over it in Germany. The Bulgarian lawyer is shocked and angry, and the L's later. He urges them to at least get at least the papers ready. And he wants money. 4000 euros in cash, later another 5000 please, without receipt. The L.s give it to him. The lawyer denies, when requested by the Stern, that this happened. The L's cannot proof it.

At home in Germany come the calls of their agency. They are becoming more pressing. Deadlines are running. The L.s are not sure. What if they now say no? They are not getting younger. Is this perhaps their last chance? Would they even suggest another child to them? Will they have the financial resources to redo the procedure? They have already borrowed money and missed out on their holiday, to be able to pay the fees, translations, expenses. But, they tell themselves, they think they are experienced people. The child will get used to them. The L.s agree to the adoption.

They prepare themselves for the child. They buy white furniture and pink sheets. They buy colorful carpets, toys and cute dresses. And a schoolbag, because the child should go to school immediately, they already inscribed it. A Bulgarian dictionary they do not buy.

At 13th July 2010, in front of a Bulgarian court, in the absence of the L's and without the child, the adoption is completed. The L's look forward to a princess. But there is one troubled, traumatized little girl who apparently does not know what happened to her, and who switched already to survival mode.

The child does not eat, the child swallows. It eats quickly and as much as it can get. The child is restless, and it cannot be touched. It constantly jumps, runs away, runs back, runs. Many things it has never seen before. The child runs everywhere and tries everything. The child turns the light on and off a thousand times. It presses all buttons and sees what happens. It takes the scissors and fascinated cuts up the curtains. It does not obey. The child cries a lot, in Bulgarian. It calls after Home and after a "baby Anastasia" and other things the L's do not understand. The child sleeps when it wants to, and a fiber of its body seems always wide awake, always ready to flee.

The child does not know what happened, the L's suspect. No one had told it it will be adopted in another country or what that means. On the idea to get an interpreter, they do not come. It's a strange darkness from which the child came to Germany. 60 dry lines in the "Children Report" of the Bulgarian Ministry of Justice explains its life. Everyone seems happy with this, the agency, the adoptive parents, the German Youth Office. About the origin of biological eggs or steaks that reach German soil, more is often known.

According to research of the Stern in the home country of the child, the girl was brought several times during the first year by his grandmother and other relatives and neighbors in critical condition too the hospital. Each time after recovering it was a problem, to identify the mother, and bring it back. After the last hospital stay that was no longer possible, and so the child was brought to the orphanage in Buzovgrad. The home psychologist Elly Georgieva can remember exactly this little bundle of life, that with one year was just four kilos on the scales, could not sit and could not crawl, but had an irrepressible survival instinct had. "She was in spite of their miserable state rarely powerful and strong," said Georgieva, "She clung like a monkey firmly to the adults so that it was not forgotten. "This survival technique the child apparently never abandoned. Georgieva told that the girl made slow progress, but persistently demanded attention and the presence of an adult. If she would not get that, when she was afraid to be abandoned, she cried. The little girl loved water, music and babies, she often jumped on without reason and would ran outside, as if she was waiting for someone, and she had a curious talent for persuasion. So it sits later while watching TV just a few feet away from the screen and fixes the image from the bottom, because due to being visually impaired she recognizes nothing. All other children with healthy eyes, it do the same. The child appeared to understand that this is the way television works. With four, the child is placed in the home Nesabravka, the name means: "Do not forget me." According to the Home Director Radina Stoyanova the child was at that time on the list for

international adoptions. Three Bulgarian couples, which had previously been proposed for adoption, had rejected on grounds of ethnicity, because the child is a gypsy. Stoyanova says: "Of the 42 children here, there are only two non-Roma children. Roma children in Bulgaria are difficult to mediate [for adoption]. The child was not difficult, rather cheerful and gentle. She loved to dance and the music, there are photos and videos of performances of the child with the dance group, which the Stern can see. The child is proud because it often is allowed to do solos. Stoyanova remembers the couple who took the child eventually. "Other candidates come with photo albums from the future home, with family pictures, gifts, a complete equipment. These two were both externally and internally unprepared, they knew little and were very "distanced" says Stoyanova.

After a few days in Germany, the child is enrolled in school. She is wearing a colorful dress, a schoolbag and a troubled face. It hardly understands anything and tries to run away all the time. It screams out more and more, it listens less and less, it is more and more restless. It has only about five per cent vision. The school does not hold it out, and now it is at home with her adoptive mother Lola. Lola L. does not know how to deal with the child, she is 24 hours per day under stress, her husband is at work and also doesn't know. The situation escalates. On 13 October, a call comes in at the relevant Youth Welfare Office: "If now nothing happens, something happens," warns Lola L. Two employees are on their way. The L's are so-obviously completely unprepared and unsuited and overwhelmed by the child that it is remarkable how they could have been chosen for this girl. Social Services place the girl in a foster family, and her initial joy turns to anger. It is clearly not the place that the child expected. It rebels. The family until then had only dogs, no children. The dogs and the child do not particularly mix. A whole 48 hours the family keeps up with the child, then they call the Youth Office.

Shortly after ringing the next time the foster family Phone. Family N. has four of its own in addition to the past 20 years raised over 30 foster children - neglected, abused, abused, traumatized, disabled children. They are considered experts in difficult cases, but actually they now want the last generation raise and sit so slowly to rest, for Mr. and Ms. N. are already in their sixties. hands Wrestling you're required to take this child because you do not know where else it. The child had a difficult child and do not speak German, at least for a few weeks they are to take it to themselves until another solution was found. The N.s agree.

From the few weeks two years. The child is turned in at the beginning and sad, as if it abandoned would. But it thaws again. It eats still very fast and too much, but soon noticed wife N. that it does not chew. Mrs. N. he says again and again, that it could nach nehmen as often as wanted. Mrs. N. chewing the meat, spits it in her hand and showing it to the child to see what is chewing.

The child quickly learns German. It takes what it please, and do not ask who it belongs to. It provides continuous Dishwasher and washing machine picks up on all the levers, pushes all buttons, and is absolutely fascinated by everything it does not know. The child must keep in mind in every minute be, as it has every minute new and surprising

Invasions. It makes his or her own meaning to what it sees. It marches in other people's houses without ringing or to knock, in the village of Ns in most homes the doors open - the child is then often times unexpectedly at strangers in the living room. This raises the Baker in the queue and ordered cake, because the other do that too, though it dabeihat no money. it drags likes things from the house of the Ns and she gives in the school. It takes care of the sblings their stuff away, it painted the furniture with crayons and presses holes in the walls.

The child gets to school an "inclusion specialist" every day to sit with him in the classroom, But more often, the specialist sits there alone, because the child is easy when it is tired. The child is retrained. His social behavior beyond the classroom, it comes to a special school for the visually impaired. when the Child listening to music, it forgets everything else and dancing. The Child loves to Mrs. N. in the car to drive through the villages.

"If they sit there, looking out the window and quietly Bulgarian Sings songs that I think: Now she's happy, " says Mrs. N.

The child was the hardest child that ever the Ns had. To the first of November they have the wardship Location. The child lives in the special school connected home. The N.s says mom and dad. When they visit it, may decide to office. as it continues, is unclear.

It is a strange uncertainty in which the children brought to Germany disappear. The presumption seems likely that the adoption from a crisis area into a wealthy country like Germany is a great opportunity for many. That they will be happy. But there are experts who believe that up to a quarter up to half of all cases the children, at the age of 18 years, no more with live with their adoptive parents, but live in homes, boarding schools and assisted living projects. They do not want to be mentioned by name they, after all they can only speculate.

There is no research on the subject and no statistics. The International Social Service once the attempt, an empirical research on the to get away, but there was no regulatory body who wanted to support this research. In these weeks the Protestant University of Applied Sciences in Berlin wants a large-scale Course research to begin. The money for this is from a private anonymous donor, of whose motives nothing is known and no further investigation wishes. The children's charity Terre des Hommes has now withdrawn from the brokerage of foreign adoptions. The scene had changed, says spokesman Michael Heuer. There is a growing number of parents who are not looking for abandoned children, but for children for accidentally childless couples from rich countries. The adoption scene was marked by a competition for children. "This not only affects the different adoption agencies nationality, but also the German agencies."

The Youth Office Biberach for privacy reasons gives no information on how the child "proceed" is. The agency Children and Parents would "for privacy" not comment, but let's know that everything went according to the law. The Regional Association Rhineland as supervising authority over the agency, says for privacy-legal reasons it cannot express whether it already had

problems before with the agency Children and Parents. Lawyer Georgi Kremenliev also does not want to express himself on this case.

The adults involved are arguing since the end of January in Court, on who is to blame, who had to know what, and who has betrayed whom. The L's would like to repeal the adoption. The officially appointed guardian does not want that. Not because he seriously believes that the girl will ever live with its adoptive parents. Not even remotely. But someone has to pay, and the L's are ultimately to blame for the child being here. A child cannot be send back like a coat at Zalando. For an adopted child from abroad, the rules of the used car trade apply: accept as seen. A new family for the Child will no longer be looked for, apparently hopeless or too cumbersome.

Meanwhile, the child sits in the home. It counts the days until it may go to the N's.

With research by Zdravka Andreeva

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