

In the last five years, 62,000 Russian children have been abducted, taken out of the country and sold. The fate of most of them is unknown. Interpol and the Russian secret service, the FSB, are investigating the illegal trade in human organs. This information, which the authors of the Russian film "Yarik" have received from the highest level of government, was written into the advertising material. But in the film itself, which fictitiously exemplifies the question of the trade in children through the example of a little boy, the information had to be removed on the direction of the Russian authorities. It is more neutrally formulated in the end titles: "Every year thousands of children disappear in Russia. The destiny of many is unknown." The film's authors refer to the fact that the story is based on real events. Every year about 12,000 children end up illegally adopted, as child workers and even on the operating table to have their organs removed.

It is the case that the criminal trade with children in general and specifically with organs has become an enormously profitable international trade. Since organ transplantation has become medical routine, the demand for organs has risen. In western Europe alone, thousands are awaiting transplantation. In Germany, "12,000 patients are waiting for a donated organ, almost 9,000 for a kidney", writes the German "Foundation for Organ Transplantation – Organ Donation Coordination Centre": "Approximately three times as many people are waiting for a new kidney as can be provided by transplantation." Waiting times are increasing and the criminal networks, who organize the trade in organs from poor to prosperous countries, are profiting from it. The UN special rapporteur for children, Juan Miguel Petit, writes in the yearly report for 2007 that globalisation threatens "transplantation tourism"; the anxious search for organs also leads to many people no longer taking notice under what circumstances the organs are supplied. Organised crime has long had children in its sights, because a large number of children also require donated organs and children's organs can also be transplanted into adults.

Although all notable international organisations like UNO, Interpol, the World Health Organisation, the Council of Europe or the OSCE are aware of the existence of this crime, it lives a shadowy existence in its analysis, the gathering of statistics and in open discussion. In the first place, this has to do with the fact that the focus of attention of those involved in human rights is on sexual exploitation, slave workers and organized begging by children, which according to the findings of international organisations, 70% of the victims of the trade in humans - and up to 80% of these women and children – end up being sexually exploited. Secondly, it has also to do with the fact that some countries do not classify the cases, but mix everything together according to the type of crime, as Vera Gratscheva, expert on the trade in human beings at the OSCE explains: According to the findings of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the International Labour Office (ILO), of the at least 2.5 million people a year who end up in slave-like conditions in the target country as a consequence of the trade in humans (the inland trade is not included in the count), 43% become victims of sexual exploitation, 32% as victims of labour exploitation and 25% victims of other "miscellaneous" types of crime. Because of this, the numbers are lacking regarding the trade in children's organs and child abduction, which hinders its efficient combat as a consequence. Thirdly, it is a fact that the illegal trade in organs – the more so with children – is one of the most opaque of crimes: "The crime is extremely shadowy, only a small number are discovered," says Gratscheva. The Russian human rights organization "Angel Coalition" talks of a "completely closed sector" occupied with the trade in human beings.

An anonymous source from one of the western European secret services deems the phenomenon "extremely difficult, because of which very little is known about it." And it also remains complicated because no one tackles this question in the right way. It is the case that those who are occupied with the subject have only been actively engaged in it for a few years. What is manifestly frustrating is the lack of necessary evidence. "Over the last few years, the special representatives (the UN) have received worrying information of the illegal trade in organs and tissue involving children. The sporadic information remains in most cases unconfirmed," writes Petit in his special report from the 26<sup>th</sup> of December 2006. What is definite, however, is that it concerns a variety of purposes: for genetic research, religious or magic rituals, "but mainly for the purposes of transplantation." Suspicious cases of the trade in organs have been reported at the same time to the UN by several countries. In the meantime what remains a fact is that China has carried out the theft of organs from imprisoned members of the Falun-Gong sect. Gratscheva confirms that cases of the trade in humans for the purpose of organ removal are known of in Moldova, Israel and other lands. Members of the Organisation for Migration in Macedonia, who have reported on several cases on child trade in Albania, write that it is really only the tip of the iceberg.

The UN itself confirms that, following a fact-finding trip to Moldova and the Ukraine, among other places, new-born babies are known to have disappeared – but the few legal investigations in 2002 ran out of steam. Member of the European Parliament, Gabriele Stauner, tells the same story. A few years ago, she had endeavoured to find an explanation for what was happening to new-borns in the Ukrainian town of Charkov. The ZDF reporter Sibylle Bassler had chronicled in her documentary "Mona Lisa", that the babies were taken away from their parents; the efforts of a human rights activist revealed an anonymous mass grave containing along with fetuses the disembowelled body of a live-born baby. Stauner had to admit that years later the case remained unexplained; incidentally she reported that she and Bassler were watched by the secret service while they were at work in the Ukraine of that time under Leonid Kutschma – which was admitted later by a secret service defector.

According to the western secret service source mentioned above, the illegal trade in organs also takes place in Russia. The extent remains completely unclear. In the previous year, the case of an illegal organ transplantation within Russia was leaked. The trade goes hand in hand with the fact that every year children and youths go missing. This is "a serious worry in

several countries," writes Petit in his report. As far as Russia is concerned, the secret service source considers the figure referred to in the film "Yarik" of 12,000 missing children yearly – although not only for the trade in organs – as underestimated. Gratscheva agrees, remarking however, that the children disappear for a variety of reasons. The investigative committee of the Russian interior ministry let it be known in September 2007 that 10,000 teenagers die every year because of drugs and 35,000 run away from home because of domestic violence. Should they end up on the street, at least in Moscow, they will be temporarily accommodated in holding cells, before they are sent back home or to an orphanage, "Angel Coalition" explains. Additionally, according to UNICEF, the tally of children housed in Russian orphanages has risen by 50% to 600,000 in the last ten years. And as the International Organization for Adolescents write in their report for 2006, orphans and homeless children are a particularly popular target for international dealers in human beings.

This is confirmed by an informant with a close relationship to the Russian secret service. As a result of her researches, western special clinics order the desired organs over their international network, whereupon organized criminals in socio-economically underdeveloped countries search for the organs in not only adult and children's clinics there, but also in children's homes and orphanages. Western clinics attracting attention are above all Italian beauty clinics for the rich. The "advantage" of these clinics, located in attractive country areas, is that they are difficult to check up on, the more so since they are very secretive (for reasons of discretion regarding the rich clientele). What is also notable is the evidence that the trade operates through middlemen, in many cases via the Balkans and then Northern Italy; Trieste and environs attract particular attention. Usually, the criminal networks will search close to the geographical area, so that the organs can be speedily transported.

Hence the following two variations:

- 1.) the illegal donors or those abducted for organ donation are taken to the target clinic, operated on there and given good medical care.
- 2.) they are operated on in the country of origin, and then their organs transported to the target country, which often leads to the death of the donor, because the medical care in the original country is worse. As regards the number of disappeared children from Russia, the informant holds a number from between 10,000 - 12,000 per year to be realistic, of which 5-10% can be assumed for the trade in organs. Since not only the relatively easily operable kidneys are removed, but also lungs and liver, it is extremely likely that this is also about murder.

Russia is a signatory to several international conventions to combat human and children's rights; among others the so-called "Palermo Protocol", which concentrates particularly on the trade in women and children, which also involves the trade in organs. UNICEF indicates progress, but also finds shortcomings in adapting the protocol to Russian law.

Public clarification on the trade in humans, child abduction and the trade in organs of adults and children is in a sorry state worldwide and in Russia too: One of the best-known media researches, undertaken by Arkady Mamontov, a journalist with the Russian channel RTR, concerning illegal adoption overseas, also alluding to the trade in organs, was deeply ideological. Mamontov is a sensational journalist, who broadcasts along the Kremlin's anti-west lines. And so it was in the aforesaid film about adoption. Mamontov sees it this way: During his visit to an Italian family who had had both their adopted children taken away from them by the state because of previous maltreatment, there was apparently no trace of one of the children, which was sufficient to hint at the organ trade. He also reported on alleged mistreatment of adopted Russian children in America. Russian commentators have countered Mamontov's patriotic gesture with the fact that of 10 children who grow up in Russian orphanages, one will have committed suicide and another seven will become alcoholics. It was Mamontov's intention to create a mood against overseas adoptions. What makes this even more cynical is that it is often disabled Russian children who are adopted overseas, because they can find no adoptive parents at home. According to Vladimir Neljubin, number two in the Department for Children's Rights of the Human Rights Commission of the Russian Federation, it is clear that Mamontov's material has led to a much more strict adherence to Russian law and a stricter test of potential adoptive parents.

Mamontov also played up a case in 2004, which occurred in the Moscow Number 20 hospital. There, according to the determinations of a medical commission of the time, organs had been removed from the clinically dead for transplantation. This touched on a tricky ethical question. However, an illegal trade in organs alleged by Mamontov had in fact not taken place, according to medical circles. The doctors were later acquitted in court. But the image of transplantation in Russia took a battering and since then, according to doctors, transplantation has fallen 90%. And many have since died for want of a donor organ.