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Editorial: Adoption and politics

Adoption is essentially a measure to protect the child deprived of a family. It is based upon the best interest of the child and not on the wishes of adults. It consists of providing a family for a child and not of providing a child for a family...Principles seemingly generally accepted. Nonetheless, politics intervene in several aspects of adoption: attitude of certain receiving countries, regulations of certain countries of origin and individual decisions.

- Quite recently, the governments of *several receiving countries* have set targets for significant increases in the number of adoptions carried out by their nationals. Or they have promised to simplify the process for future adoptive parents. Or they have used adoption as an element of negotiation, and sometimes as a diplomatic pressure, with countries of origin. Why has adoption become, over recent years, a political argument? Could it be because of the fact that future adoptive parents are potential votes?

Now, according to UNICEF (see News of the ISS/IRC website below), worldwide « *...the adoption applications seem to exceed the number of adoptable children as far as young healthy children are concerned. The opposite seems, nonetheless, the case for children considered hard to place (children with special needs), for whom there is a serious lack of prospective adoptive parents* ». In this context, pressure from the receiving countries in favour of the adoption of young children without serious health problems runs the risk of encouraging abuse of inter-country adoption and thus disregarding the best interest of the child.

- In response, *some countries of origin* are tending to abolish inter-country adoption, in practice or by law, for example by restricting it to their own nationals residing abroad. Others discourage foreign adopters, for example imposing upon them, as a condition for adoption, a long period of prior residence in the country of origin; or limiting international adoption to children several years old or who cannot be cared for properly by residential institutions; or envisaging the abolition of the role of private adoption agencies.

As a reminder, inter-country (and domestic) adoption is *above all a measure to protect the child deprived of a family*, even if there is still much to be done to refocus it on the needs of children and to regulate their evolution and their fees, two aims of The Hague Convention, 1993. The temporary suspension of inter-country adoptions by a receiving country or by a country of origin, when the risks of serious abuse are very high, can be a constructive and responsible decision. But for the suppression of inter-country adoption to be ratified, in practice or by law, within the laws and regulations of a country of origin where a large number of children are institutionalised, also seems to us to fly in the face of the rights of the child, especially of those with special needs.

- Moreover, in certain countries of origin and receiving countries, *political authorities (central or local) take the decisions* to accredit adoption agencies, to approve prospective adopters, even for adoption

itself. Even if politicians surround themselves with professional advice, the risk of permitting other interests (national, political ...) than those of the child to prevail still exists in such procedures.

Therefore, it is necessary to reorganise the systems in each country through a series of nationally and internationally co-ordinated measures aimed at centering the action on the interests of the child. This reorganisation implies in particular to *entrust all the processes to professionals (from the psycho-social work to the decision-making competence)* from the formulisation and realisation of a long-term family project (re-integration into the family or, in the alternative case, adoption) for children in care. These professionals in matters of the child and the family (local social services, care centers, Central Authorities, accredited adoption agencies), must be independent of politicians; they also must be trained, experienced and supervised by a guardianship administration and/or by independent experts.

Adoption is not a political matter but a legal instrument of protection for certain children deprived of a family. Thus, it must be protected from pressure groups and from being used for political, economic or diplomatic purposes. Adoption must guarantee primarily the best interest of the child through the professional ethics of all the protagonists.