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Missing Ukrainian Toddler Found Adopted by Putin Ally – BBC

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A two-year-old girl taken from a Kherson children's home in 2022 has been adopted by a political ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, according to documents obtained by the BBC.

The BBC accessed adoption records and a birth record showing Margarita Propenko was renamed Marina Mironova, with A Just Russia leader Sergei Mironov and his wife Inna Varlamova listed as her parents.

The Geneva Convention bans the unnecessary deportation of civilians and changing a child's family status, making the removal of children from occupied regions of Ukraine and their adoption possible war crimes.

Varlamova, identifying herself as "the head of children's affairs from Moscow," visited the Kherson children's hospital in August 2022, where 10-month-old Margarita was being treated for bronchitis.

Sources told the BBC that, shortly after the visit, Margarita was sent back to the children's home where she had lived after being given up by her mother shortly after birth, picked up by a group of Russian men, some in military attire, and taken to Moscow.

Several weeks later, the rest of the children in the home, including Margarita's half-brother, were taken by Russian officials, who said they would be going to "safe conditions in Crimea."

Mironov denied the reports that he had adopted a Ukrainian child, calling them a "fake from the Ukrainian special services and their Western curators."

Ukraine says 19,546 Ukrainian children have been taken to Russia since the beginning of the full-scale invasion in 2022.

Russian children's rights commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova has said Ukrainian children in Russia are only going into foster care or temporary guardianship.

"We don't have adoptions," she said. "This is a very important fact because adoption means that the child becomes fully native. You can change his last name, first name, patronymic [middle name], you can change the place of birth."

Russia claimed to have annexed large parts of Ukrainian territory, including the Kherson region, and now considers them as part of Russia, not Ukraine.

These regions are recognized by the international community as Ukrainian territory.

The Russian government told the BBC that it permits the adoption of Russian citizens from its newly declared regions.

Putin and Lvova-Belova are wanted by the International Criminal Court for the "unlawful deportation" of Ukrainian children.

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