

Interview with Natalja K.

For the subject "Integration" I had an interview with an immigrant called Natalja K. . She was born in Russia but today she lives in Germany. She and her family, her husband (Andrej K.), her son (Dieter H., birth name Dimitrij K.) and her daughter (Maria K.) emigrated from Russia to Germany in 1996. She reported something about the background, the integration and experiences which she and her family have made.

In the beginning of the interview, I asked her what were the motivation for Natalja and her family to emigrate. She told me that the main reason were their children and the future. She explained this statement with the fact that during this time the crime rate was very high in Russia and that they as parents had fears about their children. In addition, her son would have had to start the military duty in the red army. The main reason for the thoughts of emigration was the instable economic and political situation of the land. Based on this answer I asked her, why they chose Germany. The mother and the grandmother of Mr. K. already lived in Germany, so they chose Germany to reunite the family. Accordingly, I wanted to know, what the first impression was which Natalja and her family had about Germany. Mrs. K. answered that she has to make a distinction because before they emigrated, she and her family had visited their mother and grandmother in Germany in 1994. She said that she and her family had liked it so much that they did not want to go back. The politics and economy in Germany were more stable and the circumstances were much better than in Russia. My next question was how the impression of Germany was after the emigration and whether it was still positive. She told me that the impression changed through the acute troubles like linguistic problems, no work and the increasing bureaucracy. Natalja K. said that it was no more like in the vacation. To secure her own future and the future of the children was the only concern at that time.

I wanted to know how Natalja K. and her family were received here in Germany. She reported that there were different reactions. During the passing through the departments they met people which were very friendly to her and her family, because it was a normal situation to them. But there were also persons who showed antipathy and prejudices. After a linguistic test Mrs. K. was classified as a foreigner and according to this she got a Russian identity card.

My next question was whether she feels integrated or if there are still problems. She answered that she feels integrated, but that there also problems: She still is considered as a Russian. Natalja and her husband recognized the prejudices and the social exclusion especially with their children. Their son changed his birthname into a German name because of problems in school, in everyday life and also because of the unsuccessful search for a traineeship. Mrs. K. said, that her family and especially their son recognize that this was the right decision, because with his German name he is treated differently and is respected by some people. Many people even don't recognize that his parents are foreigners and he was born in Russia.

"A change of name?" I asked. Furthermore I wanted to know, whether anyone can do this or not. She answered that this is only possible in Lower Saxony at the moment. First you have to make an application for the change of the name at the civil registry office giving a written ground for the change. The base for the approval of the change of the name is that the applicant has a family member who is German citizen and is considered as repatriate. She also said, that this is a complex procedure and her son had to go often to the civil registry office and show the documents of the family and the documents of his grandmother, a copy of the

identity card of his parents, the birth certificate and the documents from the late emigration to change his name from Dimitrij K. to Dieter H. This isn't only a complex procedure, it is expensive too. You have to pay 500 Euros. Despite this complex and expensive procedure they also want to make it possible for their daughter. During the interview I asked Natalja K. whether there is still contact to Russia or if it is totally dismantled. Mrs. Natalja K. explained that the contact will still continue because her whole family still lives in Russia. Her family still likes their home country after all these years. They watch Russian shows on TV and it is very important for them, to raise the children with two languages. My last question was, if they plan to go back to Russia. She answered me that she doesn't want to go back to Russia these days. She and her husband said that if the situation in Russia will continue to get better while the situation in Germany gets worse and Germany shows an instable economic and political situation they could think of going back to Russia for retirement.

Interview and translation by Claudia Fischer