

Nordic Headlines 4 August 2005

Danish press

Corruption case collapsing

Corruption allegations against two case-workers at the Directorate of Immigration in danger of collapsing after the first Chinese national to be charged with bribery in the 'money for residency' affair was yesterday acquitted by Copenhagen District Court of bribery, but found guilty of forging documents. The court ruled that it couldn't be proved "...that the many thousands of kroner that the accused paid for a residency permit had ever ended up in the hands of an Immigration Agency employee." Although it has been documented that the agency issued 72 false residency permits to Chinese nationals claiming to be students, the prosecutorial authorities are having difficulty proving that middlemen, who originally received up to DKK 39,000 from Chinese applicants, ever passed the money, or part of it, on to the two case workers.

(Politiken, 3 August 2005, front page & Jyllandsposten, p. 2, NE translation)

Finnish press

Kajaani Finland's most racist city, statistics reveal

Saturday evening's attack against a Kajaani pizzeria run by immigrants was not an isolated incident. Of all the cities in Finland, Kajaani has the largest number of racially motivated crimes in proportion to the number of foreign residents. Statistics compiled by the Police College of Finland reveal that the northern Province of Oulu – home of both Oulu and Kajaani – is the country's darkest territory for hate crimes. "Fifteen men stormed in simultaneously from the front and the back doors. Armed with billiard cues, they came from the adjacent bar. They did not say anything, just started hitting us in the head and breaking the place up", owner of the Kajaani pizzeria, Al-Masri Mohamed, said. Mohamed, who originates from Jordan and is also an Israeli citizen, has lived in Finland for nearly 13 years. "This is worse than Israel. I never imagined anything like this when I applied for asylum here," he said. "Saturday's attack was surprisingly fierce and we take this very seriously", Detective Chief Inspector, Ari Kylmäniemi said. "We do not have actual skinhead gangs, but there are a number of marginalised, unsociable young men, who idly hang around and who are often drunk. These are issues that cannot be solved by the police alone," Kylmäniemi said. The municipal social and youth services will consider measures to tackle the problem once more data has been gathered. In 2003, the police recorded 522 racist crimes in Finland, most of which took place in the south of the country, where the bulk of the immigrant population live. The most common racist crime was assault. The victims, typically black or Arab men and Somalis, were most commonly 15 to 44 years old, while the perpetrators were between the ages of 15 and 24. (Helsingin Sanomat, 3 August 2005)

Norwegian press

Asylum-seekers owe the State NOK 65 million

Norwegian authorities intend to pursue some 18,000 persons who owe the State NOK 65 million. Most of these persons are asylum-seekers who have not paid their fines or claims for damages after committing criminal acts. Statens Innkrevningsentral (SI), which is in charge of collecting the money, hope they will get access to the files of the Directorate of Immigration. Each asylum-seeker owes the State an average NOK 3,250.

(Dagsavisen, 4 August 2005)

Change of an era in Norwegian asylum policy

Op-ed by Rune Berglund Steen, Acting Secretary General, Norwegian Organisation for Asylum Seekers (NOAS) & Raymond Johansen, Secretary General, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)

The involuntary return of rejected asylum-seekers to southern Somalia is breaching the principles Norwegian asylum-policy are based on and the moderate and responsible ideals promoted by UNHCR. Norway's policy up to September 2004 was in principle to grant residence to all asylum-seekers from southern Somalia. During the summer of 2004, the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development (KRD) expressed its concern about the large number of arrivals from Somalia and indicated that one intended to examine the practice. Minister Erna Solberg subsequently instructed the Directorate of Immigration (UDI) to halt the determination of claims of asylum-seekers originating from Somalia despite that the situation in the country had worsened. Since the UDI resumed the determination of such claims in January 2004 [sic] more than 30 per cent of those coming from southern Somalia have been rejected – which is in conflict with recommendations from UNHCR. Minister Solberg has said in a press statement that “much suggest that a larger flow from Somalia is not only a manifestation of the situation in the country, but also normal migration”. Berglund Steen and Johansen claim that the majority of the rejected asylum-seekers are not ordinary migrants. Two individual examples are given: one man who is about to be returned to Mogadishu where his father, brother and uncle were killed, and another man whose wife and children were killed in the conflict. Berglund Steen and Johansen write that they expect that some of the 400 rejected asylum-seekers will be killed if they return to southern Somalia. If this happens Norwegian authorities need to be held responsible.

(Dagbladet, 1 August 2005, www.dagbladet.no)

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Danish press

Foreigners wave goodbye to Denmark

For the first time in 25 years, Denmark has experienced a period during which more foreign citizens have departed the country than have been allowed in. New figures from Statistics Denmark show that 5,298 foreign nationals left the country during the second quarter of this year, whilst just 4,983 arrived. Although the figures represent all foreign nationals with residency permits in Denmark, the rise is greatest amongst citizens from non-Western countries. There has been a sharp rise in the number of US citizens choosing to return home – 600 left Denmark during the second quarter, three times as many as during the same period last year. Morten Østergaard, the Social Liberals' spokesman on immigration, sees the development as a direct consequence of the country's strict immigration policies. "It's not just the fact that fewer and fewer are coming in, but there are many foreigners choosing to leave. If Denmark is to attract qualified manpower in the future then we're going to need a different immigration policy." The Danish People's Party's immigration spokesman Jesper Langballe said that a strict immigration policy is necessary to limit immigration from non-western countries.

(Jyllandsposten, 10 August 2005, front page, NE translation)

Private jets for asylum-seekers

It is costing the Danish state millions of kroner every year to force some rejected asylum-seekers to leave Denmark. Although the majority of asylum-seekers who are denied asylum leave the country voluntarily, 189 individuals had to be personally escorted back to their native countries by the police last year, costing taxpayers nearly DKK 21 million in privately-chartered airplanes, hotel expenses and related costs.

(Berlingske Tidene, 8 August 2005, p. 3, NE translation)

Liberal demand for loyalty oath from foreigners

If immigrants to Denmark publicly incite, or participate in, terrorist activities there should be means by which they can be stripped of their Danish citizenship. That is the latest anti-terror proposal from the ruling Liberal Party, whose policy spokesman Jens Rohde is demanding that immigrants sign a 'declaration of loyalty' when they are granted a Danish passport which would later provide possibilities for annulment of citizenship and deportation if they become involved in, or offer support for, terrorism. "Obviously, individuals' legal rights and freedom of speech have to be protected, but we're dealing with people who are willing to blow up themselves and others," Rohde said Friday.

(Politiken, 6 August 2005, front page, NE translation)

Swedish press

Refugee to witness against Lukic

"I'm shaking with joy," says Jasmina, a Bosnian refugee in Sweden, on hearing the news that Milan Lukic, wanted for war crimes in Bosnia, has been arrested in Argentina. Jasmina will now be called to the War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague to give evidence against Lukic. According to the information given to Jasmina, Milan Lukic will be transferred to The Hague within 30 days. Jasmina, who is well known in her homeland Bosnia, has led an organisation that gathers evidence and testimony to the ethnic cleansing of Bosnian Muslims that took place in Visegrad during 1992-1995. Jasmina and her family sought asylum in Sweden in 2002, after she received death threats in Bosnia. Her application was rejected twice but the Aliens Appeals Board finally granted the family temporary residency after The Hague tribunal and the UN certified that Jasmina was in mortal danger in Bosnia. Sweden has an agreement with the UN to give protection to those who witness at The Hague but with Lukic free Jasmina did not have a formal status as a witness and Sweden therefore was only able to grant the family temporary residency at that time. Jasmina has previously told newspaper Dagens Nyheter that the threats against her began in earnest after she appeared on a Chilean TV programme in 2000. "It was Lukic and those who protected him who were behind it," she says as she expresses her thanks to those who contributed to Lukic's arrest.

(Dagens Nyheter, 10 August 2005, p. 14, SPR translation)

Asylum-seekers flock to cities

The Swedish government's attempts to house asylum-seekers outside major cities have failed miserably as asylum-seekers continue to flock to the densely populated immigrant areas around Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö. Earlier in March this year the government cut housing benefits (the so-called 'ebo' allowance) for those asylum-seekers who chose not to live in apartments offered by the Migration Board in small towns. Fresh statistics show, however, that 55 per cent of asylum-seekers arrange their own accommodation. "Asylum-seekers seem to be living with relatives and friends, regardless of whether they receive high or low allowances," comments Hans Emanuelsson, chief analyst at the Migration Board.

(Dagens Nyheter, 10 August 2005, p. 11, SPR translation)

Sweden to receive Uzbek refugees

Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands have agreed to take a number of Uzbek refugees who would otherwise be returned to Uzbekistan from Kyrgyzstan. Vlatjeslav Chan, a government official from Kyrgyzstan, said Monday that the three countries had agreed to take 11 refugees who have been granted refugee status by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

(Svenska Dagbladet, 9 August 2005, p. 8, SPR translation)

Sweden stops deportations of gay Iranians

Following the execution of two homosexual men in Iran in July, the Swedish Migration Board has stopped all deportations of gay Iranian asylum-seekers. "We want to find out if there has been a change in the situation. Previously, the information has been that, formally speaking, homosexuality carries the death penalty in Iran but does not carry it in practice," says the Migration Board's Deputy Director-General Lars-Gunnar Lundh.

(Svenske Dagbladet, 6 August 2005, p. 8 & Dagens Nyheter, p. 8, SPR translation)

Christian leaders oppose deportation of homosexuals

Several Christian leaders support the demand put forward by the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights (RFSL), to stop the deportation of homosexuals that risk prosecution in their home country. A demonstration against deportation of homosexuals to Iran was organized by RFSL in Stockholm 5 August, together with the Swedish Red Cross Youth Society. Many homosexual asylum-seekers in Sweden have gone into hiding after having their applications rejected. They are too scared of returning to countries such as Iran, where homosexuals risk capital punishment, according to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

(Dagen, 5 August 2005, pp. 2-3)

New asylum proposal

The government wants to prevent refugees who do not assist in trying to prove their identity and have had their applications rejected from being allowed back to Sweden. Currently the ban on refugees returning to Sweden can only be applied to criminals and people with forged identity documents. The main reason for the proposal is to save time at the Swedish Migration Board. "It's about reducing the time it takes for each case. It takes up a huge amount of resources to investigate a person's identity, which I don't think is reasonable," says Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy Barbro Holmberg. Holmberg says that as many as 92 per cent of asylum-seekers to Sweden lack the necessary identification documents. "Most of them help to establish their identity, but there are a few that don't and this group is growing," she adds. However, the proposal has been criticised by Amnesty, who say that it punishes political asylum-seekers who cannot get hold of ID documents because of the regime in their homeland.

(Svenske Dagbladet, 5 August 2005, p. 6 & Dagens Nyheter, p. 11, SPR translation)