

Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Thursday 18 August 2005

Baltic press

Estonia

New law to give asylum-seekers more rights in Estonia

Estonia will have to offer wider protection and more benefits to asylum-seekers if the Parliament adopts a bill setting out new rules for the treatment of people fleeing war or persecution in their homeland. The bill on providing international protection to foreigners, which is based on European Union directives, secures the same social rights for asylum-seekers that are enjoyed by permanent residents of Estonia. An asylum-seeker, defined as a person under temporary protection, is entitled under the bill to state benefits, family benefits, labour market services and unemployment benefits. The current law, adopted in 1997 envisages the same benefits only for people who have obtained the status of refugee. Of the one hundred or so people who have sought asylum in Estonia over the past eight years, only two individuals from Afghanistan and two from Algeria have been granted a refugee status. "The planned changes will have social consequences on the basis of the EU law, asylum-seekers will be granted access to the Estonian labour market once they have received a residence permit," authors of the bill said. The law, which is to take effect 1 July 2006, will require extra money to be implemented, yet officials are unable to offer any definite forecasts as it is impossible to predict the number of refugees arriving in Estonia in the future.

(Estonian Review, Volume 15, No. 30, 8-14 August 2005)

Danish press

Racist radio closed down

Local Copenhagen radio station 'Radio Holger' has been officially closed down after challenging listeners to drive out or kill immigrants. The radio and TV watchdog committee revoked the station's transmission licence for three months, Wednesday, after it was found guilty of promoting racial hatred. Radio Holger will be allowed to transmit again from 16 November but will lose its licence forever if found guilty of further transgressions.

(Politiken, 18 August 2005, p. 4, NE translation)

48-hour integration summit

A group of 48 business leaders will meet with a cross-section of writers, leading imams and immigration experts at a 48 hour summit at a Roskilde hotel this week

in an innovative effort to come up with some new thinking to solve the country's integration problems. The Integration Summit'05 is an effort by the Confederation of Danish Industries (DI) to get to the bottom of why over half of all immigrants and their descendants are unemployed, despite increasing employment figures. (Jyllandsposten, 16 August 2005, p. 3, NE translation)

Dramatic fall in number of Iraqi refugees returning home

According to the Danish Refugee Aid, the number of Iraqi refugees with Danish residence permits wanting to return home has slumped to 29 this year, compared to last year's 141. All in all 250 Iraqis in Denmark have gone back to Iraq since the fall of Saddam Hussein in spring 2003, but last autumn 20 took advantage of their one year right of return to Denmark and came back, put off by the unstable and chaotic situation in the country. (Jyllandsposten, 15 August 2005, p. 4, NE translation)

Denmark did breach human rights in Ugandan refugee case

The Danish government's appeal against a ruling by the United Nations' Human Rights Committee that it violated international conventions in a deportation case involving a Ugandan has failed. The UN Committee declared on Thursday that Denmark did in fact breach human rights conventions when its National Refugee Board deported the man to his country in December 2004. The committee maintained that the Danish authorities did not give sufficient consideration to the fact that due to his past political activities in Uganda the man risked facing persecution and torture when they ordered his expulsion. The board expelled the man because of a previous conviction on narcotic charges. The Ugandan lives in Copenhagen today with wife and children with so-called tolerated asylum status. (Politiken, 12 August 2005, p. 8, NE translation)

Finnish press

Heightened border security brings 100 refusals of entry

During last week's World Championships in Athletics held in Helsinki, Finnish guard officials caught more than 20 people for attempting entry with false travel documents. Most of those caught immediately filed a petition for asylum in Finland. From another Schengen country - mainly Sweden - some 100 people attempted entry into Finland without travel documents of any kind. All of them were sent back to where they came from. In all, about 40,000 people, equalling between 5 to 12 per cent of the total flow of travellers, were randomly checked on the internal Schengen border. Normally, only travellers from outside the Schengen area are checked. "It may well be that we have to revise our estimates as to how many illegal aliens currently reside in Finland", Major Janne Piironen from the Helsinki Unit of the Gulf of Finland Coast Guard District says. In Piironen's view, the number of those travelling without proper documents was high. In the whole of last year, Finnish border guard officials caught 400 people trying to cross the external Schengen border

without appropriate documents. Now, around one hundred people were caught in the space of three weeks on the internal border. The controls support the Frontier Guard's notion that the internal Schengen border is the main artery into Finland for asylum-seekers. Based on the Schengen treaty, Finland is not able to continue inspections on the internal border, even though judging by the experiences during the World Championships the border seems to be leaking. "The findings of this three-week experience, however, may be utilised by the Ministry of the Interior and the local police forces, who are in charge of monitoring foreigners in Finland", Piironen concludes. (Helsingin Sanomat, 16 August 2005, www.hbl.fi)

Icelandic press

31 refugees arriving in Iceland

Thirty one refugees will arrive in Iceland over the next two weeks, a seven person family from Kosovo and 24 women and children from Columbia. According to newspaper Morgunbladid the Icelandic Red Cross is busy preparing for the arrivals. "Volunteers have renovated housing for the refugees and the Red Cross will provide furniture and other necessities," said Atli Vidar Thorstensen, project manager for the Red Cross. He says that the children will go to the school Auturbæjarskóli and the teenagers to the Trade School in Reykjavik. The adults will study Icelandic this winter. All the families will be assigned Icelandic support families to help them adjust to Icelandic society. Morgunbladid reports that the first refugee group came to Iceland in 1956 from Hungary. Thereafter groups came in 1959, 1979, 1982, 1990 and 1991. Refugee groups have been admitted to Iceland every year since 1996 except for the years 2002 and 2004. A total of 420 refugees have come Iceland since 1956.

(Iceland Review, 16 August 2005, <http://icelandreview.com>)

Norwegian press

Progress Party brochure sparks racism charge

Reactions were swift and strong after the populist Progress Party's (FrP) new election campaign brochure appeared, its cover featuring a man wearing a balaclava and brandishing a shotgun alongside the quote: "The perpetrator is of foreign origin...!" "For the FrP a stricter immigration policy and a stricter crime policy is about safety. (...) "Safety for people to walk the streets without fear of being raped or robbed," the brochure reads, and FrP argues they have facts on their side. Olaf Thommessen, deputy leader of the Liberal Party called the leaflet "absolutely appalling" and Nadeem Butt, head of Anti Racist Centre in Norway, said it was "not worthy of a Norwegian political party". "This is a low and places the FrP on the outermost right-wing in European politics," Thommessen said. The prominent Liberal politician compared the brochure's content with the arguments of Le Pen and Haider and believed the approach would repel voters.

Nadeem Butt particularly addressed FrP leader Carl I. Hagen's charge that no other Norwegian politicians were willing to take up the issue of immigrant criminality. "Carl I. Hagen underestimates other politicians. I have not met a single Norwegian politician who doesn't take criminality seriously, but no one over dramatizes and mixes immigration policy and crime the way Hagen and the FrP do," Butt said. PM Kjell Magne Bondevik also expressed dismay over the party literature. "The Progress Party plays on the fear of foreigners. I expected that this would happen during the election but I think it is sad," Bondevik told newspaper Dagsavisen. Hagen rejected Bondevik's accusation of spreading fear. "Bondevik is wrong here. The brochure says that very many immigrants are law-abiding citizens that do a fantastic job for Norway. But unfortunately there are all too many who are not law-abiding. Statistics show that clearly that criminality is growing among immigrants," Hagen told Dagsavisen. The FrP stance is likely based on the last figures from Statistics Norway (SSB) that calculate crime rates and ethnicity from 2002. The rate of non-Western immigrants convicted of crimes then was 30 per 1000, compared to 14 Norwegians per 1000. SSB noted that the higher percentage of young males in the immigrant population was a contributing and explanatory factor behind the high representation. "What we are focusing on is that we have had an immigration policy with a lack of integration and a lack of demands on immigrants. Many youngsters with an immigrant background end up in a route to crime ... and we think it is important to focus on that. But if others want to put a lid on the problem and not debate it, we won't solve these problems," said Per Sandberg, FrP immigration policy spokesperson. (Aftenposten, 16 August 2005, www.aftenposten.no)

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Monday 22 August 2005

Danish press

Immigrant women gear up for emancipation

The country's youngest immigrant women are well on way to turn the tide and break away from traditional gender roles. Their families, however, remain an obstacle. The key to integration of immigrants lies with the women, experts say. Encouraging Muslim women to rebel against repressive gender roles is the only way to have their families become an integral part of Danish society. Poul Christian Matthiesen, a professor of demographics and population consultant for the national statistics bureau, said that many immigrant women were doomed to isolation because they did not dare to challenge their role as housewives. Immigration consultants, however, said the rebellion was already well on way. The United Nations said in a recent population report that economic and social development in Middle Eastern countries had stagnated. The report also found that a lack of gender equality was a decisive barrier to societal development. In Denmark, less than half of all immigrants from non-Western countries are employed. For women of certain nationalities, such as Somali and Palestinian, the employment rate is less than ten percent.

(Jyllandsposten, 22 August 2005, NE translation)

Are the Danes doomed by low birth rate to become a minority in their own country?

Today Denmark's population is 5.14 million but in 40 years' time it will have fallen to 4.37 million, despite immigration, a new Copenhagen University demography survey shows. The projected drop in the overall Danish population corresponds to the population of the city of Odense. There are approximately 270,000 foreign citizens living in Denmark at the present time, a figure expected to rise to 900,000 by 2045 if this group's birth rate remains the same as in the period 1999-2003, the study, produced by Demography Assistant Professor Hans Oluf Hansen predicts, using data from Statistics Denmark as its base. The problem is that the average Danish female gives birth to only 1.75 children, where a birth rate of between 2.1-2.5 children is necessary to keep Denmark's population unchanged at its present level, the professor says. "It is thus inevitable that there will be fewer original Danes in a few years' time. Danes simply aren't having enough issue to replace the dead," Assistant Professor Hansen says. "This means that descendants of today's foreign citizens in Denmark and future immigrants could find themselves in a majority in Denmark at the turn of this century." The Danish population is seen as topping at 5.42 million in 2017 and declining inexorably from that date onwards.

(Berlingske Tidene, 21 August 2005, front & p. 4, NE translation)

Finnish press

Minister would remove income support from ill-founded asylum-seekers

Kari Rajamäki, the Finnish Minister of the Interior, was quoted as saying in the Sunday issues of Väli-Suomen sanomalehdet, a group of middle Finland newspapers, that he would remove income support from asylum-seekers with groundless applications. He added that it was a serious matter that Finland received a bigger number of asylum-seekers rejected earlier somewhere else than other EU states. "The stay of a groundless asylum-seeker who is not in need of protection could last for two months in a reception centre. That is where paying income support is money thrown down the drain," the minister told the papers. Instead of fully-fledged income support, Rajamäki would pay asylum-seekers for food, healthcare and accommodation - lest loose income support practices attract fortune hunters into the country.

(NewsRoom Finland/STT, 22 August 2005)

Icelandic press

Icelanders view immigrants in a positive light

Icelanders hold positive views of immigrants shows a recent Gallup poll done for the Icelandic Red Cross. Newspaper Morgunbladid reports that 76 per cent of those surveyed believed that their standard of living had neither increased nor decreased with increased numbers of immigrants to Iceland. 19 per cent said that their standard of living had increased somewhat to substantially while 5 per cent said that they had decreased. 52 per cent believed that immigrants had a good effect on the economy but 16 per cent believed they had a bad effect. 57 per cent of those surveyed said they were in favor of their child marrying a foreigner but 16 per cent were against it. The poll showed that recent international terrorist attacks have effected Icelander's view towards Muslims. Results from the survey show that one out of every five Icelanders do not wish to live next door to a Muslim. 1,000 Muslims are living in Iceland according to the Icelandic Broadcasting Service. The survey was done as part of an awareness campaign that the Red Cross is promoting under the slogan "Build a Better Society". The Red Cross hopes to promote discourse on how to make a good society better with with the "various changes ongoing in society including the increased number of immigrants in the country".

(Iceland Review, 22 August 2005, <http://icelandreview.com>)

Swedish press

Foreign sportsmen seeking asylum

Seven footballers from Burkina Faso and six table tennis players from Mongolia have sought asylum in Gothenburg and are waiting for their cases to be heard, newspaper Göteborgs-Posten reports. In all, 14 footballers from Burkina Faso

defected following a tournament in Denmark in mid-July and seven of them have disappeared without trace. Originally, 16 table tennis players from Mongolia disappeared following a tournament in Karlsborg – 10 are still missing.
(Dagens Nyheter, 22 August 2005, p. 7)

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Tuesday 23 August 2005

Norwegian press

Africans face steep unemployment

The unemployment rate for African immigrants in Norway is over five times higher than the rate for the country's population. Registered unemployment among immigrants decreased by 0.8 of a percent point, from 9.8 per cent in the second quarter of 2004 to 9.0 per cent in the second quarter of 2005, according to a new report from Statistics Norway (SSB). The greatest decrease was seen for immigrants from Eastern Europe, down 1.3 percent over the last year. For Norway's population as a whole unemployment declined from 3.7 per cent to 3.3 per cent. Even though the downward trend is positive, about three times as immigrants are out of work compared to the total population, and fully 17.5 per cent of African immigrants are jobless. SSB reports that part of the reason is that there is a relatively high percentage of newer refugees than in other non-Western groups, particularly refugees from Somalia, who have not had time to establish themselves in the country.

(Aftenposten, 23 August 2005)

Swedish press

No refugee amnesty

The Moderate Party and the Social Democrats yesterday said no to calls from the other parties for a refugee amnesty. The Parliamentary Committee on Social Insurance had called for the extra meeting yesterday to ensure that the Parliament will have time to vote on the closure of the Aliens Appeals Board 14 September. A new procedure will be introduced by 31 March 2006, whereby decisions may be appealed to migration appeals tribunals. The Administrative Court of Appeal in Stockholm will act as the higher appeals tribunal. To ensure that the courts are not flooded with a backlog of cases, the Liberal Party, the Christian Democrats, the Centre Party, the Greens and the Left Party have called for a general amnesty for asylum-seekers in Sweden.

(Dagens Nyheter, 23 August 2005, p. 11 & Svenska Dagbladet, p. 8, SPR translation)

“Legalise abortions for foreign women”

The Social Democratic Women in Sweden are calling for a change to Sweden's abortion act so that it will be legal for Swedish hospitals to carry out abortions on women from countries where abortions are banned. Doctors in the county of Jönköping are facing legal action after it emerged that they had carried out

abortions on women from abroad. Swedish law currently only allows the right to free abortion for women who are Swedish citizens, registered as resident in the country or asylum-seekers.

(Dagens Nyheter, 23 August 2005, p. 11, SPR translation)

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Thursday 25 August 2005

Danish press

Integration effort for kids

Copenhagen politicians are hoping to put a stop to 'black' or 'white' kindergartens and day-care centres, that have a predominance of either ethnic Danish children or ethnic minorities, by providing immigrant children with the right to attend centres that are mostly 'Danish.' However, whilst Copenhagen Town Hall believes that this is the key to better integration, parent organisations claim that parents will lose their freedom of choice.

(Jyllandsposten, 25 August 2005, NE translation)

Norwegian press

Asylum-seeker talked down after nine hours in mast

An Iranian asylum-seeker was finally persuaded to come down from a 25-meter (82-foot) mobile telephone mast in the county of Østfold. Police negotiators managed to get the man to come down of his own free will after over nine and a half hours. At around 11 a.m. on Wednesday police were notified that two asylum-seekers, a 21-year-old Iranian and an Albanian, living at Nordbybråten asylum center in Våler, had scaled the mast and were threatening to jump. The pair had been twice rejected for residency applications. The Albanian descended at around 4:30 p.m. after requests from police. Later in the afternoon Østfold police had a new problem when 20-30 sympathizers watching the drama decided to lie down and block highway 115 in a support protest. The group disbanded and returned to the local asylum center at 5:16 p.m., in accordance with urging by police.

(Aftenposten, 25 August 2005)

Swedish press

Sweden refuses to take Guantanamo detainees

The Swedish government has rejected plans to grant asylum to 15 prisoners being held at the Guantanamo Bay naval base in Cuba. The prisoners were formally released in 2003 but are still in detention since the United States does not wish to send them back to their home country China. According to newspaper Washington Post, some 20 countries have rejected proposals that they grant the 15 Chinese Uighur detainees asylum. The men cannot be returned to China for fear of torture.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 25 August 2005, p. 10 & Dagens Nyheter, p. 11, SPR translation)

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Friday 26 August 2005

Norwegian press

“All terrorists are Muslims”

Progress Party leader Carl I. Hagen sees the fight against terrorism as a fight against Islam. “I know that not all Muslims are terrorists, but we have seen that all terrorists are Muslims,” Hagen told Aftenposten after an appearance on TV 2 on Thursday, referring to the attacks in London and New York. Hagen said that comparisons to Northern Ireland and Basque terrorism in Spain were “national conflicts” that did not fit into the picture. On TV 2's program Hagen said his party wanted tougher measures to battle terrorism, and said that “we must expel people who resist western values and encourage terrorism”. Hagen said that measures must be taken against those who spread fear and rejected the idea that his stance might do the same. “No, no absolutely not. We fight for democracy and freedom of speech,” Hagen said. The head of SOS-Racism, Trond Thorbjørnsen, believes that Hagen runs the risk of standing accused of fearmongering if such legislation is passed. “It is peculiar that a law and order party distinguishes between terrorism in internal Christian conflicts and terrorism in international conflicts where Muslims are involved. This doesn't matter much to the victims,” Thorbjørnsen said.

(Aftenposten, 26 July 2005)

Police want refugee cooperation

Police want asylum-seekers to be obliged to notify authorities of their location. About 2,000 asylum-seekers have disappeared from reception centers in Norway so far this year, and authorities have no clue as to where they are. Now police want their workload cut, and want asylum seekers to be duty bound to report their location, Norwegian Broadcasting (NRK) reports. The problem is especially acute with asylum-seekers who have had their application rejected, and police hope that such regulations would make it easier to carry out deportation orders.

(Aftenposten, 26 July 2005)

Swedish press

Sweden believes in criticised non-torture guarantees

Despite massive international criticism the Swedish government says it still believes in guarantees from countries promising that they will not torture deportees. Both human rights organizations and the United Nations Committee on Torture have criticized Sweden for sending two Egyptians to Cairo in late 2001, after promises from Egypt they would not be abused. Several reports have

uncovered evidence of torture, which has led Sweden to demand an official investigation by the Egyptian authorities. Critics have said the Swedish authorities have been naïve, both in accepting the guarantees in the first place, and then for expecting an investigation from a regime that routinely practices torture. Most observers had thought the experience would have led the Swedish government to change its position. But Swedish Radio News has discovered that instead, the government has recently sought to get other members of the Council of Europe to accept such guarantees and expand the system. The disclosure came in Sweden's official response to the UN Torture Committee. (SRInternational, 25 August 2005, www.sr.se)

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Nordic and Baltic Headlines

Wednesday 31 August 2005

Danish press

Immigrant crime a major issue says candidate for mayor

The Liberal Party's candidate for mayor of Copenhagen, Søren Pind, is trying to make immigrant crime a major theme of the upcoming election campaign by proposing a "three strikes and you're out" policy – foreign residents who do not have a Danish passport should be deported after committing three crimes. The proposal is part of a major integration initiative for Copenhagen to be laid out by Pind today that proposes strict reforms to halt ghettos, criminality and get immigrants off welfare. "Copenhageners are becoming more and more fearful of walking the streets. The only thing that works is a policy of zero tolerance," says Pind.

(Politiken, 29 August 2005, NE translation)

Swedish press

Amnesty issue causes friction

The government and alliance parties sat down yesterday evening to begin discussions and negotiations on the budget. Newspaper Dagens Nyheter reports that the issue of an amnesty for refugees is already causing strife and the government is being accused of exaggerating the costs of an amnesty. The Left and Green parties said that none of the points that the parties need to agree on have been dealt with yet. Both parties were most outraged at the figure of SEK 8 billion, which the Government Offices announced would be the cost of a refugee amnesty. "It's definitely a way of consciously obstructing the discussion," says Kalle Larsson, Left Party spokesman on refugee issues. "I'm convinced that the figures are hugely inflated," he adds. The Green Party's Gustav Fridolin is equally critical and points out that an amnesty would also mean savings as it would no longer be necessary to investigate all the cases and more people would be able to get legal employment.

(Dagens Nyheter, 31 August 2005, p. 13, SPR translation)

Segregation a threat to democracy

The government's discrimination investigator Masoud Kamali presents his report today and writes on newspaper Dagens Nyheter's debate page that increased ethnic segregation is a direct threat to democracy. He makes several proposals to tackle the problem. Masoud Kamali writes that the ethnic and religious segregation that exists in Sweden is not just limited to housing, but also impacts on professional life and social relations. The causes must therefore be sought

amongst other people, not just those in the segregated groups. His work with focus groups has revealed a high level of frustration, suspicion and sometimes despair amongst people from marginalized groups in Malmö, Gothenburg and Stockholm. Police are accused of targeting residents in certain areas and of showing no interest in dealing with reports of crimes. The Swedish mass media is also criticized for its negative images of people with a foreign background, immigration, the suburbs and the home countries of immigrants, which many feel merely gives fuel to racism. Those interviewed also talk of a feeling of powerless, that they have no influence in terms of the decisions that affect their everyday lives. Masoud Kamali makes a number of proposals as a result of his investigation, one of which is the establishment of a citizens' council comprising people living in marginalized areas. The council would be a mouthpiece for discussion with those authorities that are responsible for regional development, welfare, the labour market, housing, education etc. Another proposal is that a new law be introduced to offer those living in segregated areas an advantage when applying for work with equal merits. In order for this to work, the National Agency for Higher Education ('*Högskoleverket*') must develop ways of comparing Swedish and foreign qualifications.

(Dagens Nyheter, 31 August 2005, p. 6, SPR translation)

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