

Nordic and Baltic Headlines

Thursday 1 September 2005

Danish press

Liberals support Pind proposal

Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Immigration Rikke Hvilshøj says she is in agreement with Søren Pind's proposal to tighten legislation for immigrant criminals, but would not go as far as adopting his 'three strikes' strategy. In his campaign to become mayor of Copenhagen, Pind has proposed a United States style 'three strikes and you're out' policy – immigrants with foreign passports who commit three crimes should be subject to automatic deportation. Hvilshøj says that the Liberal Party will propose its own change in the law when parliament reconvenes, containing an alternative threat of deportation. Immigrants will be given a 'yellow card' when they break the law the first time and then deported if they offend again. A working party group has been convened to lay out which offences should lead to deportation.

(Berlingske Tidene, 31 August 2005, p. 5, NE translation)

Swedish press

Orback proposes mentor program

On newspaper Svenska Dagbladet's focus page today, Minister for Integration, Metropolitan and Gender Equality issues Jens Orback proposes that Sweden should introduce a mentoring program to help integrate immigrants into society. The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) reported earlier this year that Sweden has the most generous attitude in Europe to immigration. Only 14 per cent of Swedes are negative to immigration – the lowest figure in Europe. In addition, a report on the general public's attitude towards immigration that will be published today shows that 53 per cent of Swedes are prepared to help immigrants integrate and that 20 per cent are prepared to become mentors for newly arrived immigrants. Jens Orback calls on political associations in Sweden to make the most of this goodwill and writes that the government will be proposing in its 2006 budget bill that a number of counties work together so that individuals, organizations, authorities and businesses all help new immigrants to settle.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 1 September 2005, p. 5, SPR translation)

Public Information

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Nordic and Baltic Headlines

Tuesday 6 September 2005

Danish press

Attacks linked to race

The police received many more reports of racially motivated personal attacks and damage to property during the first eight months of this year compared to the same period in 2004, as figures rose by over 100 per cent, from 23 to 48. Incidents include young immigrants who have been refused entry to discotheques, desecration of Muslim burial sites and attacks on immigrant taxi-drivers.

(Berlingske Tidende, p. 4 & Politiken, p. 5, 6 September 2005, NE translation)

Integration debate dominates Mayor race

Candidates for Mayor of Copenhagen have been warned that using campaign rhetoric such as 'Three strikes and you're out' and 'Stop black ghettos' could inflame racial tension in the capital. 'It's an extremely aggressive and populist tone that we know from Danish People's Party leader Pia Kjaersgaard,' says integration consultant Fahmy Almajid. 'I realise that Copenhagen is experiencing massive problems with integration and young immigrant criminals, but this isn't the solution.' Liberal Party candidate Søren Pind, who stated in a full-page advert in free daily newspaper *MetroXpress* yesterday that '82 per cent of juvenile crime in Copenhagen is committed by immigrants or descendants of immigrants' rejected the criticism. 'I am fully aware that there is a difference between immigrants, but there is a hard core that we have to crack down on. Sometimes you have to be cruel to be kind.' Social Democrat candidate Ritt Bjerregaard denounced the advert and accused Mr Pind of 'speculating in people's fears and insecurity.'

(Berlingske Tidende, 6 September 2005, p.5, NE translation)

Criminal deportees refuse to leave

Murderers, rapists, arsonists and other criminal immigrants who have received deportation orders are often allowed to remain here for years after refusing to return to their native countries. 39 foreign criminals sentenced to deportation are currently detained at Sandholm refugee centre, a form of 'halfway house' for those who refuse to be deported but can no longer be kept in prison, where they receive food and board, are free to move around and are only required to report to the police once a week. However, they receive no money and a spokesman for the Police's Immigration Department said he is in no doubt that some of them are involved in some form of criminality to support themselves financially. Birgit Kofod Olsen, head of department at the *Institute for Human Rights*, calls it a 'serious

problem.' 'What we are doing is forcing these people into a life of crime. They exist in a no-mans land and at the same time present a major risk to society because they're so desperate.' A Danish People's Party spokesman said that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs could put pressure on those countries where the criminals come from by refusing their diplomats a visa if they refuse to take their own citizens back.

(Berlingske Tidende, 5 September 2005. NE translation)

Norwegian Press

Krekar threatens Norway

Norway's most controversial refugee has lodged a threat against the country that has hosted him and his family for the past 14 years. Mullah Krekar calls his possible deportation "an offense" that shouldn't go unpunished. In an interview with Arab TV station Al-Jazeera, Krekar vowed he will never go along with a deportation order issued by Norwegian authorities.

Cabinet Minister Erna Solberg initially ordered him sent out of the country in February 2003, calling Krekar a threat to national security. Krekar fled Iraq in the early 1990s and landed in Norway in 1991. He later, however, started travelling back to northern Iraq, where he played a key role in building up the guerrilla group known as Ansar al-Islam.

Now Krekar claims he faces torture and a death sentence if the Norwegian authorities send him back to Iraq. He told Al-Jazeera, therefore, that "everyone must know" that a deportation to Iraq "is an offense that shouldn't be made without punishment." Krekar wasn't specific, however, about what kind of punishment he thinks Norway should receive if a court upholds Solberg's deportation order. In the interview, Krekar also seemed to attack Solberg personally. "How can a politician play with my life to satisfy her adolescent political visions," he asked.

Krekar's Norwegian defense attorney Brynjar Meling downplayed the significance of Krekar's claims in the Al-Jazeera interview, saying they didn't amount to threats and contained nothing new. He declined further comment, though, until he had conferred with his client. Solberg, meanwhile, responded that "no one can threaten their way into obtaining permanent residence in Norway." She maintains that a new constitution and government in Iraq, with guarantees that Krekar won't be executed, are expected to clear the way for Krekar's expulsion. (Aftenposten, 6 September 2005)

Swedish press

No Place in Malmö Schools for Underground Kids

The authorities in the southern city of Malmö have decided that the children of underground asylum-seekers will no longer be allowed in schools.

The official who chaired the meeting says any other decision would have violated the law, but in reporting the story, the newspaper "Sydsvenska Dagbladet" says the decision violated the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child, which says all children have a right to education.

Another official says despite the ruling, individual principals will be allowed to let in such children on their own discretion. But a member of a group working with asylum seekers in Malmö says the new ruling will give principals an excuse to exclude the underground children.

In the last year nine out of ten asylum seekers have been refused permission to live in Sweden, and thousands have chosen to go underground to stay here.
(Sveriges Radio, 5 September 2005)

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Nordic and Baltic Headlines

Monday 12 September 2005

Norwegian press

Iraq wants Krekar extradited

The Iraqi Minister of Justice Abdel Hussein Shandal is seeking Mullah Krekar's extradition, claiming he is wanted for alleged crimes committed in Iraq. The Minister said that Krekar "is an Iraqi citizen and should appear in court" for alleged crimes in the Kurdish areas of northern Iraq. "We're building a democratic state, and he will have the right to defend himself and have an attorney," Shandal said. Shandal also claimed that Krekar would not face death penalty if he is sent to Iraq. He also promised that Krekar would not be extradited to any other countries if he returns to Iraq. Krekar has previously been sought by officials in Jordan for other alleged crimes. Shandal said Krekar is suspected of terrorist activity and is charged with being responsible for a string of offenses and terrorist attacks in Northern Iraq when he led guerrilla group Ansar al-Islam. Shandal also charged that Krekar has motivated and encouraged Ansar al-Islam to make new terrorist attacks within Iraq while he's been in exile in Norway. Krekar is fighting his possible deportation, and recently made remarks that were widely interpreted as threats to Norway if he is sent back. Krekar denied he has encouraged Ansar al-Islam to attack the Iraqi government. "My case is with Norway," he told 'TV2 Nettavisen'. "For three years now, I haven't done anything against the Iraqi government", Krekar said.

(Aftenposten, 9 September 2005)

Finnish press

Finns resist employment of foreigners

A survey commissioned by Finnish newspaper Aamulehti published Monday, shows that the majority of the Finnish people believe that a foreign worker should not be employed, if there is a Finnish worker who could be taken on instead. According to the survey conducted by 'Taloustutkimus', 74 per cent object to the employment of a foreigner and 21 per cent support it. The survey also revealed that almost 60 per cent of the Finns do not consider Finland to face a serious labour problem, which requires foreign labour to resolve. Supporters of the Green Party expressed most belief in the labour problem. Higher income earners viewed a labour problem as more likely than lower income earners. 1,011 Finnish persons age 15-79 participated in the survey. The margin error is three per cent in both directions.

(STT, 12 September 2005, www.stt.fi)

Thousands in demonstrations for Refugee Amnesty

Last Saturday, a Swedish network called “Refugee Amnesty 2005” – composing of 110 religious and political organisations and civil societies – organised demonstrations in some 30 Swedish cities in favor of a refugee amnesty. As many as 5,000 people gathered only in Stockholm. The demonstrations were follow ups to the so called “Easter Appeal” that was signed by 157,000 people a couple of months ago. The network demands amnesty for all asylum-seekers who are waiting for a decision and for those that have gone into hiding after having their asylum application rejected. The background to the demand is that the Aliens Appeals Board will be replaced by three courts in March 2006, and should ideally start working from scratch. The refugee amnesty is a hot issue in the Parliament, prior to the budget negotiations this week. According to the government, an amnesty would include some 34,000 people. Both the Social Democratic Party and the Conservative Party oppose a refugee amnesty, and believe each case should be proceeded individually. The other five parties in the Parliament have made an official proposition stating that all refugees that have applied for asylum before the 31 December 2004 and are still waiting a decision, or have gone into hiding should be given permanent residence permit. The Parliament will come to a conclusion on the matter by Wednesday.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 11 September 2005, p. 10 & Dagens Nyheter, p. 9)

Deported Egyptian’s lawyer criticises Sweden

Lawyer Hafez Abu Saeda, who represents one of the two Egyptian men deported from Sweden, has criticized Sweden for its actions in the case of his client. “No other EU country apart from Sweden has so far deported people to Egypt, which is a country known for its systematic use of torture,” says Hafez Abu Saeda in an interview with newspaper Dagens Nyheter. Saeda is also secretary general of the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights. His client Ahmed Agiza is currently serving a 15-year sentence in a prison just outside Cairo as one of Egypt’s 23,000 political prisoners. He arrived here after being deported from Sweden in a brutal manner together with another Egyptian seeking asylum, Mohammed al Zery. Agiza was later convicted by an Egyptian military court for being a leading member of the terrorist organization Islam Jihad. Agiza had already previously been convicted in his absence back in 1999. “That conviction was then used by the Egyptian authorities as an argument to get him deported. But the fact that Sweden went along with it was very unexpected, and a clear breach of human rights,” says Hafez Abu Saeda. He adds that he thinks Sweden acted in this way due to pressure from the USA. Sweden was promised by Egypt that there would be a proper trial and that Agiza would not be subjected to torture. However, Hafez Abu Saeda says that neither of these promises were kept, but that a new trial would be a way for the authorities to live up to the agreement. He has also proposed that Agiza be allowed to serve his sentence in Sweden and be near his wife and children.

(Dagens Nyheter, 11 September 2005, p. 26, SPR translation)

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Nordic and Baltic Headlines

Tuesday 13 September 2005

Finnish press

Finnish unions endorse working immigrants

The Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions (SAK) likes to see foreigners coming into Finland to work. Indeed, SAK thinks work-motivated immigration ought to be the cornerstone of Finnish immigration policy. Immigration must, however, be augmented in a controlled fashion in order to ensure the just treatment of foreigners coming into the country, SAK maintains. The Finnish labour market must not be divided into sheep and goats. SAK gave its statement on Tuesday on the June report of the working group presided by Provincial Governor Rauno Saari. The report is to serve as the basis for the Government immigration policy programme. SAK says the views of the working group are correct, but finds the report too general in nature. The sinking numbers of working-age Finns on the horizon gives reason to consider also actively enhancing immigration. SAK points out that, so far, only one immigrant in ten has come to Finland first and foremost to work. However, increased immigration cannot be the primary solution to the challenges lying ahead of Finnish employment. Neither may immigration policy weaken the chances of people living in Finland to find work. SAK sees as problematic in the draft programme the fact that it pays too little attention to foreigners in temporary employment. Annually, there are tens of thousands of such persons present in Finland. "It is especially temporary work that often is coupled with substandard wages, work discrimination and the black economy. It is the experience of the National Bureau of Investigation and trade unions that cross border employment has ties to even financial crime," the statement adds.

(STT, 12 September 2005, www.stt.fi)

Swedish press

Government makes concessions on amnesty

The budget negotiations are now hanging on the conditions for those asylum-seekers who have children. The Green and Left parties have previously demanded a general amnesty as a condition for them supporting the budget, and now it appears that the government is prepared to make some concessions on the issue. However, newspaper SvD writes that late last night Green Party spokesman Peter Eriksson was skeptical over the government's latest offer. Negotiations are continuing this morning. The Social Democrats have said that apathetic children and those who cannot be sent back due to difficulties in their home country will be able to stay in Sweden. This would mean, for example, that

Iraqi and Somali refugees who have had their applications rejected would be allowed to stay. These concessions will most likely be an agreement reached alongside the budget, as the government still does not consider the issue to be a matter for budget negotiations. Newspaper DN writes that it is possible for the government to put forward the budget on its own and still get a majority in the Parliament, but that it is embarrassing that the socialist bloc is split in the face of an increasingly united non-socialist bloc. However, Minister for Finance Pär Nuder is optimistic. "I am absolutely convinced that this budget will win the Parliament's approval," he said. In a related article Liberal Party spokesman on refugee issues Mauricio Rojas writes about the need for the non-socialist alliance to be united in calling for an amnesty. He says that the Moderates must change their stance on the amnesty if they really believe what they are themselves saying in relation to growth and employment. They should not be fearing people who seek asylum but rather welcoming them.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 13 September 2005, p. 5 & Dagens Nyheter, p. 9, SPR translation)

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Nordic and Baltic Headlines

Wednesday 14 September 2005

Baltic press

Latvia

Vike-Freiberga congratulates 100,000th naturalized citizen

President Vaira Vike-Freiberga on Thursday congratulated the 100,000th naturalized citizen. Deniss Rostrovskis, 17, became the 100,000th person to naturalize in Latvia. In her congratulation speech, Vike-Freiberga encouraged all naturalized citizens to feel a kinship with Latvia and to become more active members of society. "You have become Latvian citizens – active in your actions, in your intentions and in your choice. As the head of state, I am congratulating you on this, and I want to say that it is a wise and right choice because now you have the same rights as other citizens, regardless of the number of generations this citizenship has been passed on," the president emphasized. "I appeal to all of you to acknowledge for the duration of your citizenship that now you belong to this state as citizens and it belongs to you, and from now on it depends on you how mighty or powerful it will be, or how pitiable," the president said.

(The Baltic Times, 10 September 2005)

Danish press

Investment needed to stop ghettos

Liberal Party mayors have accused Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen of failing to live up to his campaign promise to stop ghettos being formed throughout the country. Mayor of Århus Louise Gade has now challenged the PM to use some of the DKK 2 billion from the National Construction Fund that is specifically set aside to combat ghettos. "The government has come up with some good initiatives but has refused to spend any money on them. Things are going in the wrong direction," she says. The party's candidate for mayor of Copenhagen, Søren Pind, says that the government should put a stop on immigrants being placed in public housing projects until the ratio of ethnic Danes and immigrants reflects the balance of society. "Major areas of publicly funded housing in Copenhagen are being turned into ghettos. Where does it say that immigrants have the same right to an apartment as Danish citizens?"

(Berlingske Tidene, 14 September 2004, front page, NE translation)

Swedish press

No Green budget support – fights for refugee children

The government managed to get the Left Party on side when it presented the autumn budget in connection with the opening of the Swedish parliament Tuesday. But the Green Party is threatening to put forward its own budget motion. “The offer that is currently on the table is not good enough when it comes to refugee children,” says Green Party spokesman Peter Eriksson. The Left Party admitted defeat over the refugee amnesty but leader Lars Ohly said that they would continue to fight for it.

(Dagens Nyheter, 14 September 2005, pp. 10-11 & Svenska Dagbladet, p. 7, SPR translation)

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Nordic and Baltic Headlines

Thursday 15 September 2005

Danish press

Centre-left immigration dispute blows up again

Despite efforts by the Social Democrats and the Social Liberals to put a lid on their long-standing disagreement over immigration policy, Social Liberal leader Marianne Jelved has reopened the wounds by setting out her demands for the foundation of any future coalition agreement between the two centre-left parties. In the run up to the Social Liberals' party congress this weekend, Jelved says that it would be impossible to enter government alongside the Social Democrats without a pre-agreed immigration policy. "Those Social Democrats who believe that we can just isolate issues which we don't agree on are completely wrong," says Jelved. "We disagree on immigration and it has to be resolved. Two centrist parties can't fight an election on two different policies." The Social Democrats have consistently maintained that the Social Liberals will have no influence on immigration policy in an S/R coalition.

(Jyllandsposten, 15 September 2005, NE translation)

Swedish press

No to refugee amnesty

After a six-hour long, emotionally charged debate yesterday the Swedish Parliament said no to a general amnesty for refugees living in hiding in Sweden or those awaiting a rejection. Newspaper Svenska Dagbladet writes that calls for the Social Democrats and Moderates to abandon the party line fell on deaf ears. The figures were 134 for and 172 against an amnesty. Five MPs declined to vote. Seven MPs did however go against their party's line, including Moderate Göran Lindblad. "I don't think a general amnesty is the best solution. But it's better than what the committee majority proposed. The Swedish State has failed and mistreated these people," said Lindblad. Opponents of the amnesty maintained that it was a breach of the fundamental principles of the right to asylum. "The right to asylum is a basic human right. And human rights are individual. Collective decisions are a breach of that right," said Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy Barbro Holmberg. Holmberg's speech was interrupted by activists in the public gallery who sang a parody of the national anthem, while outside the people affected by the decision were protesting. "They will execute me and my husband if we are sent back to Iran. We are both active in the opposition movement," said one woman who has been in Sweden illegally for the past 3 years.

(Dagens Nyheter, 15 September 2005, pp. 8-9 & Svenska Dagbladet, p. 10, SPR translation)

Uzbek refugees to Sweden

Eleven Uzbeks who fled their country in May when the government attacked opposition will be sent to Western Europe from Kyrgyzstan. According to the Kyrgyz authorities they will be received by Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands. The Kyrgyz government is refraining from sending them back to Uzbekistan after pressure from the UN, which maintained that they would be subjected to torture if they were sent back.

(Dagens Nyheter, 15 September 2005, p. 22, SPR translation)

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Friday 16 September 2005

Swedish press

Underground kids can go to school

Two days after the Swedish parliament rejected a blanket amnesty to those who have been denied asylum and have gone underground, the government has announced legislation to give underground refugee children the right to attend school. At present municipalities are free to set their own policies, which means such children can go to school in Gothenburg but are not allowed to do so in Malmö. Swedish Radio News reports that until the new law is passed, the government will be providing economic compensation to those municipalities who are allowing the children of underground asylum-seekers to go to school. Five parties in parliament supported the blanket amnesty, but the two largest – the ruling Social Democrats and the opposition conservative Moderates – were opposed and held a comfortable majority.

(SR International, 16 September 2005, www.sr.se)

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Monday 19 September 2005

Danish press

DF marks 10th anniversary

The Danish People's Party (DF), the far-right, ultra nationalistic, anti-immigration ally of the ruling Liberal-Conservative coalition government, celebrated the 10th anniversary of its foundation at a weekend congress in Odense. In an atmosphere of euphoria, Pia Kjaersgaard, the DF leader, addressed the party faithful, slamming the opposition Social Democrats and the European Union and demanding the setting of a stop to immigration as her DF's price for supporting government reforms to the welfare system. "We in the Danish People's Party want to set a strict ceiling on the number of new foreigners entering Denmark, the issue is directly connected to the welfare question," Kjaersgaard told the 815 delegates at the congress. She also demanded guarantees from the government that EU would not meddle in Denmark's upcoming welfare reforms. A government Welfare Commission is due at the end of the year to submit its proposals for a reform of Denmark's streamlined womb-to-tomb social welfare system. DF is Denmark's third biggest party with 24 seats in parliament, 13.3 per cent support among the electorate and 7,337 members.

(Jyllandsposten 18 September 2005, p. 4; Berlingske Tidene, p. 7;
& Jyllandsposten 19 September 2005, p. 4 + most Danish newspapers)

Swedish press

"Hidden refugee children" to go to school

The Social Democrat Party, the Left Party and the Green Party agree that Sweden's municipalities should receive SEK 50 million as an incentive to allow refugee children in hiding who have been refused asylum to attend school. The money has been earmarked in the budget to be tabled tomorrow and a working group with representatives from the three parties will now discuss how to introduce legislation to this effect by the autumn of 2006. Left Party leader Lars Ohly is satisfied with the agreement. "This follows the children's convention. It is not the children who choose to hide and all children have the right to go to school. It is therefore important that the hidden children can do so without having to be afraid of being collected by the police," he says. The police will not be allowed to go to schools to collect the children or use them to find their parents. Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy Barbro Holmberg admits that there is a danger that legislation could send the hidden families a double message. On the one hand they are to return to their homelands. On the other hand their children will be allowed to go to school. "However, this has to be weighed against the

children's need for structure and support and that they do not lag behind in their learning," Holmberg says.

(Dagens Nyheter, 17 September 2005, p. 10 & Svenska Dagbladet, p. 12, SPR translation)

Iranian risks deportation despite torture risk

The Swedish Aliens Appeals Board has ruled that an Iranian refugee who played a role in revealing the circumstances of Canadian photojournalist Zahra Kazemi's death in Iran two years ago is to be deported with his family. The man himself risks torture in Iran, reports newspaper Dagens Nyheter. Rabi Nikoo played an important role in revealing the circumstances surrounding Zahra Kazemi's death. He was the man who gave Doctor Sharam Azam, the man who informed the Canadian and German press of Kazemi's torture, the contacts and channels he needed to prove his credibility. "What he has done has had more significance than what I did. The Iranian regime is angrier with him than with me. It was thanks to his interview and his opportunities to spread the information that I succeeded," says Sharam Azam to DN.

(Dagens Nyheter, 17 September 2005, p. 12, SPR translation)

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Wednesday 21 September 2005

Danish press

No passport for torture victims

Many torture victims have been denied citizenship in Denmark as a consequence of new guidelines introduced by the parliament's naturalisation committee, without informing the public. The new rules mean that torture victims who are so psychologically damaged that they are unable to learn Danish are now systematically denied citizenship on the grounds of language requirements.

(DR online, 21 September 2005, NE translation)

Norwegian press

Better care for asylum-seeking children

County governors will get more responsibility to take care of under aged asylum-seeker children who live alone at reception centres. The way these children have been treated previously has been widely criticised. The decision to remove the supervision responsibility is made by the Directorate of Immigration (UDI). Hordaland was the first county trying out the change of supervision responsibility, which is the first step towards a permanent and nationwide arrangement, newspaper Aftenposten writes. The purpose is to ensure that unaccompanied minor asylum-seekers receive the range of services that the state has decided on, says State Secretary of Local Government and Regional Development Cathrine Bretzeg. The supervision of children at childcare institutions is already placed by the county governors. UDI believes it is time to also place the supervision responsibility for children at reception centres at the same place. Save the Children thinks the supervision of under aged children who live alone at reception centres has been unsatisfactory so far.

(Aftenposten, 21 September 2005)

Swedish press

Most refugee children will be able to stay

In the budget talks, the government's alliance parties, the Left Party and the Greens, had to drop their demand for a general refugee amnesty. Instead the three parties have agreed on "the intention" that "most of the children will be able to stay" in Sweden. The question is what this actually means, comments newspaper Svenska Dagbladet. Children and families with children who have

been refused asylum but who cannot be deported because of the situation in their home countries will have their applications for residency in Sweden reviewed again. An estimated 16,000 people will be granted a new hearing, and consideration will be given to the children's social situation, their ties to Swedish society and how long they have lived in the country. Apathetic refugee children have been given a guarantee that they may remain in Sweden. The Migration Board has not yet been given a mandate to review cases, nor any guidelines. These must first be discussed between the government and the alliance parties. Only then will it be possible to say whether more children really will be able to stay in Sweden, according to Jana Valik, Director General of the Migration Board. "We have received an indication that attention should be given to the children's situation, but also that each case should be looked at individually. Everything rests on the mandate," she says. The Green Party is saying that the government has finally assumed responsibility for children and families in hiding to stay. Green spokesperson Peter Eriksson said yesterday "nobody needs to hide any longer." However, the Left Party considers there are no guarantees that this is the case. "The hidden children cannot go out and play without the risk of the police coming to take them. The police have the same orders as before," says Left MP Ulla Hoffmann. The new rules governing asylum hearings will be introduced at the beginning of April next year, when the Aliens Appeals Board will be replaced by three courts.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 21 September 2005, SPR translation & Stockholm City, p. 3)

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Friday 23 September 2005

Danish press

Heightened citizenship demands

It has become more difficult for immigrants who cannot speak Danish to get citizenship in Denmark, but it is not impossible says the Social Democrats' spokesperson on naturalisation, Anne-Marie Meldgaard, who has worked closely with the government on language requirements for immigrants. The Institute for Human Rights has accused the parliament's naturalisation committee of discrimination for tightening requirements so much that torture victims who are unable to learn Danish are rejected out of hand. However, Meldgaard says that the committee has the ability to grant dispensation in some cases. "We have not closed the doors entirely. Some who have suffered drastic injuries, such as brain damage, can still become citizens, as can those who are dyslexic."

(Politiken, 23 September 2005, p. 8, NE translation)

Integration divides Danes

Half of the Danish population has no interest in meeting immigrants or in actively making an effort to improve integration. That is the conclusion of a new survey commissioned by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) which reveals that 45 per cent of ethnic Danes say it is 'highly improbable' that they at any time in the future will take the initiative to contact a person with an immigrant background. However, at the same time, 13 per cent of Danes, or one-in eight, say they are eager to come into contact with someone from an ethnic minority. 47 per cent of all immigrants say that they will 'most probably' try to initiate some form of contact with Danes and 82 per cent consider themselves to be 'integration friendly.'

(Politiken, 22 September 2005, p. 7, NE translation)

Swedish press

New chance for Iranian journalist

The Iranian journalist Rabi Nikoo who has criticised the regime in his home country and whom the Aliens Appeals Board wants to send back to Iran has received strong support both in Sweden and abroad. The Board now feels that there are new circumstances that may mean he can stay. Newspaper Svenska Dagbladet writes that many of Nikoo's relatives have been imprisoned and killed. "It is impossible for me to even think about returning to Iran. I would be arrested, interrogated and tortured and perhaps die under torture, like my brother did," says Nikoo. So far this has not been sufficient reason for the Board to allow him

to stay in Sweden. But after a flood of support both from human rights organisations in Sweden and abroad the Board may now change its mind. "His need for protection can only have increased after the recent attention. I do not want to anticipate a decision from the chair but all the media exposure could mean that a new application would be looked on favorably," says Carl-Otto Schéle of the Aliens Appeals Board.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 23 September 2005, p. 14, SPR translation)

Sexual orientation and gender grounds for asylum

According to a government proposal to the Swedish parliament, persecution due to sexual orientation or gender-related violence will be included as legal grounds to seek refugee status. Currently, individuals who face possible persecution for these reasons are protected and receive permanent residency in Sweden. With the new proposal, these individuals would be granted refugee status, thereby expediting the process of seeking Swedish citizenship.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 23 September 2005, p. 22; Dagens Nyheter, p. 9; & Stockholm City, p. 20)

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Monday 26 September 2005

Baltic press

Latvia

Asylum-seekers allowed to apply for work permits

From now on, asylum-seekers in Latvia will be issued work permits until such time the final decision concerning granting the status of a refugee or alternative status is made. This has been stated by the amendments to the regulations regarding the work permits issued to foreign citizens passed by the Latvian government. Until recently, such work permits were only issued to those refugees and persons who had been granted alternative status. The amendments prepared by the Ministry of Welfare will complement the regulations by including the instructions of the European Union directives stating the minimum standards for approval of persons searching for asylum, eliminating also the shortcomings discovered in the course of application of the regulations. As of now, foreign citizens, who are students of educational establishments accredited in the Republic of Latvia or full time students, will be issued work permits only on the condition that the number of working hours stated in the employment agreement does not exceed 20 hours a week. Based on the data of the Citizenship and Immigration Board, 141 persons have sought asylum in Latvia since 1998, of which nine persons have been granted alternative status.

(Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Weekly News Summary/BNS, 13 September 2005)

Norwegian press

Police rage after new fight at transition centre

The police have been called several times lately to interfere in fights at Våler transit centre in the Norwegian county of Østfold. "This time it has gone to far" says sheriff Per Tore Fremstad. An employee of the center was punched by an asylum-seeker. The employee was not physically injured but other personnel are afraid of the asylum-seekers. Four Chechen refugees have been detained by the police. "One of them will be charged for the assault", says sheriff Fremstad. It has been a considerable number of fights at the centre lately. The police now criticize the center for not having an adequate staffing situation. "There were only two people working last weekend. It is not enough. We have demanded that it must be at least the double", the sheriff continues. The police say that it has used too many resources on the center. "We have been called every weekend and 25 policemen have dealt with the

case. We are using all resources in the county in order to solve this. We expect the management of the centre to take further action in order to solve the problem. We will contact the Directorate of Immigration (UDI) about the matter as well”, Fremstad says. Not long ago, some asylum-seekers threatened to commit suicide, which led the Norwegian Organisation for Refugees (NOAS) to react. NOAS criticizes the centre for having too young employees. “When we hire people we see other factors as well, not only age or working experience”, says head of the centre Ole Morten Lyng.
(NRK, 26 September 2005, www.nrk.no)

Teen tolerance declines

A new survey suggests that Norwegian teenagers are less tolerant towards immigrants and more concerned about immigration than their parents. The amount of those who are skeptical about immigration has almost doubled in the past six years. Four of 10 teenagers questioned said they think immigrants represent “a serious threat to the national character.” Their answers came in a questionnaire handed out in connection with school elections earlier this month. That is nearly double the number of teens who responded the same in a similar survey in 1999. The survey was conducted by Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) and is based on answers from 5,000 high school students. Boys were the most skeptical, with around half saying they agree that immigration threatens the national character. Three of 10 girls answered the same. “We have to look at this in connection with the recent years' terrorist events in London, Madrid and the US, where immigration has been tied to terrorism and terror threats,” said Knud Knudsen, a sociology professor at the University of Stavanger. He's surprised by the survey results, however, even though he's been following Norwegian attitudes towards immigration for several years.
(Aftenposten, 26 September 2005)

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Nordic and Baltic Headlines

Tuesday 27 September 2005

Swedish press

Hidden refugees still being deported

Newspaper Svenska Dagbladet writes that despite promises to stop the deportation of apathetic refugee children whilst cases are looked at again, the government is still sending families back. The latest case involves a family from Bosnia-Herzegovina. Four children from Bosnia aged 10-16 may be deported after police arrested their mother, who had been in hiding, while she made a hospital visit. The children have been in Sweden for the past five years and have been attending a Swedish school. "It's essential to make sure that refugees are not sent back in the intervening time before the new directives go out to the authorities. We have made a political agreement that children and families with children will have their cases looked at again so both the police and immigration authorities should back off a little," says Gustav Fridolin of the Green Party, who has become involved in the case. He goes on to say, "If politicians say one thing and the reality is quite different then it not only affects the families involved but also damages the general public's faith in democracy." The Left Party is also calling for a freeze on sending families back until their cases have been re-examined. But Tomas Eneroth of the Social Democratic Party, who chairs the Standing Committee on Social Insurance, is not commenting on the possibility. "We're agreed that cases will be re-examined and now we will meet to clarify in detail what the consequences of that will be," he says. Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy, Barbro Holmberg, declined to comment.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 27 September 2005, p. 6, SPR translation)

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Wednesday 28 September 2005

Danish press

Government softens immigration restrictions

In a move that has upset its ally on immigration issues, the Danish People's Party (DF), the Liberal-Conservative government has announced a surprise relaxation of its tight rules on family reunification. The modification of the much-criticised immigration restrictions, means that under 24-year-old students of selected subjects, such as medicine, mathematics, IT and engineering, resident in Denmark, will now be allowed to have their foreign wives or husbands living with them here. The softening of the rules means not only that the young students are no longer affected by the notorious 24-year-rule but also relaxes the stipulation about a couple's joint affiliation to Denmark. Minister for Refugees, Immigrants and Immigration Rikke Hvilshøj (V) justifies the easing of the family reunification rules by quoting the need for Denmark to ensure that young people with the necessary qualifications stay in the country or are attracted to come from abroad. In principle the move puts nurses, students of engineering, computer technology, mathematics, statistics, physics and science – areas in which Denmark lacks labour on a so-called "positive" list, giving them priority over those with less attractive qualifications. The opposition Social Liberals (R) criticise Hvilshøj's move as discriminatory, while DF fears it will be open to gross misuse.

(Jyllands posten front page; most papers 28 September 2005, NE translation)

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Thursday 29 September 2005

Danish press

Broadcasting board rebukes TV2 over fabricated immigrant gang news story

The Radio & Television Surveillance Board has sent a stiff rebuke to state-owned TV2 for airing a fabricated story about an immigrant criminal gang that didn't exist. On July 17-18, the semi-commercial TV station, Denmark's most popular channel, broadcast a "Triple A" news feature in which it was alleged that a young immigrant gang in Denmark, armed to the teeth, was preparing for holy war. The police insisted at the time that the gang did not exist and the supposed gangsters interviewed in the news story withdrew their comments and accused TV 2 journalists of manipulation. It later transpired that much of the footage had been taken from a music video used in a fashion advertisement. TV2's News Division has denied any attempt to mislead its viewers, but the affair led to the resignation of the channel's deputy news chief. The board has called on the station to issue a full report and submit guarantees that it will safeguard objectivity and impartiality in future broadcasts.

(Jyllandsposten, 29 September 2005, online + p.14. NE translation)

Danish People's Party to block government plan to ease immigration restrictions

The Liberal-Conservative government's plans to ease restrictions on certain categories of immigrants have met with severe criticism from its ally, the Danish People's Party (DF), which is demanding that they be withdrawn. Earlier in the week, Minister of Refugees, Immigrants & Immigration Rikke Hvilshøj (V) announced plans to soften the government's tight rules on family reunification, meaning that under 24-year-old students of selected subjects, such as medicine, mathematics, IT and engineering, resident in Denmark, could be allowed to have their foreign wives or husbands live with them here. The softening of the rules meant not only that the young students would no longer be affected by the notorious 24-year-rule but also eased the stipulation about a couple's joint affiliation to Denmark. The Danish People Party Foreign Affairs spokesman Jesper Langballe says he will demand that the minister withdraw her proposals at a meeting next Monday. Minister Hvilshøj rejects Langballe's accusations about failing to inform DF about the proposed relaxation in the family reunion rules.

(Politiken, 29 September 2005, online + p. 2, NE translation)

Swedish press

The Left and the Green Parties demand end to deportations

The Green and Left parties are demanding that a decision be taken today to put an end to the deportation of refugee children and families that have been in hiding. The working group that is to make the agreement on refugee policy a reality is to meet today, but in the meantime families are still being sent back, writes Swedish newspaper Dagens Nyheter. Dagens Nyheter lists several cases where families with children have already been sent back or are about to be. Many refugees that DN has spoken to are worried that the agreement made between the government and alliance parties is meaningless. The group meeting today is to establish a time plan for the implementation of the agreement, but the Left Party's Ulla Hoffmann wants action. "It's important that we work quickly and I'd like to see a decision made at the end of the day," says Hoffmann. The Left and Green parties want to see an immediate stop to deportations for those who have been promised a re-examination of their case and assurances that no more apathetic children will be sent back. "The issues cannot be delayed. It's taken enough time just to organize the meeting," says Gustav Fridolin of the Green Party.

(Dagens Nyheter, 29 September 2005, p. 13, SPR translation)

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Friday 30 September 2005

Danish press

Minister forced to drop plan to ease immigration laws

After two days of intense pressure and fiery invective, Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Rikke Hvilshøj (V) has had to bow to her critics and withdraw plans to ease restrictions on certain categories of immigrants to make it more attractive for them to come to Denmark. Ms Hvilshøj's proposal had been designed to make it easier for students of chosen disciplines, notably medicine, mathematics, IT and engineering, to have their foreign wives or husbands live with them here through a relaxation of family reunification laws. The centre-right government's ally, the far-right, anti-immigration Danish People's Party (DF), which was one of the sharpest critics of Hvilshøj's plan, is to hold a meeting to discuss the matter with the minister on Monday.

(Berlingske p. 5, Politiken front page + most papers, 30 September 2005, NE translation)

Swedish press

Children abandoned overseas will receive help

The Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs is discussing ways in which to improve the handling of abandoned children trying to return to Sweden. These are immigrant children who have been taken to their country of origin by their parents, to visit relatives or for educational purposes, and then left there, often to fend for themselves. It is not known how many such children there are, but a dozen have sought the help of Swedish officials. As they are underage, embassy staff cannot give them passports without parental consent nor loan them the funds to return to Sweden. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is discussing the creation of a special children's fund, while the National Board of Health and Welfare is reviewing whether it may be possible to amend the Swedish passport law to make it possible for minors to apply for a passport without parental consent.

(Dagens Nyheter p. 11, 30 September 2005)

Hidden refugees must wait

Hidden refugee children and their families must wait until the beginning of November before they can safely come out of hiding, writes the Dagens Nyheter newspaper. The government and alliance parties agreed yesterday to fast-track a change in the law to stop deportations. "We have today agreed to propose a change in legislation that means that the Swedish Migration Board can begin re-examining cases sooner," says Minister for Migration Barbro Holmberg. The change must first be adopted by the Riksdag and could go into force in the first week of November. "Then deportations can also be put on hold pending re-examinations," says Holmberg, who adds that as many have been in Sweden for a long time most of the families will be able to stay in Sweden.

(Svenska Dagbladet p. 6, 30 September 2005)

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