

Nordic Headlines 2 December 2004

Danish press

Denmark has a duty

During a visit to Copenhagen the UN's newly appointed Commissioner for Human Rights, the Canadian Louise Arbour, described Denmark as a "leader in many human rights issues" and "a very important financial contributor to her new place of work." Whilst refusing to criticise the country for its controversial immigration legislation, Arbour said that leadership requires responsibility and asylum and integration policies are the yardstick of a country's image as an advocate of human rights.

(Berlingske Tidene, 1 December 2004, p. 8, NE translation)

PM: Integration shouldn't be smothered by religion

At the Marienborg summit on integration, Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen welcomed 22 representatives from the immigrant community but warned them not to let integration be smothered by religion. The PM has been criticised for not inviting any religious leaders, or Imams, to the summit, but he maintained that although it was 'quite natural' that he and Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder would be entering into dialogue with Imams in the near future, there was no place for them at a summit on integration. "[I]mams know nothing about integration and in fact are good examples of poor integration. The Imam Abu Laban has lived in Denmark for twenty years and still doesn't speak Danish. Hopefully he isn't a role model for young immigrants," said the PM. After listening to arguments from immigrant delegates, Rasmussen said that the goal of the government is that the unemployment rate amongst immigrants should be no higher than that for ethnic Danes – but neither he nor Haarder were able to put forward any new proposals that will make the goal become a reality. "Getting immigrants into jobs is an ambitious, but not impossible goal. We've listened to what has been said today and the most pressing issue is giving youngsters with an immigrant background as solid an education as possible," said the PM.

(BerlingskeTidene/Jyllandsposten, 1 December 2004, front page, NE translation)

Proposal for state control of Imams

When Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen and Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder meet with 22 leading representatives of the immigrant community at the integration summit at the PM's residence at Marienborg they will be met with a proposal that Muslim religious teachers, Imams, should be placed under state control. According to Muharrem Aydas, former chairman of the umbrella organisation for ethnic minorities, POEM, even though the PM has chosen not to invite Imams to the summit, their significance cannot be dismissed. "In Denmark there are Imams whose knowledge of Danish society's rules, norms and values are so minimal that they holding back and even

worsening integration,” claims Aydas. “There should be more control from the Danish authorities about who is preaching what in mosques throughout the country”, Aydas stresses that he is not interested in getting involved in the Imams’ religious orientation, but would like to see certain demands placed on them, such as the ability to speak Danish so they interpret Islam from a Danish point of view rather than in a Middle Eastern context. Ahmed Akkari, Imam at a mosque in Århus, agrees that Imams should know more about the workings of Danish society, but rejects the idea of more control from the state, saying it would only exacerbate the relationship between Muslims and Danes.

(Danmarks Radio news online, 30 November 2004, NE translation)

Message to PM: Forget Muslims in election campaign

Sükrü Ertonsen, Chairman of the Council of Ethnic Minorities, has appealed to Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen not to make immigrants and Muslims the dominant theme of the upcoming election campaign as it has a negative effect on integration. “It seems to be that those who make the most noise about integration get the most votes even though it’s not the most important issue,” claims Ertonsen. According to a Berlingske Tidende survey of the 22 participants in today’s Marienborg summit, distrustfulness of Muslims is one of the major obstacles to integration in Denmark today.

(Berlingske Tidene, 30 November 2004, p. 4, NE translation)

Muslims consider legal action in freedom of speech debate

Leading members of the Islamic Faith Society are considering whether to take legal action against state run TV channel Danmarks Radio (DR) and partially state-owned TV2, because they have both transmitted the murdered Dutch director Theo van Gogh’s controversial film ‘Submission.’ In an effort to make a legal test case of freedom of speech, Muslim leaders claim that by showing the film Islam is being exposed to derision, contempt and abuse that contravenes Danish legislation. “We are exploring the possibility of legal action, not just for the sake of suing DR and TV 2, but also in protest that Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen has given the film’s screenwriter an award, thereby sending a signal that people can freely abuse, violate and exploit Muslims and the Koran,” says a spokesman for the Islamic Faith Society.

(Politiken, 30 November 2004, p. 2, NE translation)

Ethnic children, youths top summit agenda

Why do not Danes have friends from ethnic minorities? Why do so many children of immigrants drop out of high school? Why is immigrant parents’ knowledge of education possibilities so limited? These are just some of the items on the agenda when Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen convenes the highly anticipated summit on integration at the PM’s residence at Marienborg, tomorrow. The 22 specially invited guests from the immigrant community will also discuss topics such as the controversial 24 years of age stipulation for people seeking residency via family reunification, the state’s right to protect freedom of

speech and democracy, and how to improve relations between Danes and ethnic minorities in the media, places of work and schools.

(Berlingske Tidene, 29 November 2004, p. 4 NE translation)

No change in immigration laws despite UN criticism

Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder is defiant that there will be no change in Danish immigration legislation, despite UN criticism of the 24-years of age stipulation for immigrants seeking residency via family reunification. "This matter has been thoroughly analysed by the Danish Institute for Human Rights who have concluded that the law doesn't contravene international conventions. However, there can be administrative problems and we have agreed to reassess 40 cases where mistakes can have been made," he says. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights concluded in a recently released report that the Danish government should either retract or change the age regulation.

(Jyllandsposten, 28 November 2004, p. 7, NE translation)

PM: No room for extremists

Danish Muslim extremist movements such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir can be equated with Nazism and should be resisted at all costs, according to Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen. Reacting to recent events, including the assault on a non-Muslim lecturer at Copenhagen University who read out a passage from the Koran and the murder of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh, Rasmussen says that it is important to take a stance now before things get out of hand. "I feel a great responsibility that we have to stick together in Danish society so that recent events in Holland aren't repeated here. We don't need confrontation and polarisation," he says. "We're now seeing signs of what can be considered Nazism in the fundamental extremism of groups such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir and others who promote a state governed by religion. It's a philosophy of authoritarianism, where democracy is dissolved and replaced by a dictator, or in this case a religious leader. We have to reject it, just as we have rejected Nazism."

(Jyllandsposten, 27 November 2004, front page, NE translation)

Finnish press

PM Vanhanen calls for population policy

The Finnish parliament discussed last Wednesday a future report prepared by the government regarding population development and age structure change in Finland. Prime Minister Vanhanen stressed that in the present situation, Finland needs a population policy. The government's cure for the current situation is longer job careers, more children and more "work based immigration". During the discussion some MPs opposed a more open immigration policy and referred to, among other things, "the high employment rate among immigrants".

(Helsingin Sanomat, 25 November 2004, p. A12)

Norwegian press

Muslims march against violence

NRK journalist Noman Mubashir wants Muslims to participate in a march in Oslo to protest against terror, violence, and murder. While Muslims in several countries have protested against religious extremism, Norwegian Muslims have chosen to remain passive. Mubashir hopes people will take to the streets Saturday after he urged them to take a stand. "As a Muslim and a known media personality, I wish to highlight that moderate Muslims in Norway opposes all type of violence and terror in society," Mubashir says. In Norway there were reactions when Zahid Mukhtar, head of the Islamic Council, stated on a TV show that he understood the reason for the murder of Dutch film director Theo van Gogh. Mubashir says he does not want this to be the last word uttered by Norwegian Muslims. "If we remain silent and defensive, it may be perceived that Norwegian Muslims supports terror and violence," Mubashir says. "I don't want that on my conscious. I really hope that the 80,000 other Muslims in Norway agree with me." (Aftenposten, 1 December 2004, p. 4)

Support for status quo – fewer want stricter asylum policy

The annual survey on attitudes towards immigrants and immigration carried out by Statistics Norway (SSB) shows a more liberal attitude towards immigrants and asylum-seekers. The share of people who support the current asylum policy or a more liberal policy increased by 8 percentage points from 2003 to 2004. Six per cent think that it should become easier to be granted asylum status, whereas 44 per cent want the current policy to continue. In 2003, 37 per cent supported the current asylum policy. The fact that fewer people now want a stricter regime (47 per cent against 56 per cent in 2003) must be viewed in light of the fall in the number of asylum-seekers and a stricter asylum policy. The report suggests that the reasons behind the decrease may be a combination of increased control measures from the government, resulting in greater focus on false asylum applications in public opinion. The number of asylum-seekers increased throughout most of the period, a fact that probably played an equally important part. Furthermore, attitudes towards immigrants seem to be stable. Attitudes towards settled immigrants are more or less unchanged from last year. Two thirds of the population 'strongly agree' or 'agree on the whole' that immigrants make a valuable contribution to the Norwegian working life. Those who want immigrants to adapt to the Norwegian culture are also most critical to immigration in general. Education, age and place of residence affect attitudes. Education is the single most important background factor in determining attitudes towards immigrants and immigration. The more education, the more likely a person is to be positive towards immigrants. The oldest age group is more sceptical than younger age groups. Although not surprising, there is a correlation between attitudes towards immigrants and party preference. Respondents who voted for the Red Electoral Alliance or the Socialist Left Party were more likely to be positive towards immigrants than respondents who voted for the Progress Party.

(Statistics Norway, 24 November 2004 – the whole article can be found on www.ssb.no/english/subjects/00/01/30/innvhold_en)

Swedish press

Asylum-seekers' housing allowance to be abolished

Local politicians in municipalities with many immigrants have for a long time criticized asylum-seekers' right to housing allowance, the so called 'ebo' system. The Social Democratic Party and the Moderate Party have now agreed on abolishing the subsidy of SEK 850 per month given to asylum-seekers choosing not to live in apartments offered by the Migration Board. Municipal Commissioner in Malmö, Ilmar Reepalu, is satisfied with the decision. "This is the first step towards a new effectual policy which gives the asylum-seekers right to good accommodation, practical job training and education", he says. Ulla Hoffman from the Left Party is disappointed. "Malmö will be a closed city where rich people get richer and poor people get poorer. The Government estimates that only 10 per cent of the asylum-seekers living in private accommodation wish to move back to the Migration Board's refugee centres", she says. (Svenska Dagbladet, 2 December 2004, p.11)

Parent care will help apathetic children

The Government and the Federation of County Councils have put forward a proposal concerning a new care structure, in order to help some 120 asylum-seeking children who suffer from apathy. The apathy might be a result of traumatic experiences and the fact that they live under very uncertain circumstances, waiting for a decision to be made on their asylum claims. The Government has only contributed with money for child care but now the subsidy will also include the parents. They children and their families will receive psychiatric care if needed and there will also be 'mobile teams' which can give help to the children in their home environment. Furthermore, there will be established a group of experts who will search for the reason for this phenomenon and prepare a care program. "As a politician I see that it's the whole asylum structure that makes these children sick and it's very important to solve the problem", coordinator for asylum care, Christian Foster, says. The decision will be made 7 December. (Dagens Nyheter, 1 December 2004, p. 15)

More and more asylum-seekers turn to church

According to a group deacons working in Stockholm, almost 30 per cent of those who come to the parish are asylum-seekers or people hiding from deportation. According to the deacons asked this depends on the fact that it has become more difficult to be granted asylum in Sweden. In despair people turn to the church for help, but the church can not in a proper way help those who are hiding from the authorities. "Since they may not be seen officially we can not apply for any subsidies in order to help them. But we do our best", one of the deacons

says. When the Swedish Migration Board can not find asylum-seekers who are to be deported, they hand the case over to the police: However, many persons are never found and stay illegally in the country. "We only find some 10 per cent of those who are to be deported. It is simply a matter of resources", Ove Neselius, inspector at the Stockholm Police Force, says. City Commissioner for Social Affairs in Stockholm, Margareta Olofsson, is familiar with the problem but she does not believe that the city can do anything in order to solve it. "This is caused by the existing Swedish refugee policy", she says. Minister for Development Cooperation, Migration and Asylum Policy, Barbro Holmberg, believes that the situation in Sweden is not that serious compared to other countries. "I am aware of the fact that we have an increasing number of asylum-seekers whose claims have been rejected, and that they therefore chose go into hiding, but we must remember that Sweden has a better and more humane deportation procedure than many other countries", she says.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 29 November 2004, p. 8)

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Danish press

Deported Iranian granted asylum

A 23-year-old Iranian who was deported from Denmark five years ago has now been granted asylum in this country after it was revealed that he was tortured on his return to Iran. After fleeing to Greece he returned to Denmark where he has now been granted asylum by the Refugee Board. Commenting on the decision, Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder said he had no reason to criticise the Refugee Board, which has now acted on new information received.

(DR online, 7 December 2004, NE translation)

Muslims to sue DR

A group of around ten prominent Muslims are to sue the state-owned TV channel Danmarks Radio (DR) on grounds of blasphemy, because it has repeatedly transmitted clips from the murdered Dutch instructor Theo van Gogh's film 'Submission'. According to the group's lawyer Laue Traberg Smidt, DR will be charged with violating Muslims' rights by showing a clip from the film over and over again.

(Berlingske Tidene, 6 December 2004, p. 3, NE translation)

Less than one in five Imams speak Danish

Only 10 out of 56 Imams currently residing in this country speak Danish, which according to a report in Jyllands-Posten makes them generally unable to form any real impression of the general living conditions for the majority of Muslims in Denmark. In addition, no more than an average of 10,000 Muslims, or 5.5 per cent of the Muslim population of this country, regularly attend Friday prayer sessions conducted by Imams. A number of Imams created a stir in the press recently with a number of controversial statements, but according to leading religious researchers, although they are outspoken they only represent a small proportion of Muslims. "Many young immigrants believe that most Imams stand in the way of progress and are starting to look elsewhere for answers," says Doctor of Theology Lissi Rasmussen of the Centre for Islamic and Christian Studies. According to another expert, Tina Jensen of the Institute for Anthropology at Copenhagen University, Danish politicians are making a mistake by interpreting statements from Imams as a threat from Islam because more often than not Imams just do not have the power generally believed.

(Jyllandsposten, 5 December 2004, p. 3, NE translation)

Haarder to meet Imams

Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder has announced he is willing to meet with a group of Imams. Haarder, who has previously rejected requests for a public debate in Nørrebro Hall because of its location in an

immigrant-dominated district of Copenhagen and refused to let any Imams attend last weeks integration summit, now says that the Carsten Niebuhr Institute in Copenhagen is prepared to host a meeting 30 January, the day before the institute commences public hearings about freedom of speech. Iman Ahmed Abu Laban criticised Haarder during Friday prayers at the Dorthesvej mosque in Copenhagen for refusing to agree to a one on one debate.
(Berlingske Tidene, 5 December 2004, p. 3, NE translation)

Fines for kids' truancy

Parents should be fined if their children neglect their studies, play truant, or generally disrupt teaching in the classroom – that's the latest proposal from Minister of Business, Industry and Economy Bendt Bendtsen, aimed primarily at the immigrant community, who would also like to see parents forced to attend courses in how to raise children. "Parents whose children don't attend school or are taken on long holidays during school term should be hit where it hurts – in the pocket," says Bendtsen who claims he was 'shocked' by the message of last week's integration summit. "Integration lay in ruins before we came to power in 2001, especially in public schools. Far too many families have been wrapped in cotton wool and we've become a victim of our own sentimental, knee-jerk view of society. It's about time we placed some demands on how certain children are brought up," says Bendtsen. The Social Democrats reject any threat of fines or economic sanctions such as a reduction in child-support. "Any financial punishment would eventually affect the children themselves," says a party spokesman.

(Jyllandsposten, 5 December 2004, front page, NE translation)

No place for torture victims

Victims of torture currently waiting in UN refugee camps throughout the world risk being rejected as potential refugees to this country because of the government's new strict selection procedures. In a letter to parliament, the Rehabilitation and Research Centre for Torture Victims (RCT) claims that many refugees suffering from psychological traumas will be denied the possibility of coming to Denmark if Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder's new law proposal for how refugees are selected is passed.

(Berlingske Tidene, 5 December 2004, p. 6, NE translation)

Norwegian press

Immigrants do not feel discrimination

A new survey of immigrants from Bosnia, Pakistan and Turkey indicates that a vast majority do not feel they have been discriminated against in Norway. Racism appears to be less widespread than earlier believed. Only two of every ten immigrants interviewed said they had experienced discrimination in the survey, conducted by polling firm Opinion for the Norwegian Institute for Community Research. Fully 85 per cent of all respondents gave the impression they lead

good lives in Norway. The survey interviewed 1,200 of the roughly 54,000 immigrants from Turkey, Pakistan and Bosnia who now live in Oslo. "The results are interesting because the media generally put the focus on negative aspects of the new, multi-cultural Norway," said researcher Jon Rogstad of the Institute. "The survey gives a picture of a reality that is much more positive." Rogstad claimed there actually are many immigrants who have succeeded in Norwegian society. He noted that the job market also has improved, and that young immigrants and the next generation of immigrant families are having an easier time breaking into the job market. Rogstad conceded that survey results may have been different if it had included more Africans, especially since immigrants from Somalia, for example, have a documented track record of integration trouble in both Norway and Denmark.
(Aftenposten, 7 December 2004, p. 2)

No to psychological testing of all asylum-seekers

A group of experts from the Norwegian Health Services Research Centre (HELTEF) reject systematic medical examinations for all asylum-seekers in order to find out who might have psychological problems. The Directorate for Health and Social Affairs has recommended earlier that all asylum-seekers and refugees get a primary examination in order to discover any somatic or psychological illness. HELTEF Director Pål Gulbrandsen believes that it is a bad idea to conduct a quick examination in order to detect those who might get sick.
(Aftenposten, 6 December 2004, p. 3)

Norway's population logs slight gain mostly due to immigration

According to Statistics Norway (SSB), there are now more than 4.6 million people living in Norway. Officials link the increase in population mostly to immigration. Norwegian women in general are giving birth to fewer children today than they were 20 years ago, although the birth rate has been rising in the past few years. It now stands at 1.8 children for every woman, but that compares to 2.1 in 1974. Immigrants now make up 349,000 of Norway's total population, or 7.6 percent, coming from 200 different countries. There are immigrants in all of the country's townships, but the largest number resides in the capital of Oslo.
(Aftenposten, 6 December 2004, p. 3)

Imams boycotted Muslim anti-violence protest march

Most of Norway's top politicians, but very few Imams participated in Saturday's Muslim torchlight protest march in Oslo against violence and terrorism. Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik was disappointed over the fact that most Imams boycotted the protest march. "They say they are against violence and murders. Why don't they join us here in this protest," Bondevik said. "I react to the fact that Muslims continuously have to prove that we are against violence by participating in protest marches. We feel we are being forced to take part," says Imran Mushtaq, deputy leader of the Islamic Council of Norway. He has therefore launched an alternative campaign encouraging people to sign a petition titled "Muslims in Norway are of course opposed to all violence and criminal acts."

(Aftenposten, 5 December 2004, p. 3)

FrP welcomes Vietnamese boat refugees

Approximately 100 former boat refugees from Viet Nam, presently living in the Philippines, will be welcomed to Norway thanks to the Progress Party (FrP). The party supports an initial proposed resettlement of 87 Vietnamese refugees within the Norwegian quota scheme. "This contradicts what they have said throughout the years," a surprised Minister for Local Government and Regional Development, Erna Solberg, says. Her Conservative Party is against the proposal. Solberg emphasises the fact that these people are not actually defined as refugees who are in need of protection. The Vietnamese also have relatives in Norway but not as close family as they qualify for the family reunification programme. FrP spokesperson Per Sandberg says in a press release that "it is far better that these Vietnamese, who are eager to work, are coming, than people responsible for genocide or individuals like Mullah Krekar."

(Aftenposten, 4 December 2004, p. 3)

Solberg reprimands Save the Children

Save the Children has claimed that the treatment of single minors seeking asylum in Norway is poor and that Norwegian authorities breach the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. At a conference organised by the Directorate of Immigration (UDI) on minor unaccompanied asylum-seekers, Minister for Local Government and Regional Development, Erna Solberg reprimanded Save the Children for their statement. "Save the Children has not been able to come up with any documentation showing signs of abuse, failure of care, lawlessness or 'wild west' circumstances at the reception centres. This is an attack on the people working with the refugee children at the centres and I strongly oppose that", the Minister said.

(Aftenposten, 30 November 2004, p. 2)

Swedish press

Parliament votes against asylum proposal

The Swedish Parliament has voted against a government proposal to abolish asylum-seekers' opportunity to submit a new application when their initial claim has been rejected. There will be no limitations to how many times a person can submit an application to the Aliens Appeals Board. The decision is considered a setback for Minister for Development Cooperation, Migration and Asylum Policy, Barbro Holmberg.

(Dagens Nyheter, 9 December 2004, p. 11)

Deported family returns to Sweden

A family from North Ossetia who was deported from Sweden has returned to the country and is again applying for asylum. The final decision on deportation was made by the Aliens Appeals Board in May 2004 and shortly thereafter the family

was sent to Moscow. After being arrested and robbed by the Russian police the father, who is Ingush, decided to travel back to his home country due to security reasons. The mother, who is Ossetian, and the son went to the city of Beslan where they have relatives. In Beslan, the six year old boy became one of the victims of the terror attack against a school, where more than 350 children, parents and teachers were killed. The boy survived and the family is now back in Sweden, hoping to receive asylum. They describe the situation in North Ossetia as dangerous after the terrorist attack, since most Ingushians have now become targets of revenge. "I will never return to North Ossetia. The place is highly dangerous for people like us. And in other parts of Russia they don't receive us. It is almost impossible for a Caucasian to get a permit of stay", the mother says. (Dagens Nyheter, 5 December 2004, p. 9)

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Danish press

UN criticism

Denmark was in breach of international human rights conventions when the Refugee Board deported a Ugandan man back to his native country. That is the verdict of the UN's Human Rights Committee which has accused the Danish refugee authorities of failing to take into consideration that the man was at risk of torture and persecution when he returned to Uganda. "It's a sad day, but it's been proved that Denmark went too far," says the man's lawyer Tyge Trier. "This case could just be the first of many when we consider the restrictions that have been introduced since 2001."

(Berlingske Tidene, 15 December 2004, p. 6, NE translation)

Immigrants dominate crime statistics

In an effort to settle the ever-present debate about criminality and violence committed by immigrants, Statistics Denmark has conducted its own survey – and according to initial conclusions there is no doubt that, taking age and social disparity into account, criminality amongst males with a non-Western background is 43 per cent higher than the average for all males in the population. "There is no disputing the facts," says national statistician Jan Plovsing. "The figures are very precise and are based on calculations that should be discussed." Although both the Liberal Party and the Social Democrats expressed satisfaction with the survey, the Social Democrats immediately accused the government of cutting back the social programmes and initiatives that could alleviate the problem.

(Politiken, 13 December 2004, p. 11, NE translation)

Fogh: Muslims wrong to make Islam an election issue

Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen claims that he is not threatened by a proclamation from the Islamic Faith Society that it will do all it can to prevent the re-election of the current Liberal / Conservative coalition and called the 'sound to arms' an unwise decision by Muslims. "We've been bombarded from all sides with the message that we mustn't make integration and immigration an election issue but now they've gone and done it themselves," says the PM in reaction to a declaration from leading Imam Ahmad Abu-Laban that all prominent Muslim community leaders in the country should spread the word that the current government should not be re-elected. "It's unwise of Imams to mix religion with politics," says the PM. "In addition there are many immigrants who don't share their point of view and actually support centre-right parties." Danish People's Party leader Pia Kjaersgaard says it comes as no surprise that immigrants are being encouraged to vote for left-wing parties, but claims it will only encourage more ethnic Danes to distance themselves from Muslims. "It's no secret that this isn't just a political, but also a religious battle," she says.

(Berlingske Tidene, 11 December 2004, p. 11, NE translation)

Muslim alliance against Fogh

Danish Muslims should join up and campaign against the government and its supporting Danish People's Party in an attempt to prevent Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen from being re-elected. The Muslim congregation in Denmark, the Islamic Community, which is led by the imam Ahmad Abu-Laban, will attempt to forge an alliance between disparate Muslim communities in Denmark in order to gain influence, it says. Chairman of the media and politics committee of the Islamic Community Kasem Ahmad, explains the strategy. "It is to show that we are a part of society, and that we intend to take part. We need to be more visible. Otherwise we will be abused by the politicians at the next election," he says. (Berlingske Tidene, 10 December 2004, front page, NE translation)

Finnish press

Finnish values support assimilative immigration policy

According to PhD Maarit Ylänkö's new research, the British and American model for multicultural society which emphasizes ethnicity does not fit into Finnish tradition. She argues that the Finnish value system is different from other Nordic and Anglo-Saxon value systems and rather closer to the French. In most parts of Finland the family model and the system of inheritance have traditionally been very egalitarian. As a result, the society is nowadays more assimilative and less prone to racial discrimination. Half of the foreigners living in Finland are married with a Finn, which according to Maarit Ylänkö, makes it very inconsistent to consider them only as members of their own ethnic group. (Helsingin Sanomat, 12 December 2004, p.11)

Norwegian press

Professor caught in immigration rules

An acclaimed professor at the University of Oslo has been denied permanent residence and working permission in Norway, because state officials have sent him on too many overseas assignments. University officials are nothing short of embarrassed over their own country's immigration rules, which have left a valued colleague in a difficult position. Sundeep Sahay is a professor in information technology from India, who has held a full-time position on the faculty since the beginning of 2000. During that time, he has often traveled overseas at the request of the university and Norwegian authorities. Rules administered by the Directorate of Immigration (UDI) prohibit those seeking permanent residence and working permission from being outside Norway for more than seven months during the three-year application period. Sahay's academic travels have exceeded the seven-month limit. His application for permanent residence was thus rejected, leaving university officials in despair. "Our exchange students and foreign staff members often get trouble from UDI," the leader of the university's IT institute, Jens Kaasbøll, said. "Sahay can have temporary residence permission,

but as long as he hasn't been in Norway for three consecutive years, he can't be granted permanent residence. Those are the rules," says Karl Erik Sjøholt of UDI.

(Aftenposten, 14 December 2004)

Swedish press

Asylum-seeker released from detention

A Kurdish asylum-seeker from Iran, Parvin Solemanpour, has been released from the Kronoberg Remand Prison while waiting for a decision to be made by the Aliens Appeals Board. There have been several attempts to deport the woman, but they have all failed. The Board has now issued an inhibition order, which means that the woman can not be deported until the case is closed.

(Dagens Nyheter, 15 December 2004, p. 11)

UN intervenes in Swedish asylum case

UN Commissioner for Human Rights appeals to Sweden in order to stop the deportation of a Kurdish woman, who faces the risk of being tortured when coming home to Iran. Several attempts have been made to deport the 54 year old woman. It is very unusual that UN reporters intervene in individual cases. Madeleine Seidlitz, legal expert and refugee desk officer at Amnesty International Sweden, is surprised. "I have never heard that this has happened before, at least not when it comes to Sweden", she says.

(Dagens Nyheter, 13 December 2004, p. 7)

Iranian Kurds leave no man's land for Sweden

A new group of 185 Iranian Kurdish refugees has left the Jordanian capital, Amman for Sweden, after spending more than a year and a half in "no man's land" which straddles the Iraqi border with Jordan. They are part of a group of 387 Iranian Kurdish refugees that Sweden accepted for resettlement. The remaining 202 were taken to the Scandinavian country in late November. All the refugees accepted by Sweden have relatives living in the country and they will settle down in the same communities as them, facilitating their integration, the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said. Many families left Iran in 1979 after the fall of the Shah and during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war. In Iraq, most of them used to live in the al-Tash camp, some 50 km from Fallujah city, but fled when the war started in March 2003 and got stuck at the border with Jordan. However, although the refugees were happy to leave, they expressed concerns over the fate of the 650 Iranian Kurds who are still stuck on the Jordanian-Iraqi border. Jacqueline W. Parlevliet, a senior protection officer with UNHCR, said that they were doing their best to resettle the remaining refugees. "There are some 150 cases that might leave for Norway and Canada, and 23 already left for Ireland three weeks ago," she said. Countries such as the United Kingdom were studying individual cases, while the response of Finland was still pending. Australia has already denied the resettlement of Iranian Kurds.

"They might take other cases," Parlevliet added. There are also Palestinian refugees living in the camp but their case was particularly difficult to resolve for political reasons and many of them had decided to go back to Iraq, UNHCR said. "There were solutions for Sudanese, for Iranians, but never solutions for Palestinians, so they decided to go back to Iraq," Astrid van Genderen, spokeswoman with UNHCR-Iraq in Amman said, adding that although the UN refugee agency was not promoting the return, it could facilitate it. "The situation inside [the camp] must be so difficult to force them to go inside Iraq," she added. Some 1,400 Iranian Kurdish refugees, who were living in the al-Tash camp, located very close to Ramadi and roughly 110 km from the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, recently fled given the poor security in the area, according to UNHCR. (Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN), 9 December 2004, www.irinnews.org)