

Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Wednesday 1 February 2006

Swedish press

The Swedish Migration Board denies reason for celebrations

The engagement in festivities following some cases the Board had processed were not celebrations for the deportations of asylum seekers but were instead meant to celebrate the cooperation between authorities, according to an internal inquiry by the Migration Board. The Board has been criticized since it was revealed that the staff had celebrated some of the processed cases with cake and champagne. However, the choice of words in the e-mails that contained an invitation to the celebrations were clearly inappropriate, according to Lars-Gunnar Lundh, Deputy Director-General at the Migration Board.

(Radio Sweden online www.sr.se, 1 February 2006)

Unit Director at Migration Board risks warning

The Head of Unit of the Swedish Migration Board in Hedemora, Majvor Skoglund, may get a disciplinary punishment for having screamed at a visually impaired Iraqi that he should have an eye contact with her when discussing, according to a protocol between the Migration Board and the Parliamentary Ombudsman (JO) Nils-Olof Berggren.

(Dagens Nyheter p.11, 1 February 2006)

Norwegian press

Assesment of a ban against forced marriages

The Minister of Labour and Social Inclusion, Bjarne Håkon Hanssen (Ap), want to use serious measures in the fight against forced marriages. "Forced marriages are such a serious issue that we are assessing the possibility of putting an age limit and a condition on the link to the country when allowing family reunifications," Hanssen said. At the end of this year the Government will give proposals concerning a new Alien's Act.

(VG in Aftenposten online www.aftenposten.no, 1 February 2006)

Danish press

Imprisonment instead of deportation

A 18-year-old with African roots was today sentenced to six months in prison instead of being deported to Togo in Africa. The Supreme Court thereby over-ruled the High Court, which had sentenced the boy to a five-year-long deportation. The boy came to Denmark when he was nine and has no family in Togo except for his grandmother.

(Politiken online www.politiken.dk, 1 February 2006)

Estonian press

Estonian government to set 2006 immigration quota to 675

On Thursday the Estonian government is setting the country's immigration quota to 675 for this year. Under the Aliens' Act the yearly immigration quota must not be higher than 0.05 percent of Estonia's permanent population, spokespeople for the government said. However, the quota does not apply to citizens of the European Union since Estonia is a member of the EU and there is a principle of free movement of citizens within the Union. Additionally, the immigration quota does not apply to Estonians living abroad and citizens of Iceland, Japan, Norway, Switzerland and the United States. It does not apply to spouses, children, parents, grandparents and dependants of Estonian citizens and of aliens residing in Estonia under a residence permit. However, there is a proposal stating that a person whose arrival in Estonia is deemed necessary by the state since the person will contribute to the development of the economy, education, science or culture, may be the permitted to come to Estonia without any regard to the quota. The immigration quota has been more or less the same in the past several years, and has been less than 700 people. Last year the quota was set to 677 people.
(Baltic News Service, 1 February 2006)

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Thursday 2 February 2006

Swedish press

Migration Board's investigation complete

The Swedish Migration Board (Migrationsverket) is facing a great deal of criticism after the organization's own investigation into the champagne and cake parties concludes that the incidents were not unethical. In its report the Board merely criticizes the wording in the e-mails that were sent to employees. But politicians have reacted angrily. "It's a real shame that the board's management do not seem to realize that there is an extremely cynical attitude amongst the staff," says Annika Qarlsson (c). Liberal MP Mauricio Rojas goes as far as to say that a completely new authority is needed. "An authority that solely carries out asylum investigations, while the reception of asylum seekers is handled by municipalities and voluntary organizations. In this way the whole process becomes more open to external observation," he says, adding that it is unfortunate that the Board did not take the opportunity offered by the investigation to "restore its tarnished reputation". (Dagens Nyheter p. 14, Svenska Dagbladet p. 10, 2 February 2006, SPR translation)

DNA tests for asylum seekers?

Barbro Holmberg, Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy is proposing that the Swedish Migration Board (Migrationsverket) be given powers to carry out DNA tests on children and others seeking permanent residence in Sweden so as to reunite them with their families. "It will be an additional tool in the work to confirm relationships between people," says Barbro Holmberg. Child Ombudsman Lena Nyberg is cautious, however. The aim of the proposal is to make it simpler for families to be reunited and to protect children from being exploited. "It's possible that this will help us tackle the problem of children coming here with people who aren't their parents and then being exploited," says Barbro Holmberg. Lena Nyberg has not yet read the whole proposal but has previously expressed concern that DNA tests can make things worse for families where the mother has been raped, for example during war. "If this measure is not made voluntary in practice, then it is a worrying development," says Lena Nyberg. (Svenska Dagbladet p. 10, 2 February 2006, SPR translation)

Norwegian press

Suggestions concerning forced marriages causes quarrel

The proposals by the Minister of Labour and Social Inclusion, Bjarne Håkon Hanssen (Ap), concerning harsher methods for fighting forced marriages has caused a spectacle in the corridors of the government. Hanssen wishes to see an age limit on the applicants that get married and seek family reunification in Norway. Further, he wants stricter requirements for the level of income among applicants in order to secure that they are financially able to support the spouse. Hanssen is also assessing a new claim stating that spouses should live in the country wherein they have the greatest link to the realm. The Socialist Left Party (SV) does not believe that Hanssen's proposals will be accepted. Worker's Youth Organisation (AUF) accuses the cabinet ministers for getting

inspired by the right-wing Danish government instead of their Social Democratic friends in Sweden. “When Hanssen begins to seriously assess his own proposals he will probably conclude that many of them should be put aside. They are unsuitable for the intention – to fight forced marriages. But certainly they are suitable if you wish to fight for harsher immigration politics,” member of the Parliament (Stortinget) Karin Andersen (SV), said.

(Aftenposten online www.aftenposten.no, 2 February 2006)

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Saturday 4 February - Monday 6 February 2006

Swedish press

Shortage of interpreters problem for asylum seekers

The new Migration Courts that are supposed to come into force in two months time are short of authorized interpreters, which could result in a breach of the legal security of asylum-seekers. Even though the Swedish state has put in additional three million kronors in order to speed up the pace in employing authorized interpreters, there are languages that do not have one single authorized interpreter in the whole of Sweden. Additionally, authorized interpreters often lack the ability to handle judicial jargon. "I am worried. Having qualified interpreters is extremely important in order for the asylum-seekers to get their say in an adequate manner", said Ulla Pålsson who is in charge of the project with the Migration Courts.

(Dagens Nyheter p. 14, 4 February 2006)

Dark shadows over Danish refugee politics

The recent events surrounding the caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad in Denmark have given Danish People's Party increasing support. Party leader Pia Kjærsgaard takes every opportunity to warn for the "Muslim danger", according to Dagens Nyheter. Politicians from the Social Democrats to the more right-wing parties on a large scale agree on the harsh politics conducted in asylum and integration questions. The debate is regularly promoted by the Danish People's Party which proposes new restrictions including DNA-tests for refugee families, the abolishment of all societal information in Arabic, and the prompt deportation of immigrants who have committed crimes as well as these immigrants' families.

(Dagens Nyheter p. 28, 4 February 2006)

The Swedish Migration Board needs 1 billion

The Migration Board has signaled to the government that an additional one billion kronors is needed in order for the Board to be able to do their work properly. The temporary asylum act has in itself cost 415 million kronors extra. If the Board is expected to stay within the proposed budget frames one would need to dismiss 65 per cent of the staff in April this year. An asylum application is currently estimated to take up to one year instead of the six months that is the maximum amount of time set by the government for handling an application. "The Migration Board has not received the full economic compensation for the new temporary asylum act," Lars-Gunnar Lundh, deputy director-general, said. Until today, 8,562 cases have been decided under the new act. 7,000 of these cases have resulted in permanent residency.

(Dagens Nyheter p. 10, 5 February 2006)

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Tuesday 7 February 2006

Swedish press

Immigrant groups demonstrate

Some 80 representatives from several Kurdish, Iranian and Iraqi organizations gathered in Stockholm yesterday to defend the freedom of the press and the right of free speech. "If we lose the battle for the right of free speech then Islamic extremists will demand further concessions. Then they will be deciding how we should live. This is a trend that we have to stop," said Kammal Mohammad Asad, chair of the Cultural Association of Kurds in Sweden.

(Dagens Nyheter p. 11, Svenska Dagbladet p. 6, 7 February 2006)

Danish press

Solidarity demonstrations for Denmark

A number of immigrant groups in Århus in Denmark will hold a demonstration in Gjellerupparken on Tuesday evening in which they will show their support for Denmark and protest against the act of setting embassies on fire in order to bring a message forward, Rabih Azad-Ahmad, from the Multicultural Organization (Multikulturel Forening), said. They hope to have mobilized foreign press, including newspapers from Muslim countries, into covering the event. The Multicultural Organization also feels insulted by the caricatures but Azad-Ahmed acknowledges that the pictures are legitimate and does not support a tightening up of the freedom of speech.

(Jyllands-Posten online www.jp.dk, Politiken online www.politiken.dk, 7 February 2006)

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Wednesday 8 February 2006

Swedish press

Risk for growing refugee queues

There is a risk of growing refugee queues as a result of the temporary asylum act, Andreas Carlgren, Director General of the Swedish Integration Board (Integrationsverket), said at Dagens Nyheter's debate pages today. As a result of the new act municipalities will receive some 26,500 refugees this year – three times as many as in 2005. Co operation is needed in order to deal with these numbers, or else there is a risk that refugee queues will grow again. Andreas Carlgren said that some 90 Swedish municipalities do not have any organized reception centers for refugees. Some municipalities, such as Danderyd, Österåker, Staffanstorp and Vellinge are located in areas where there are good job prospects and should be able to offer refugees a good reception. He calls on those municipalities that do not have reception centers to state how they intend to resolve the matter. He concludes by stating his hope about a reply from the municipalities that better fits with the decision taken at government level to raise the reception standards.

(Dagens Nyheter p.6, 8 February 2006. SPR translation)

Asylum-seekers will get decision by summer

Before this summer a decision will be given to asylum-seekers who apply for asylum according to the temporary asylum act. On Tuesday the government and its alliance parties met to assess how the new temporary asylum act has worked so far. All three parties said afterwards that they are happy with the speed at which cases are now being dealt with. The review has shown that families and children who have been in Sweden for two years or longer are likely to be granted residency. Children who are born while their parents are in hiding are not included in the new legislation. However, these children will be entitled to the same treatment as other children who have been in hiding. One bone of contention for the Left Party (Vänsterpartiet) and the Greens (Miljöpartiet) is that hundreds of asylum seekers from the Northern parts of Iraq have not been granted permanent residency in Sweden. They have only been granted permits valid for one year, which is in breach of the new act, according to the two parties. Kalle Larsson, MP from the Left Party, said it is a worrying trend and points out that there is still no clear directives for Afghan asylum seekers.

(Dagens Nyheter p.11, 8 February 2006. SPR translation)

Auditors give harsh criticism to Integration Board

The State Audit Institution (Riksrevisionen) has strongly criticised the Swedish Integration Board (Integrationsverket) for the way in which it pays out money to anti-racist organizations. According to the Institution, the Integration Board has no clear guidelines as to how applications for grants should be dealt with. Additionally, documents have a tendency to disappear and some officials have too much power, according to the State Audit Institution.

(Svenska Dagbladet p.11, 8 February 2006. SPR translation)

Danish press

Imams barred from integration plans

Critical statements by Imams about Denmark in Muslim media have angered the Minister for refugees, immigrants and integration, Rikke Hvilshøj. Political criticism of local imams in recent days has led the Minister to exclude the Muslim clerics from discussions of the integration of Muslims into the Danish society. Some imams have reportedly offered such statements to media in Muslim countries that have harmed Danish interests in the on-going row over the Mohammed caricatures, Hvilshøj said. "I think it is clear that the imams are not the ones we should put our trust to if we want integration in Denmark to work," Hvilshøj told the daily newspaper Berlingske Tidende. "I have become aware that there are other forces we should draw upon," she added. One incident involved Imam Abu Laban telling television station al-Jazeera that he was happy about the Muslim boycott. Later the same day, he said to the Danish television station TV2 that he would urge Muslims to stop the boycott immediately. Hvilshøj has earlier made efforts to draw upon the imams' significant influence in local Muslim communities. During a conference held with seven local imams last April, she called upon them to encourage young Muslims to complete their education. PM Anders Fogh Rasmussen had also invited a group of imams for an anti-terror conference at his residence in Marienborg in September. The conference sought to find ways of preventing Islam from being used in the name of terror attacks. Such efforts to involve the Muslim clerics were now a thing of the past, Hvilshøj said. "The imams have revealed that they aren't the ones who benefit the integration in Denmark," she said. "Some of the statements we have seen show that they aren't interested in integration," Hvilshøj added. (Berlingske Tidende in Jyllands-Posten online www.jp.dk, 8 February 2006)

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Thursday 9 February 2006

Swedish press

Personnel from Migration Board buying Tax Free at deportation

Two handling officers from one of the Swedish Migration Board's (Migrationsverket) detention centers in Gothenburg bought liqueur, wine and cigarettes on a deportee's boarding card. The two staff members were escorting the man to the air port following the rejection of his asylum application. Their future at the Migration Board is still not decided. The course of events took place in mid-January and the customs informed the Migration Board today. "Low and shocking", Stefan Bergman, Director of the detention center said in an interview concerning the staff members' behavior.

(Dagens Nyheter p.6, Radio Sweden online www.sr.se, 9 February 2006)

Danish press

Parties to both left and right gain more members

The conflict surrounding the Muhammad caricatures has provided both the right-wing Danish People's Party (Dansk Folkeparti) and the left-wing Social Liberals (Det Radikale Venstre) with an increasing number of members. Palle Svensson, professor in political science at the University of Aarhus argues that it is not that surprising that the two parties gain more members. "They stand for the two refined positions in this question. One side says that we should stand up against the alien powers, the Imams and the Muslims. We shall not budge for them at all. That is the Danish People's Party's viewpoint. The Social Liberals' say that we live in a multicultural society in a globalized world, and that we now have to try to understand them, be considerate and create a dialogue. Therefore, it makes sense that it is those two parties that raise peoples' interest, he said. The Danish People's Party has during one week sent out around 500 invoices to new members. Usually the number is between 20 and 40. The Social Liberals has during eight days got 86 new members, which accounts for as many members the party normally gets in one month during normal circumstances.

(DR online www.dr.dk, 9 February 2006)

Estonian press

Two African women seeking asylum in Estonia

In January two African women filed applications for asylum in Estonia, and the applications are now being processed, the daily SL Ohtulehti reported. A spokesman for the Citizenship and Migration Board (KMA) said the asylum-seekers were from Nigeria and Cameroon, according to preliminary information. The women filed their applications while in the country. In accordance with the Refugees Act the asylum proceeding is not public and information concerning asylum-seekers is confidential. In January the weekly Eesti Ekspress wrote that a Nigerian woman who worked in a brothel next to the Central

Tallinn children's polyclinic was applying for asylum in Estonia. The African woman was caught with a fake Canadian passport on the Estonian-Latvian border in November. The Central Criminal Police is investigating the girl's involvement in human trafficking. Last year KMA rejected asylum applications filed by two African men. They said they came from Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe and sought asylum in Estonia in July. Last year also citizens of Russia, Iraq and Turkey sought asylum in Estonia but their applications were rejected.

(Source: Baltic News Service, 9 February 2006)

Training for managing multiculturalism

During a five-year period a cooperation project has been held in order to train Estonian and Finnish teachers, lecturers, social workers and other public servants for work in multicultural environments, Tallinn University spokeswoman Krista Manna told the Baltic News Service (BNS). Tonu Otsa, the Estonian coordinator of the project and training provider at Tallinn University, said the project got off the ground in 2001 when they went to Vantaa near Helsinki to familiarize themselves with the educational and social system in that community. It was found that on the basis of earlier knowledge and experience the Estonian educational and social system would not be able to cope with immigrants whose nationality, beliefs and traditions were unfamiliar in Estonia. The joint project was managed by the Tallinn University upgrading center and financed by the municipality of Vantaa. Cooperation partners were the Estonian Education and Science Ministry and Åbo Akademi University (Åbo Akademi).

(Source: Baltic News Service, 9 February 2006)

Latvian press

UNHCR inquires about citizenship issues in Latvia

Representatives from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) inquired about issues of citizenship in Latvia when they met with officials from the Secretariat of the Special Assignments Minister for Social Integration during their visit in Latvia. Irina Vinnika, director of the secretariat's Department of Ethnic Minority Affairs, informed the UN commissioner's aides about the secretariat's efforts to "promote the development of national identity while at the same time maintaining the ethnic identity," the secretariat's spokeswoman Gunta Kale said. Representatives of the secretariat told the UNHCR representatives about their work in supporting ethnic minorities in Latvia, and made them familiar with the national program for tolerance promotion as well as with the activities aimed at building a civil society. The UNHCR delegation visiting Riga included Bo Schack, Senior Policy Advisor at UNHCR's headquarters in Geneva, Philippe LeClerc, senior legal officer at the department for stateless persons and Peter Trotter, Regional Protection Officer at UNHCR's office for the Baltic and Nordic region. This was UNHCR officials' introductory visit to Latvia.

(Baltic News Service, 9 February 2006)

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Friday 10 February 2006

Swedish press

Human trafficker caught once again

Amir Heidari, a well-known human trafficker (although he proclaims that he is rescuing people, assisting them to apply for asylum), is once again suspected of organizing widespread smuggling of refugees from Iran and Iraq. He was remanded in custody before a Gothenburg court on Thursday together with five accomplices. Amir Heidari has been sentenced on numerous occasions for similar crimes and has even a law named after him that states it is punishable to earn money by smuggling people. In 2002, he was sentenced to four years imprisonment and he has served a total of 13 years in prison in Denmark and Sweden for human trafficking. This time Amir Heidari is suspected of smuggling some 20 refugees in 2005, though the public prosecutor in Gothenburg suspects that many more cases have gone undetected. According to a previous ruling, Amir Heidari is to be deported from Sweden. However, it has not been possible to deport him since he risks persecution in his native country of Iran.

(Svenska Dagbladet p.12, 10 February 2006. SPR translation)

Officials may lose jobs

Two officials at the Swedish Migration Board (Migrationsverket) in Gothenburg risk losing their jobs after Swedish Customs discovered the two using the boarding card of a man who was to be deported from Sweden in order to buy spirits, wine and cigarettes.

(Svenska Dagbladet p.6, 10 February 2006. SPR translation)

No support for camel project

The plans to raise camels in Løten to help employ immigrants now look set to fall through. The municipality of Løten, in the southeastern county of Hedmark, has failed to win financial support from the Directorate of Immigration (UDI), TV 2 reports. Løten is home to many refugees from African countries and the local initiative to start a camel farm was viewed as a way to have a positive effect on the lives of new residents. Many of the refugees have lived as nomads and for them the camels are domesticated animals and a source of milk, meat, hide and wool. But the Directorate of Immigration has refused to earmark funds for the creative project, and the Løten camel farm is now in danger of staying on the drawing board.

(Aftenposten online www.aftenposten.no, 10 February 2006)

Danish press

Family reunification cases frozen

The disturbances caused by the Mhammad caricatures have resulted in a decision by the Minister of Integration, Rikke Hvilshøj (V), to freeze the handling of some of the cases concerning family reunification. Such a decision means that the applicants from those countries wherein there have been wide-spread unrest will at the moment not get

their applications rejected even if that would be the procedure under normal circumstances.

(Jyllands-Posten online www.jp.dk)

Caricatures crisis can harm integration

The labour market should support democratic Muslims since the current crisis concerning the Muhammad caricatures can be damaging for the process of integration, the business man Asger Aamund said. Aamund calls for support by the business world as well as the trade-union movement for the suggestion made by the radical politician, Naser Khader, concerning a network of democratic Muslims. "I think that the network here at home can be especially positive for the further democratic development and the integration into the working place. Therefore, I wish for a broad support from the parties of the labor market. Not the least in the current situation with the burning of the Danish flag there is a danger that many Danes perceive every Muslim as a potential bomber. And that does not work since the great majority of Muslims in Denmark are good democrats – even if they are Muslims – and wish for the same democratic development as the rest of us", Aamund said.

(Berlingske Tidende online www.berlingske.dk, 10 February 2006)

Latvian press

Fighting racism and intolerance in Latvia

Participants in a discussion on racism in the US and Latvia have called for ways of fighting manifestations of racism and intolerance in Latvia. George Steel, a representative of Afrolat, an organization uniting Latvia's residents of African descent, told participants that it is necessary to think of ways to stop manifestations of racism and intolerance in order to prevent such incidents from repeating themselves in the future. He voiced regret over the unwillingness of the Latvian society to admit that it has problems with racism and that the attacks on foreigners in recent months are not acts of hooliganism, but racism. Latvian Foreign Minister, Artis Pabriks, also called to seek solutions to the problem before it is becoming too pressing. In the minister's opinion, concerted efforts of governmental institutions could be one way of dealing with outbreaks of racism. Additionally, police officers should be informed that violence against people from foreign countries could be caused by racism and intolerance, Pabriks said. Politicians, meanwhile, should not always yield to the pressure of public majority which often prompts them to take the wrong decisions, he added. In addition, mass media should take a tough stance on the issue of racism and intolerance and use their influence to prevent politicians from taking populist decisions.

(Baltic News Service, 10 February 2006)

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Saturday 11 – Monday 13 January 2006

Swedish press

Mother attends funeral of murdered son

The mother of 20-year-old Abbas Rezai, who was found murdered last November, attended her son's funeral in Älta on Saturday. The brother of the man's girlfriend has admitted responsibility in what is being seen as an honour killing, and he and his father have been arrested. The girl is in hiding. "It's important to be here and share the sorrow but also to show that if we cannot protect people who are subjected to this kind of violence then it is a failing on the part of society," Left Party (v) leader Lars Ohly said. The Liberal Party's (fp) Birgitta Ohlsson agreed and said that society can do more to prevent honour killings. "We in Sweden are letting down those young people who dare to break with old traditions. It's time we put our foot down," she said. (Svenska Dagbladet p.15 , Dagens Nyheter p.9, 12 February 2006)

Danish press

Denmark faces criticism from European human rights body

In an upcoming report the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) levels sharp criticism against Denmark for its performance on the race relations front. The report, due to be published in April, will order Denmark to take prompt action to stop hostility and discrimination against Moslems. Based in Strasbourg, the ECRI has previously attacked Denmark for its poor showing on immigration and ethnic minority issues, listing in 2001 as many as 48 "negative" cases of racial hostility. (Politiken p.7, 11 February 2006. NE translation)

Mohammed cartoons crisis boosts the far right – poll

A Rambøll Management opinion poll in the leading daily Jyllands-Posten taken last week gives the far-right, ultra-nationalistic, anti-immigration Danish People's Party (DF) a major boost at the cost of the opposition Social Democrats (S). According to the poll, voter support for the DF has surged to 17.8 per cent, which is an increase of 4.5 per cent since last year's election, with the Social Democrats slumping to a historic low of 21.6 percent, which shows a 4.2 per cent decrease. This means an increase of 8 seats for DF, a drop of nine for the beleaguered Social Democrats. This is good news for the Liberal-Conservative minority government (VK) and its ally DF, which now has the support of 55.5 per cent of the electorate as opposed to only 43.5 percent for the combined centre-left opposition. Translated into parliamentary seats, this gives the VK-DF bloc 100 seats and the opposition 75 seats in the Folketing. (Jyllands-Posten p.2, 12 February 2006, NE translation)

More volunteers helping refugees

Volunteers are trying to show that immigration in Denmark is more than just the Mohammed drawings. Two of Denmark's largest refugee aid associations are finding that more people are interested in volunteering for the organizations as a way

of protesting against the government's strict immigration policies, reported newspaper Kristeligt Dagblad on Monday. Before the current Liberal-Conservative government's tightening of asylum procedures in 2001, the Danish Red Cross had about 400 volunteers. Last year they had over 900, according to Bo Hansen who coordinates the organization's volunteers. "A lot of volunteers say they need to show that there are other points of view than those that set the political agenda at the moment," Hansen said. Hansen expects that the number of Red Cross volunteers will increase to over 1000 this year. The Red Cross's volunteers and the Danish Refugee Council's 2500 volunteers are mostly involved with helping refugees to learn Danish and other school work. Others help out by serving as contacts in the Danish community through evening or weekend visits. Representatives from immigrant communities said the increasing number of volunteers was a sign of an overall trend. "This shows us a truer picture of Denmark," said integration consultant Fahmy Almajid.
(The Copenhagen Post in Jyllands-posten online www.jp.dk, 13 February 2006)

Finnish press

Russian immigration to Finland slows down

Personal relationships appear to be more important than work in determining the number of Russians immigrating to Finland, according to an article by Aku Alanen, head actuary at Statistics Finland. The article in a Statistics Finland publication examines trends of Russian immigration to Finland between 2000 and 2004. One third of all Russian citizens who settled down in Finland did so because of a Finnish spouse. One in four arrived in Finland in order to be with a relative or acquaintance, and only one in six had work as the primary reason for coming to the country. In his article, Alanen assumes that work as a motivation factor for coming to Finland will increase in the future. Tougher rules for immigration that came into effect in 2003 can already be seen, and net migration from areas near Finland has decreased. The greatest net immigration - the difference in the number of those arriving and leaving the country - was in the areas of Uusimaa in the south, Northern Karelia, South Karelia, and Kymenlaakso in the southeast, and in Finland Proper (Varsinais-Suomi) in the southwest.
(Helsingin Sanomat online www.hs.fi, 13 February 2006)

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Tuesday 14 February 2006

Swedish press

Immigration Keeps Population Up

At the end of last year the population of Sweden had risen to 9,047,752, according to Statistics Sweden. That is an increase of 35,360 persons and marks the eighth year in a row that the population of Sweden has increased. The rise is attributed to immigration, which went up by 5 percent last year to 65,229. That marked the largest number of immigrants to this country since 1994. The population of Stockholm rose by just under 6000 to 771,038 people. Gothenburg currently has a population of 484,942, while there are 271,271 inhabitants in the Southern city of Malmö.

(Radio Sweden online www.se.se, 14 February 2006)

Asylum-seeker suspected for arson

A fierce fire broke out on Tuesday night in an apartment in Grimsås. The apartment belonged to the Swedish Migration Board (Migrationsverket). An asylum-seeker who was living in the house wherein the fire started was later arrested. He is suspected for fierce arson since there was a great danger for the other inhabitants in the house in question. The man does not admit that he started the fire.

(Dagens Nyheter p.9, 14 February 2006)

Danish press

Moderate Muslims meet PM to discuss integration

The newly founded group Democratic Muslims gives its advice to the Prime Minister for how to improve Muslim integration. As the most heated rhetoric in the conflict over the Muhammad caricatures begins to cool down, moderate Muslims took the floor on Monday to give their advice to the Prime Minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen. The PM had invited a score of representatives from the newly founded Democratic Muslims to a meeting at his official residence to discuss how to improve the integration of Muslims. "The conflict shows that something is wrong, so let's use this situation to find out how we can do things better," said Naser Khader, founder of the group and opposition MP. Khader also said that meeting with the prime minister was intended as a signal to Muslims in Denmark and abroad. "We don't like what's happening out in the world. Our message to the Islamic world is that what's happening is not in the interest of Islam or Muslims," Khader said. Among the group's recommendations to the PM were requirements that foreign imams take courses in democracy before being allowed to preach in Denmark. In addition, they said it was vital that young immigrants were able to find on-the-job training positions as part of their education. The group also said a special effort needed to be made to integrate immigrant women. "We need to get hold of young immigrant women whose only contact with Danish society is their family. We need to get them out of the house and into Danish courses and courses about democracy," said group member Rushy Rashid. Khader, who is finding common ground in the debate ensuing from the Muhammad caricatures, said the group found it unacceptable that a

handful of Muslims 'stole Islam' from the entire group. "The prime minister was moved when we told him that Denmark is not a racist country, and that we would fight for Denmark and to spread knowledge of democracy," Khader said. According to the group both sides had a role to play in contributing to an improved dialogue. They said extremist anti-Muslim voices were just as harmful as extremist Islamicists. "Dialogue and reconciliation - from both sides of the table," said one participant.

(The Copenhagen Post in Jyllands-Posten online www.jp.dk, 14 February 2006)

Caricatures affair 'positive' according to integration minister

Whilst many claim that Denmark's integration efforts are now lying in ruins, alongside Danish embassies that have been attacked and burnt, Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Immigration Rikke Hvilshøj (V) claims that the whole Mohammed caricatures affair has actually had a positive effect. In response to Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen's (V) meeting with Naser Khader's newly formed Democratic Muslims network, Ms Hvilshøj said: 'We're now seeing the emergence of many Muslims who are prepared to say that they support Danish society and democracy. It's good for Danes to see that there are other types of Muslims than imams. I was concerned that this affair would harm the whole integration process but now I'm actually quite confident, because we've been handed new tools to work with in the future.'

(Jyllands-Posten p.4, 14 February 2006. NE translation)

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Wednesday 15 February 2006

Swedish press

Integration's effect on the economy

The articles cover the discussion of the increase of Swedish population and whether the population increase will be an economic asset for Sweden. An analyst at Statistics Sweden (SCB), Gun Alm Stenflo, said that integration policy will now have a key role in this issue. Minister for Integration, Jens Orback, is reluctant to look at immigration policy in financial terms. Refugee policy should be based on offering sanctuary to those in need of protection, he stresses. "But that doesn't have to mean that we at the same time can't offer people the best opportunity to get onto the labor market," he adds. This spring Jens Orback is to present a new direction in terms of the policy on receiving refugees, with more focus on education. For example, a doctor coming to Sweden should be offered a language course specifically directed for doctors. The main explanation to the increase in Sweden's population figures is due to the immigration of relatives to immigrants already in Sweden, EU citizens and people who have been hiding in Sweden. Some believe the increase is due to the temporary asylum law. "We can't be sure but it seems the most likely explanation," says Cecilia Wass at SCB.

(Source: Svenska Dagbladet p. 13, Dagens Nyheter p. 10, SPR translation)

Norwegian press

Higher sentence for forced marriage

The Supreme Court in Norway imposed a higher sentence for the father and half-brother of a girl that was involved in a forced marriage. The father of the 18-year-old Kurdish woman is sentenced to two years and six months in prison, while the half-brother is sentenced to two years. The young woman claimed that she would have been threatened for life by her father, half-brother and others from the Kurdish community if she would refuse to go through with the marriage. Originally the father was sentenced to one year and nine months in prison, while the brother was sentenced to one year and five months in prison by the Court of Appeal.

(TV2 Nettavisen www.tv2.no, 15 February 2006)

Finnish press

Concern about increased direct flights between Finland and China

The constantly increasing direct air connections between Finland and China have become a cause of concern for Finland's Border Guards. The direct flights are making Helsinki an increasingly important hub for travel between Asia and Europe, which means that there could be a considerable increase in illegal immigration, and even trafficking of humans. To help fight the problem, the Border Guard has decided to send a special liaison officer to work at the Finnish Embassy in Beijing. "There is concrete evidence that already at present there is illegal immigration from there to the Schengen zone", says

Lt.-Colonel Martti Sarasmaa. The Finnish national carrier Finnair operates a total of 18 weekly flights to and from China with 300-seat MD-11 aircraft, which fly at almost full capacity. This means thousands of passengers every week. "The flow is aimed via Finland to other parts of the Schengen zone, and Finland needs to make its own contribution to this issue. We cannot just think about how much illegal migration is directed at Finland - we must also think about the migration directed to other countries, via Finland", says Matti Sarasmaa. This means that in effect Finland is responsible for guarding the integrity of the borders of all Schengen countries.
(Helsingin Sanomat online www.hs.fi, 15 February 2006)

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Thursday 16 February 2006

Swedish press

Swedish authorities want to facilitate return of children

The proposal of Minister for Public Health and Social Services Morgan Johansson would make it easier for children to be issued a passport, as well as receive financial support during the waiting period. Currently Embassies are only allowed to issue passports to children if they have parental consent. According to the Foreign Ministry some 45 children have been sent to their native homelands against their will, dropped off with relatives. Often parents also take the child's passport, making it impossible to leave the country. Authorities believe that many of the children are sent away by parents who don't agree with the Swedish way of life.

(Source: Radio Sweden online, www.sr.se, 16 February)

Norwegian press

Muslims want own crisis centre for women

Muslim women want a crisis centre of their own in Norwegian Stavanger in order to shed more light on hidden home violence in Muslim environments. The leader of the Islamic Women's Association (Islamsk kvinnoförening) in Rogaland, Hanin Hamid, says that their aim with this would be to put violence against women on the agenda of the Muslim community. Hamid believes that a separate crisis centre would lead to more Muslim women daring to ask for help. 80% of the women seeking help at the existing crisis centre in Stavanger are of foreign background. However, Lawyer Kirsén Clausen of the centre's board say that she is against a splitting and that she thinks it is better if the Muslim women wishing to proceed with this come to the Norwegian centre for collaboration.

(Source: NRK Rogaland online, www.nrk.no, 16 February 2006)

Danish press

Resident permits for refugees plunge

A historically high number of foreigners were granted residency permits in Denmark last year – a total of 39,729 according to new figures from the *Immigration Agency* and *Denmark's Statistics*, which is a rise of over 3,000 from the previous year. The majority of permits were given to foreign students or people with qualifications who had acquired work before arriving. At the same time, the Liberal-Conservative coalition's strict immigration policies have created a sharp drop in the number of refugees and immigrants seeking residency – just 4,676 last year, compared to 17,213 in 2001.

(Source: Jyllands-Posten, 16 February 2006, translation by News Express)

Bishop does not go to court over Christmas preaching

Denmark's Church Ministry decided that Bishop Kjeld Holm was acting within his rights when he criticized the Danish government's refugee politics in his preaching on Christmas Day last year. In the so called "priest initiative", he gathered more than 230

priests in a protest against the Danish policy on foreigners and against the tone in the debate.

(Source: Politiken online, www.politiken.dk, 16 February 2006)

Baltic press

Roundtable in Latvia on attitudes towards minority groups

Experts and politicians discussed in a roundtable arranged by the US Embassy, Latvia's increasingly acute problem of prejudice against minority groups. Foreign Minister Artis Pabriks said that Latvians needed to get "vaccinated" against racism and intolerance. Intolerance and racist attitudes were said to be on the increase in Latvia. EU accession had allegedly increased the level of intolerance in all three Baltic states, according to quoted civil society polls. Recent acts of violence in Latvia, including the assault of a black tourist, a rabbi, and an Indian chef, have brought the issue to the limelight, and made experts question the way the government is handling the problem.

(Source: The Baltic Times Online, www.baltictimes.com, 16 February 2006)

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Friday 17 February 2006

Swedish press

Somalis without legal interpreter

Around 1,300 Somali people are in the midst of the asylum process and will soon be up in the immigration courts for the initial negotiations. But there is no legal interpreter available for them, writes Dagens Nyheter. One candidate, Ida Gure, who came to Sweden 11 years ago and is an authorized interpreter, has been turned down by the Legal, Financial and Administrative Services Agency (*Kammarkollegiet*) on several occasions. "I've studied the basic legal course in order to get the necessary competence but they keep knocking me back," she says. Part of the problem, according to Kerstin Björkholm at Kammarkollegiet, is that there are no exact equivalent legal terms in the Somali language. But Ida Gure responds, "Somali is spoken by around 8 million people. Of course there are legal terms."

(Dagens Nyheter, SPR translation)

3,4 million Swedish crowns against honorary killings

Stockholm's County Administrative Board will give 3,4 million SEK (approx. 420 000 USD) for preventive measures against so called honorary killings. Sixteen projects in Stockholm county will get 50 000-400 000 SEK each. In distributing the grants, priority will be given to developing competence amongst the authorities concerned, to non-profit organisations that have achieved tangible results and to actors whose activities provide direct support to exposed adolescents. The largest grant, 400 000 SEK, goes to Regnbågen women's jour centre in Stockholm's suburb Botkyrka that will now transfer their overview survey of knowledge about honorary violence issues amongst school youth and authorities into targeted competence building.

(Source: Stockholm City and Stockholm County Administrative Board, www.ab.lst.se, 17 February)

Danish press

Muhammed cartoons conflict increases support for strict immigration policies

The conflict around the Muhammed cartoons has increased support for the Danish People's Party (Dansk Folkeparti) that pursues a strict immigration policy. If elections were due today, the party would increase its mandate by eight, to a total of 32. This attitude is echoed from the radical mayor of Holbæk, Jörn Sørensen, who says that the radicals must combat reluctance to deal with these issues and start putting demands on immigrants living in Denmark. He suggests a new pragmatic immigration and integration policy. Several radicals also call for a major re-profiling of the party following the success of the new moderate Muslim network Democratic Muslims (Demokratiske Muslimer).

(Source: Jyllands Posten Online, www.jp.dk, 17 February 2006)

Baltic press

Schools “not interested” in discussing tolerance

It is likely that Sri Lankan students beaten up in the Ilguciems area in the Latvian capital Riga in early January this year were assaulted by female students of one of the schools in the neighborhood. Yet, when the society integration ministry experts wanted to discuss tolerance issues with schools youngsters in the area after the attack, the local schools had demonstrated lack of interest in this kind of cooperation, said the minister for society integration, Ainars Latkovskis, speaking on the public Latvian Radio on Friday.

(Source: Riga newsroom, Baltic News Service, 17 February 2006)

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Saturday 18 to Monday 20 February 2006

Norwegian press

Capital first choice for immigrants and refugees looking to settle in Norway

Friends and a familiar community plus a belief in better job opportunities keep immigrants heading to Oslo, newspaper *Bergens Tidende* reports. In Oslo 18 percent of the population has a non-western background, compared to just 6 percent in Bergen. Researcher Tanja Seland Forgaard can see several explanations for the stream towards Oslo and eastern Norway. "First, it is important that there are many immigrants in the Oslo area from before. Many have friends and acquaintances there and want to live closer to them. In addition, the network refugees get in the municipality where they are settled, is important. If they don't know many people it is easier for them to decide to move," Forgaard told *Bergens Tidende*. Recent research indicates that job opportunities also attract refugees in the Oslo area. "They believe it is easier for foreigners to find work in Oslo, partly because there are more casual jobs there and more contacts who can find work for them," Forgaard said.

(Aftenposten English Web Desk/NTB, www.aftenposten.no, February 20 2006)

Major advancement for right wing party

The right wing Progress Party (FrP) now has nearly as much support from the electorate as the Labour Party, according to the latest poll made for Norwegian newspaper *Verdens Gang*. A total of 31 per cent of persons asked, stated that they would vote for FrP, which means an increase of 5.2 points from the previous poll. Conservative leader Erna Solberg is in no doubt that the controversy around the publishing of the caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed and the debate around Norway's immigrant policy has benefited the right wing Progress Party. -FrP always benefit from issues around the immigrant policy. People always become concerned when dramatic incidents surface, Solberg says. FrP's parliamentary leader Siv Jensen refutes this explanation.

(Norway Post Online, www.norwaypost.no, 20 February 2006)

Danish press

Immigrant men bend gender roles

Men with an immigrant background break out of stereotypes. Secretaries, hairdressers, and day-care centre workers are still largely considered the domain of women, despite more than thirty years of women's liberation. Vocational schools find however, that men with an immigrant background are willing to buck tradition and take an education in these fields. A recent study found that 34 percent of men with an immigrant background attending vocational schools were enrolled in study programmes dominated by women. Only 17 percent of ethnic Danish men choose the same study route. The young men with an immigrant background might have an easier time negotiating male ideals of work, because they have a difficult time finding employment, said Kenneth Reinicke at the Danish Research Centre on Gender Equality at Roskilde University. 'But that makes them more innovative,' said Reinicke. 'These young men go in and see new possibilities instead of being limited by traditional beliefs

about what a real man can work with.' The untraditional career choice could give bonuses in the form of career advancement, said Reinicke.
(The Copenhagen Post Online, www.jp.dk, 20 February 2006)

Baltic press

Illegal immigrant discovered in car trunk on Lithuanian border

Lithuanian customs officials have discovered a man hidden under luggage in a trunk of a car bound for Lithuania, local authorities said. According to the statement, the man with no personal identification documents was found in a car at the Lazdijai checkpoint on the Polish-Lithuanian border on Sunday. The illegal immigrant and the car's driver, 24-year-old Lithuanian citizen, were taken to custody in Lazdijai for 48 hours. A pre-trial investigation has been opened into the attempt to smuggle a person into Lithuania.
(Baltic News Service Online, www.bns.ee, 20 February 2006)

African band playing in Vilnius old town draws BBC attention

Black musicians playing in old-town Vilnius, which is known for its cultural tolerance, has drawn the attention of British national broadcaster, BBC. "Afroband's popularity is a sign of change in Lithuania as the country, which is for the first time receiving immigrants from across the world, starts to embrace their cultures as part of its own," a BBC journalist said in the article on Monday. The band is only three months old, but it already has a strong following. Its gigs sell out fast, and its popularity is being fuelled by media coverage. The band was born in the Pabrade centre for immigrants, home at the time for its four members, who arrived here from Liberia, Nigeria and Togo. The lead singer has since got a Lithuanian visa and moved out, but the rest of Afroband are still waiting for permission to stay. "In a country whose population is overwhelmingly white, it is rare to see a black person, even in Vilnius. New immigrants who are starting to arrive in Lithuania from Africa and Asia are often met with amazement on the streets," said BBC. Afroband members say their band is not African but Lithuanian, adding they want to stay in Lithuania and build a future.

(Baltic News Service Online, www.bns.ee, 20 February 2006)

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Tuesday 21 February 2006

Swedish press

SIDA grants further aid to Palestine

Following an appeal from the United Nations, Sweden has decided to grant a further SKr 50 million in development aid to the Palestinian territories, says the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). The decision has been taken at a time when the Palestinian Authority has warned that it is heading for a major financial crisis. The Swedish funds will go towards humanitarian relief and will be ferried via UNRWA and UNICEF.

(Svenska dagbladet, SPR Translation, 21 February 2006)

Swedish coverage of Ugandan elections

This Thursday Uganda will see its first multi party elections in over 20 years. Swedish daily *Svenska dagbladet* covers the unfolding of events, and reports on the burning of Ugandan refugee camps in Anaka, where out of the 40 000 people now a third have lost their temporary homes. Since 1997, 1.6 million people have been forced to live in 105 camps, amounting to almost the entire Achole people. Food aid from the UN is reported to decrease, being in some locations down to 40 percent of a minimal food portion. As a result of the imprisonment of the opposition leader Kizza Besigye, who is now released, Sweden cancelled parts of its aid to Uganda.

(Svenska dagbladet, 21 February 2006)

Baltic press

Council of Europe anti-racism commission criticizes Estonia

Estonia has not ratified any of the European and international treaties mentioned in the body's previous report. According to the commission's report, the number of stateless people who have obtained Estonian citizenship has been steadily increasing, and in 2004 the law on citizenship was amended to make it easier for disabled people and children under 15 years old to acquire citizenship. Regardless of the citizenship law amendments, there still are around 139,000 stateless persons in Estonia. This is in part due to the difficulties they experience in obtaining free of charge Estonian language courses in preparation for the citizenship exam. The commission recommends that the Estonian authorities take further action; for instance, that they continue to provide citizenship to more stateless people.

(Baltic News Service, 21 February 2006)

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Wednesday 22 February 2006

Swedish press

Trafficking victim granted residency

An 18-year-old girl from Kosovo who has been a victim of human trafficking is to be given permanent residency in Sweden after the evening paper Expressen published photos of her. It was during a court case in Borås that the paper took the photos of the girl who was giving evidence against sex traffickers. The photos later accompanied a report on the case that was published in Kosovo. The girl has since been threatened and her relatives have had their property destroyed. The Swedish Migration Board has now ruled that the girl will be granted residency in Sweden since her safety cannot be guaranteed in Kosovo.

(Svenska dagbladet, SPR Translation, 22 February 2006)

Finnish press

Finland may start returning people to Somalia

In its previous decisions, the Directorate of Immigration has considered all people from certain areas of Somalia to be in need of protection. The Supreme Administrative Court came to the same conclusion last June. An upcoming definition by the Department of Immigration on this issue is of specific interest to ten Somali youngsters who the Immigration police has proposed to send back to Somalia, contrary to the recommendations of the UN refugee agency (UNHCR). They have been involved in street robberies and other crimes. According to the Immigration police the situation in Somalia has changed in a way that makes it indeed possible to return people to the entire country. So far, Finland has returned only one person to Somalia who had committed a crime. That was in March 2004.

(Helsingin Sanomat, 22 February 2006)

Baltic press

European Commission criticizes Lithuanian asylum reform

In sum, Lithuania has made progress in efforts against racism and intolerance but has so far failed to ensure proper treatment of ethnic minorities, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance said in its third report on Lithuania. Asylum legislation and practice has undergone an important reform which, in spite of positive elements introduced, has diminished refugee protection in several areas, reads the document. ECRI recommends that the Lithuanian authorities ensure that the rights of asylum seekers to seek and obtain protection are not jeopardized by restrictive legislation or practice.

(Baltic News Service, 22 February 2006)

Anniversary of exile of Chechen people to be marked in Vilnius

An anniversary of the exile of the Chechen people by the Soviets half a century ago will be marked in Vilnius. Most of the Chechen population was forcibly moved to Central

Asia and Kazakhstan on Feb. 23, 1944. Over a half of them died of cold, diseases and starvation. Marking these tragic events, Chechen Men, a film by Floren Marcie, will be shown at Vilnius City Hall on Thursday. The event is scheduled to be attended by the author of the film. An international conference titled Who are We Becoming in Russia's War against Chechnya? will be held at the Academy of Science in Vilnius on Friday. A resolution is also planned to be passed during the conference, the international group of parliamentarians for Chechen problems, which is preparing it, has reported. (Baltic News Service, 22 February 2006)

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Wednesday 23 February 2006

Swedish press

Fake marriages network suspected

Swedish police are co-operating with the Belgium police in order to expose an international gang suspected of arranging fake marriages. A number of Swedes are suspected of helping 60 men from India and Pakistan in a fake marriage scam to facilitate entry into the European Union. The Swedes are suspected of human trafficking, or of aiding illegal entry into Belgium. *Svenska dagbladet* reports that a man from Garphyttan is suspected of arranging sham weddings between Indians and EU nationals at 250 000 Swedish kronor (about 31 000 USD) per marriage.

(Svenska dagbladet, Dagens nyheter, SPR Translation, 23 February 2006)

Norwegian press

Bondevik meets African crisis

Former Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik is on his first field trip for his new peace center in Oslo. He arrived in Nairobi on assignment for the UN, to meet with political leaders in countries threatened by starvation. "This is a crisis that can develop into a catastrophe," Bondevik told news bureau NTB. "It's critical that the area gets some rain. Donor countries have to recognize their responsibility and meet the appeals for help."

Bondevik met Wednesday with leaders of the UN's own aid operations, and their message was the same: Droughts are ever more frequent in the eastern "horn" area of Africa, and the situation now is bordering on catastrophe.

(Aftenposten Online, www.aftenposten.no, 23 February 2006)

Norway allocates NOK 240 million to new aid fund

The Norwegian Government has allocated NOK 240 million to a new scheme which will provide highly subsidized loans to the world's poorest countries in the event of an exogenous economic shock. These could be due to a natural disaster, war in the region or sharp fluctuations in the prices of import or export goods. As International Development Minister Erik Solheim explained, trading conditions in many developing countries have deteriorated as a result of strong fluctuations in the price of raw materials. - This new scheme will act as a buffer and will help to ensure continuity in the fight against poverty, even in cases where vulnerable, poor countries have to deal with sudden severe economic shocks due to external circumstances, Solheim said. The fund has been established by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), following a proposal by the G8 nations.

(Norway Post Online, www.norwaypost.no, 23 February 2006)

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Friday 24 February 2006

Swedish press

Eliasson proposes new UN rights council

Jan Eliasson, General Assembly president, yesterday put forward a proposal for a new human rights council to replace the criticized Human Rights Commission, which has been discredited for giving seats to countries such as Cuba, Sudan and Zimbabwe. In the proposal, the new council would have 47 members who would be reviewed on their record over a three-year period. Jan Eliasson hopes the resolution will be adopted by member nations next week. "I am of the opinion that it is a balanced text with a strong and effective mechanism for human rights," he told *Svenska dagbladet* after forwarding the proposal. To *Dagens nyheter*, Mr Eliasson says that the moment of truth has arrived for the UN. If the resolution is not supported, the UN's credibility may be undermined. "The political map is troublesome with the nuclear threat from Iran, the situation in the Middle East and other calls for reform within the UN," he says to DN. (Svenska dagbladet, Dagens nyheter, SPR Translation, 24 February 2006)

Norwegian press

Agreement on further Sri Lanka peace talks

The Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) have agreed to hold a new round of peace talks in Geneva in April. In a joint statement on Thursday evening, both sides promised that they will respect the present ceasefire agreement. They also promised to do what they can to avoid new violence. This week's talks in Geneva were facilitated by Norway, and International Development Minister Erik Solheim said at the end of the talks on Thursday night that the danger of a new outbreak of the civil war on Sri Lanka had been avoided. Solheim said he was satisfied with results of this week's talks. He pointed in particular to the fact that both the central government and the LTTE have committed themselves to do what they can to stop the acts of violence on the island. Around 200 persons were killed in various acts of violence on Sri Lanka in December and January, and many have feared that the ceasefire of 2002 would break down.

(Norway Post Online, www.norwaypost.no, 24 February 2006)

Finnish press

Demonstrators in Helsinki charge Russia with genocide in Chechnya

A group of protesters marched through Central Helsinki on Thursday carrying anti-Russian slogans and demonstrating against Russian military operations in Chechnya. "I pity the Russians and the Chechens alike", one protester said. "A group of murderers and rapists will return home to St. Petersburg." Another protester, who escaped to Finland five years ago, recognizes other familiar persons as well among the nearly 900 names on the list and says "I just heard a mother of seven was killed in my village." They have all lost their lives since Russia began its military operations in Chechnya in 1994. The peaceful protest was organized by the Finland-Chechnya Society.

(Helsingin Sanomat Online, www.hi.fi, 24 February 2006)

Danish press

New expulsion rules under heavy criticism

The Danish Government and the Danish People's Party (Dansk folkeparti) want to make expulsion of refugees no harder than that of other foreigners. An extension of types of criminality leading to expulsion would increase possibilities to expel regardless of refugee status or the time a person has been living in Denmark. The rules would be particularly strict regarding religious preachers, such as Imams. Criminal refugees would not be given any special protection against being sent out of from Denmark. Numerous politicians want to equal refugees to other foreigners that commit crimes, which lead to expulsion. Several organisations warn that the stricter rules will be at odds with the UN Refugee Convention. "We respect all conventions, but we want to send a clear signal to refugees that they are not protected if they commit criminal acts", says Minister of Integration, Rikke Hvilshøj.

(Politiken Online, www.politiken.dk, 24 February 2006)

Baltic press

Latvia yet to decide on granting political asylum to Yuko's vice-president

Latvian authorities are still undecided on whether to grant political asylum sought by Mikhail Yelfimov, vice-president of Russia's embattled oil giant Yukos, Latvia's LNT commercial television reported. According to LNT information, Latvia has not yet refused to grant political asylum to Yelfimov and has extended the term for making the decision. Under the Latvian law, authorities have to decide on granting or refusing asylum within three months after receiving the request, but in case of necessity the term can be extended to one year. Yelfimov, whose business partner, former Yukos head Mikhail Khodorkovsky, is serving a lengthy jail term in Russia, appealed for political asylum to Latvian authorities in November 2005. According to the information published in March in Russia's newspaper Nezavisimaya Gazeta, Yelfimov is one of the 13 people sought by Russian law enforcement authorities within the Yukos case. Five suspects in the criminal case have signed for not changing the address of residence, and another ten are under arrest.

(Baltic News Service Online, www.bns.ee, 24 February 2006)

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Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Saturday 25 February - Tuesday 28 February 2006

Swedish press

No narcotics found in apathetic children's blood

Two and a half months have passed since Chamber Prosecutor Lisa Eriksson confiscated the blood samples of four asylum-seeking apathetic children in the Swedish city of Sundsvall. The children were suspected to be drugged. Still there has been no sign of narcotics in the children's blood. Though the National Board of Forensic Medicine has tested the blood for all known toxics, Chamber Prosecutor Eriksson urges the investigation to be continued. According to Arne Eklund, chemist and Deputy Head of the National Board, should take no longer than a week's time. The request for continued investigation will be adhered to but new methodology must be developed in order to find unfamiliar substances.

(Sveriges Radio International Online, www.sr.se, 28 February 2006)

Danish press

Right to vote in election to Integration Council not always appreciated

A number of Danes have contacted the municipality of Copenhagen in connection to the election to the Integration Council in order to ask why they are still considered to be immigrants in Denmark, reports Politiken. It is not totally certain who is entitled to vote in the elections but the Ministry of Integration has said that the entitled voters are mainly refugees and refugees' family members and other foreigners. Some people who have Danish citizenship are uneasy with being reminded by the municipality that they are not ethnic Danes, reports Politiken. Integration Councils can be found in 70 municipalities in Denmark and are supposed to give advice to the municipalities when it comes to questions concerning integration.

(Source: Politiken p.8, 25 February 2006)

Opposition indignation

The political opposition has come out fighting against Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen's (V) attack on the media, business leaders and intellectuals who he claims have failed to defend freedom of expression during the Mohammed cartoons crisis. Social Liberal Leader Marianne Jelved dismissed the PM's attack as 'complete nonsense. Social Democrat leader Helle Thorning-Schmidt responded by saying that now is not the time to be creating even more division and that it is up to the PM to make a fundamental choice: Is he a party leader or a statesman? The far-left parties also distanced themselves from the PM's criticism, which according to the Unity List's Frank Aaen is yet another example of the government deliberately trying to mislead the public. 'By concentrating on freedom of speech the Prime Minister is desperately trying to shift focus from the harsh immigration policies and tone of debate which are the real reasons behind the Mohammed cartoons affair,' he said. However, Mr Rasmussen received an unequivocal show of support from the government's parliamentary backers, the Danish

People's Party, whose leader Pia Kjaersgaard said he had '...hit the nail right on the head.' 'I find it both thought-provoking and morally ambivalent that people who live off freedom of expression have misused the Mohammed affair to question immigration policy in stead of fighting for freedom of speech. At the same time I'm pleased that the Prime Minister has now gone out and said what the majority of the population expects,' she said.

(Source: Berlingske Tidende front page, 27 February 2006. NE translation)

Kofi Annan: Denmark doesn't understand Muslims

Denmark's inability to accommodate its Muslim minority population is one of the main reasons behind the Mohammed cartoons crisis. So said UN General Secretary Kofi Annan at a summit in Qatar over the weekend where top leaders from the UN, EU, and the Arab world convened to discuss how the publication of 12 caricatures has rapidly developed into a symbol of the mistrust and misunderstandings that exists between the Muslim world and the west. 'These offensive drawings of the prophet Mohammed were first published in a western country that only recently has experienced a significant Muslim influx and is still unsure as to how to accommodate this minority,' said Mr Annan. Although Mr Annan never actually named Denmark, his assertion was immediately rejected by Minister of Foreign Affairs Per Stig Møller (K) who said that it isn't Denmark that has to adapt to a Muslim minority, but Muslims who have to adjust and integrate themselves in to Danish society. The Liberal Party's Jens Rohde said Mr Annan's words raised doubts as to whether the Mohammed crisis can be solved by the UN, a possibility repeatedly aired by the government. 'We have no reason to adjust the way we live to accommodate a Muslim minority. It's a completely wrong way of looking at things and if that's the basis of the UN's argument as potential mediator, then I fear for the outcome,' he said.

(Politiken front page, 27 February 2006. NE translation.)

Too few immigrants in employment

Local councils and job centres have over the past few years become even worse at trying to get immigrants into the labour market, according to a new survey by NEWS express publisher IFKA. Just 47 per cent of all companies were contacted by the authorities last year with the aim of procuring jobs for an immigrant, compared to 63 per cent in 2004. At the same time, the survey also shows that 84 per cent of the companies have never experienced any problems when employing immigrants. Backed by the new figures, Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Immigration Rikke Hvilshøj (V) has now threatened to introduce sanctions against local authorities and job centres that are ineffective.

(Politiken p.5, 27 February 2006. NE translation)

Young immigrant brothers to be deported

Two Palestinian brothers, aged sixteen and eighteen respectively, who were on Monday found guilty by the High Court, for the brutal murder of an eighteen year old man in Korsør will be deported for life on the completion of custodial sentences. The sixteen-year-old was given an eight-year prison sentence, whilst his eighteen-year-old brother was deemed unfit to serve a normal sentence and will be committed to a mental institution until deportation.

(Politiken, 28 February 2006. NE translation)

Immigrants out in the streets

Ethnic minorities in Denmark have about half the living space as the general Danish population, according to an investigation that maps out the movement patterns of ethnic minorities. The lack of space results in the youth going out in the streets since there is not enough room at home and that increases the risk for criminal behaviour, said integration expert Fahmy Almajid. The ethnic minorities live on approximately 34 square meters while the population on a whole lives on 60 square meters.

(Source: Jyllands-Posten online www.jp.dk, 28 February 2006)

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