

Nordic Headlines 5 May 2004

Danish press

Danish exiled Iranians in Iraq

The lawyer, Anne Land, who represents the Danish exiled Iranians detained in Iraq accused for terrorism, is concerned at the way that her clients are being treated and says she intends to present the case before the UNHCR.

(Jyllands-Posten, 5 May, p. 4, NE translation)

Immigrants remain on introduction grant

Despite prospects of making more money, only 25 per cent of the immigrants receiving the low introduction grant moved into employment, job training or education last year, a new report shows. One of the authors, the social scientist Finn Kenneth Hansen says: "compared to other groups receiving social security benefits, this group has the largest difficulties moving to another source of income, even though they receive less money than in any other welfare programme. The introduction grant does not work, because these people have social or linguistic problems hindering their ability to secure a job." "This is not good enough", the Minister for Integration Bertel Haarder says giving the municipalities three pieces of advice: "Private job training works, a consistent close contact with the caseworker and turbo-integration. That way, immigrants adapt to "working Denmark" immediately instead of becoming part of "treatment-Denmark", he says.

(Politiken, 2 May 2004, p. 2)

EU asylum agreement

All EU member states have finally reached an agreement on joint legislation for processing asylum seekers after a three-year political tug of war. Although Denmark is not required to abide by the new legislation because of its opt-out on justice, Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder characterised the new agreement as an 'important step forward,' and said that Danish immigration laws fully comply with the new EU ruling.

(Berlingske Tidende, 30 April 2004, p. 8, NE translation)

Finnish press

Two-year transition period for new EU members

Finland is applying a two-year transition period to citizens of the new EU Member States entering the labour market. The transition period will affect eight of the new Member States joining the European Union at the beginning of May (the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia). Only Cyprus and Malta remain outside.

(Helsingin Sanomat 30 April 2004, p. A8)

“Immigrants to work in Finland on equal terms”

The president of The Finnish Confederation of Salaried Employees (STTK), Mikko Mäenpää, urges Finnish authorities to guarantee that immigrants from the new EU member states will have the same labour conditions as Finnish citizens. “We must prevent a situation where typical immigrant branches of labour are created leading to two separate labour markets – one for immigrants and one for the rest of the population. To prevent this from happening, the education, occupational experience and language knowledge of immigrants should be on the level that the Finnish labour market presupposes. Therefore, it is important that immigrants receive the right information about the rights and obligations in connection with immigration to Finland. This could be done by establishing the post of labour attaché at Finnish Embassies in the new EU member states,” concludes Mäenpää.

(Hufvudstadsbladet 30 April 2004, p. 13)

Support for immigrants in Finland

The Ministry of Education has contributed 252,000 Euro for the support of minority cultures and the fight against racism in Finland. The largest sum of 24,000 Euro was given to the Russian Cultural Democratic Union.

(Hufvudstadsbladet 28 April 2004, p. 5)

Norwegian press

A report on Somalis in Norway worries Norwegian authorities

A report by the Norwegian Social Research Institute (NOVA) has drawn attention to the problems that Somali refugees are facing in Norway. The report tells of numerous Somali families, who are dependent on social security benefits and live in miserable conditions in small and expensive rentals. According to the Somali Islamic doctrine it is forbidden to pay interest on a purchase, so only few Somalis are willing to take a loan in order to buy their own apartment. Many Somali marriages end after a short period leading to an increasing number of single mothers and divorced men living in Norway. Some Somalis claim it is the Norwegian system with social security and transitional benefits that contributes to the destruction of the traditional Somali family. Currently there are about 14,000 Somalis living in Norway and half of them are under the age of twenty. The majority came to Norway during the last five years and have found the transition from a nomadic Somali lifestyle to an organised Norwegian lifestyle difficult. The Norwegian authorities have awoken to the problems Somalis are facing and are now planning additional support measures for them.

(Aftenposten 3 May 2004, p. 3)

30 reception centres to be shut down

The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration has decided to shut down 30 reception centres for asylum seekers in 2004. The reason for this is the expected decrease

in the number of asylum seekers in the future. The Directorate estimates that there will be 10,000 asylum seekers this year compared to 15,600 in 2003. The downsizing leads to a yearly surplus of NOK 290 million.

(Aftenposten 30 April 2004, p. 3)

Mullah Krekar assails journalist

The storm around controversial Mullah Krekar, former leader of the militant Kurdish Ansar al-Islam, continued Friday with the religious leader confronting a journalist and confiscating a camera. Krekar was filmed during the incident, which occurred as he was on his way to file charges against Norwegian-Pakistani comedian Shabana Rehman who lifted him off the ground during a public debate. Journalist Jørgen Berge from TV2 Nettavisen turned up outside the police station Friday morning to snap a picture of Krekar's reaction to the highly publicised dispute with Rehman. Krekar told Berge he could not take his picture, and then grabbed the reporter and took the camera after the journalist ignored him. Krekar turned the camera in to the police, who later returned it to Berge. "I found the whole episode very unpleasant," Berge said. TV2 filmed the incident and promised to air the footage on Friday evening. Female comic Shabana Rehman lifted Krekar into the air during a public debate about the religious leader's recent autobiography, a stunt with political overtones that made headlines around the world. Rehman said she wanted to test Krekar's self-proclaimed moderation with the stunt. Rehman, who said that picking up Krekar also showed that he was not a menace, has lifted other prominent men in Norway to provoke reactions.

(Aftenposten, 30 April 2004)

Norway braced for EU expansion

No one knows how many job seekers might arrive in Norway after the EU expands by 10 new countries over the weekend. The Directorate of Immigration (UDI) has earmarked around NOK 3.5 million to help handle any prospective rush of newcomers seeking new jobs and new lives in Norway. While Norway is not a member of the EU, it is part of the European Economic Area, which is obliged to allow citizens from the new EU members to seek jobs where they want. Norway has imposed new transition rules to which citizens of the new EU member countries must adhere. Twenty new caseworkers have been hired to help implement the rules, and handle questions and applications from would-be immigrants. They will also be travelling around to local police districts in Norway, to help teach those charged with dealing with the public. All passports and immigration matters are handled through the police districts within Norway. A special help desk has been established at UDI in Oslo, also to answer questions from the police districts and staff working at Norway's embassies overseas. UDI officials says they feel prepared, but they have no idea what sort of workload they will face. While some speculate job applicants will arrive en masse, others think the attractiveness of Norway's job market is overrated. Some Poles and Latvians, for example, have said they would rather stay home, while others say they would prefer seeking their fortunes in warmer countries like Spain or Italy.

(Aftenposten, 29 April 2004)

Church asylum must come to an end

A commentary by Jon Kvalbein

Rejected asylum seekers often seek asylum in churches in Norway. Currently, there are 52 refugees receiving church sanctuary, 28 of them are children. The situation is problematic for both the Norwegian Church and the public authorities. The Head of the Church gives congregations the right to decide if they want to take in refugees or not and due to the difficult situation of the refugees, they often do. The state has no right to meddle in the business of the Church, but at the same time the state should be respected in its own area of authority. Congregations do not have the mandate nor the expertise to re-examine public decisions. It is the Norwegian Parliament that establishes the asylum policy in Norway and the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration and the Immigration Appeals Board that executes it. The Church has the right to criticize the state's asylum policy, but no one has the right to undermine a democratically accepted policy, as long as it is in line with basic human rights. As it is the Church that has exceeded its mandate in this issue, it should be the one to take initiative in coming up with a general decision on Church asylum. Asylum seekers should experience kindness and care, but also the order, justice and consequences that are proper to a law governed state. This is why the arrangement of Church asylum should be put to an end.

(Aftenposten 28 April 2004, p. 10)

Swedish press

Criticism against the Aliens Appeal Board

In two different cases, the Parliamentary Ombudsman (JO) is criticising the Aliens Appeal Board for the time they take in handling asylum appeals. In the first instance, the Aliens Appeal Board took three and a half years to come to a decision in a priority case. In the second instance, a family from Serbia had to wait two years and nine months before the Board rejected their appeal. The Aliens Appeal Board has a responsibility to handle the cases as fast as possible, the JO writes in a statement.

(Dagens Nyheter, 3 May, 2004, p. 5.)

Activists helped deportee to escape

An Iranian man, who is threatened by deportation, was helped by activists to escape from a reception centre in Malmö. The activists had gathered outside the reception centre in order to protest against the deportation, which was supposed to be carried out the same day. When the activists were not able to stop the deportation, they smashed a window from where the Iranian was able to flee. The activists argue that the man, who has been active in a communist party in Iran, risks torture and death penalty if he returns to his home country. (Dagens Nyheter, 3 May 2004, p. 5, and Svenska Dagbladet, p. 6.)

Fewer asylum seekers in Sweden

Preliminary figures from the Swedish Migration Board show that the number of asylum seekers has decreased with 19 per cent compared to the same period last year. This year, 8,045 persons sought asylum during the first four months of the year, compared to 9,949 people last year. The decrease in the number of asylum seekers from Iraq is 72 per cent, 36 per cent from Bosnia-Herzegovina and 14 per cent from Serbia-Montenegro. The Swedish Migration Board has thus decided to reduce its 2004 prognosis for asylum seekers from 29,000 to 26,000. (Dagens Nyheter, 3 May 2004, p. 5.)

No transition rules in Sweden

The government lost an important political battle when all parties except the Social Democrats voted against transition rules in Parliament yesterday. Barbro Holmberg, the Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy, argued that the workers from the East risk being exploited on the labour market. "The problem is not that people who work in Sweden exploit the social security benefits. The problem is that three Swedish child allowances correspond to a normal wage in the new member states. If you do not see this, you do not see the reality," she said. Despite the defeat, the government will present a new proposal already this autumn if Sweden experiences serious problems as a result of the EU enlargement.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 29 April 2004, p. 7, & Dagens Nyheter, p. 5)

Sweden receives Rwandan prisoners

Sweden has agreed to receive Rwandan war criminals sentenced by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in Arusha, Tanzania. Only five other countries have similar agreements with the Tribunal: Benin, France, Italy, Mali and Swaziland. The Tribunal has sentenced 18 persons since the establishment in 1994 including former ministers and heads of media contributing to the genocide.

(Dagens Nyheter, 28 April 2004, p. 6)

Extradited Egyptian sentenced to life imprisonment

A militant Islamic leader, who was extradited from Sweden to Egypt in 2001, has been sentenced to life imprisonment by a military court in Cairo. The Swedish government extradition was based upon the Egyptian's supposed leadership in a terrorist movement. Several human rights groups have criticised the extradition as well as the legal process in Egypt, mainly because verdicts of guilt in Egyptian military courts are impossible to appeal.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 28 April 2004, p. 8)

Lone children are living outside social security systems

Every year, around 100,000 unaccompanied children arrive in Western Europe. Approximately 500 of them reach Sweden, but due to a more restrictive asylum policy, a growing number of children do not make their presence known to the authorities, a new British report shows. Instead, they are living outside all social

security systems. Most lone children in Sweden come from Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan and the former Yugoslavia, but an increasing number is also coming from Eastern Europe. "Most worrying is the fact that only 55 per cent of the children are allowed to stay in Sweden and that there are no acceptable ways of sending them back," says Eva Larsson Bellander, expert on lone children with the organisation: Save the Children. Since many of the children do not have a passport, they are sent back and forth between different countries. "You really wonder what will happen to the children after the deportation," Larsson Bellander says.

(Dagens Nyheter, 29 April 2004, p. 9)

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Danish press

Rise in immigrants

The number of immigrants residing in Denmark rose during the year's first three months. According to the latest figures from the National Statistics Agency, there are now 443,774 residents classified as immigrants, or descendants of immigrants, a rise of 0.4 percent since December. This group now represents 8.2 percent of the population. Although there has been a slight rise in immigration from neighbouring countries Germany, Norway and Sweden, the majority of the newly arrived are from non-western countries, primarily in Asia.

(Jyllandsposten 12 May 2004, p. 3, NE translation)

150 refugee children disappear every year

Every year, approximately 150 refugee children, who have made it to Denmark on their own, disappear from the reception centres for asylum seekers. No one knows where they go and the Danish authorities do little to find out what happens to them. According to other European country studies, some of the children end up either taking underpaid work or prostitute themselves. However, most of the children carry on to other countries and mainly to relatives in Sweden says Klaus Høm from the Red Cross. Minister of Refugees, Bertil Haarder, turns down Save the Children's request for an investigation into what has happened to the children. According to the Minister all the refugees who come to Denmark of free will can also leave the country of free will.

(Denmark's Radio 11 May 2004)

Danish-Bosnian co-operation on repatriation

Danish and Bosnian municipalities have started to co-operate in order to facilitate the repatriation of refugees from Denmark to Republika Srpska in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The project also aims at strengthening the democratisation and integration process in Srpska, which is controlled by the Serbs. Asim Perendjia from the Danish Refugee Council and co-ordinator of the project says that one of the conditions for financing the project set out by the Danish authorities is that local NGOs (including Muslim Bosnian) and refugees organisations take part in the work with the Serbian authorities. For the authorities in Banja Luka, the capital in the Serbian republic, the Danish condition is pioneering since their tradition is not to include citizens in the decision-making processes. The finances for the project will be taken from a larger budget earmarked for democratisation, human rights, and political and economic stability in the Western Balkan. The Danish municipalities forming part of the project include Esbjerg, Herning, Odense, Nyborg and Horsens.

(Politiken 9 May 2004, p. 3.)

Hizb-ut-Tahrir can continue

The Danish People's Party will be unable to put together a parliamentary majority to ban the extremist Muslim organisation *Hizb-ut-Tahrir*, and also the Paedophile Association, after the Socialist People's Party announced that it couldn't support any efforts to intervene against legally formed associations. The Social Democrats also announced that despite earlier statements, it could not support a ban. However, yesterday's meeting of Hizb-ut-Tahrir at Nørrebro Hall could be the last time that it's allowed to convene on council-owned property. Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder (V) has challenged Copenhagen Town Hall to utilise a law that prevents local councils from renting property out to unlawful biker gangs, against the Muslim organisation.

(JyllandsPosten, 7 May 2004, p. 4, & Berlingske Tidende 9 May 2004, NE translation)

Inquiry on Islamic fundamentalism in elementary school

The Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration, Bertel Haarder, wants an inquiry with focus on schoolchildren and how they view the role of women. The objective is to determine whether there are any indications that children (with Danish and other ethnic backgrounds) have fundamentalistic attitudes. Reason for this inquiry is last week's assertions that the extreme Muslim organisation *Hizb-ut-Tahrir* has tried to recruit young schoolchildren by disseminating information outside their schools. According to Minister Bertel Haarder, the association and its contempt for democracy and women symbolise a new phenomenon in society similar to what Nazis tried to do in the 1930's. As part of its commitment to the UN work against xenophobia, the Danish Government has already earmarked 800 000 DKr for an inquiry into schoolchildren's antidemocratic and xenophobic viewpoints.

(Politiken, 7 May 2004, p. 2)

Finnish press

Fourth racism report published

The Finnish League for Human Rights has published a new report on racism in Finland. Racism is, according to the report, a daily problem for ethnic minorities in the country. Racism normally manifests itself as discrimination at work and verbal insults in the community. Immigrant men tend to become victims of violence, whereas women more often face verbal abuse. Also, 40 per cent of children with immigrant background have experienced racism. By way of international comparison however, the situation is not very serious, says Aysu Shakir from the Human Rights League. Hardened attitudes towards immigrants are becoming increasingly visible especially among young people in Finland. To tone down these tendencies, Shakir suggests that human rights and globalism studies become obligatory in Finnish schools.

(Helsingin Sanomat 12 May 2004, p. A12)

Faster processing of asylum applications

The Finnish Directorate of Immigration (UVI) has succeeded in doing away with the heavy pile of asylum applications. Now, practically all asylum applications that were submitted before 2004 have been processed. The decision to fasten the processing procedure for asylum and other applications was taken by the Ministry of Interior and UVI after a Parliamentary Ombudsman declared the long processing procedures to be against the Finnish constitution. In order to keep the processing periods shorter on a continuous basis, three new regional offices have been established and new personnel will be hired.

(Helsingin Sanomat 4 May 2004, p. A7)

“The revised Finnish Aliens Act is diluted”

Nytte Ekman, from the Finnish refugee rights organisation *Nada Hope*, says that the revised Aliens Act brings no changes to the treatment of asylum seekers and thinks on the contrary, that the Act has been diluted. According to Ekman, the local police in Finland have been given too much authority in the handling of asylum issues. The revised Act does transfer the asylum interviews from the local police to the Directorate of Immigration but the investigation of the applicant's identity, travel route and next of kin is still handled by the local police. “Many asylum seekers are afraid of the police due to bad experiences at home and therefore end up giving false information when faced with them. The local police in Finland are no experts on the political situation abroad”, Ekman says. Misinformation can also be caused by mistakes made by the interpreter. The amount of false information needed to revoke a residence permit should in her view therefore be higher in the Act. Also, the section on the need of protection is obscure. Spokespersons for human rights suggested that protection should also be given to people who in their home countries are threatened by persecution or violence for example within the family. A similar threat could be circumcision, forced marriage, honour killing or the duty to fight against your own people. None of these suggestions were included in the Aliens Act, Ekman sighs.

(Helsingin Sanomat 4 May 2004, p. A7)

Norwegian press

Stabbing incident at Norwegian reception centre

A 22-year old Sudanese man was seriously injured after having been stabbed by a 34-year old Somali man in a Norwegian reception centre. The victim's state is critical but stable. The Somali man was captured and has been charged with assault. (Aftenposten 10 May 2004, p. 3)

Norwegian police is sent abroad to stop illegal immigration

Hugo Fjeld, a Norwegian consul in Dubai, has uncovered many attempted cases of human smuggling into Norway and other Nordic countries. According to Fjeld, there is evidence that criminals from the Nordic countries lure Somalis to the North by promising them a good job in for example the Norwegian oil industry. The Somalis pay NOK 50,000 to the perpetrators. The consul, officially a police

inspector, was assigned to the post in order to stop illegal immigration to the Nordic countries. This year, Fjeld has received 363 cases of which 66 involve human smuggling from Somalia. The Norwegian Organisation for Asylum Seekers (NOAS) criticises the government for sending police abroad in order to stop asylum seekers from reaching the Norwegian borders. "The Norwegian police do not assess the situation of the asylum seeker or what will happen to him/her if repatriated to his/her country. In many cases the police just make the asylum seeker's already bad situation worse", says Rune Berglund Steen from NOAS. Fjeld is just one of many Norwegian policemen, who have been stationed abroad. Arne Huuse, chief of the National Bureau of Crime Investigation (KRIPOS), does not agree with NOAS' arguments. "Our representation in Dubai stops human smuggling on a large scale. We do not stop people in need, but persons who on false premises try to get a better life," he says. (Aftenposten 9 May 2004, p.5 and 10 May 2004, p. 4)

UDI employee stole money as revenge

An employee from the accounting division of the Directorate of Immigration (UDI) admitted having stolen NOK 3,8 million from the Directorate in 2002. The man, originally from Kenya, decided to steal the money as a revenge for not having been given more challenging work assignments at the Directorate. He now faces a three-year jail sentence. (Aftenposten 9 May 2004, p. 3)

Two asylum seekers convicted for murder

Haugesund Distric Court in Norway has sentenced two asylum seekers from Libya to respectively 9 and 16 years of imprisonment for the robbing and killing of an 83-year old woman. The crime was committed in June last year when the two men broke into the victim's house robbing and consequently killing the victim with an axe. One of the convicted men is expected to appeal his sentence. (Aftenposten 6 May 2004, p. 4)

Rejected asylum seekers refuse to leave the reception centres

The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) has asked the courts for help in removing 76 rejected asylum applicants from the Norwegian reception centres. As of January 2004 everyone, who has been denied asylum in Norway, loses their right to reside in state reception centres. Authorities say it is absurd that rejected asylum seekers have continued to receive free food and accommodation at reception centres some for up to two years. So far 365 rejected asylum seekers have received a letter giving them two weeks to agree to co-operate with the authorities in their returning home. 17 per cent have signalled their willingness to return, 37 per cent have disappeared from the reception centres, and the rest have not given any indication of co-operation. UDI, who bases its motion on "the law on forced execution", will take the first cases of forced eviction to court in the middle of May. (Aftenposten 5 May 2004, p. 2)

Sharp drop in unfounded asylum application in Norway

The number of unfounded asylum applications has dropped from 1481 in the first quarter of 2002 to 83 in 2004. Thor Arne Sass from the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development says that the 48-hour procedure has had an important impact on the number of unfounded asylum applications. According to the 48-hour procedure, applications from asylum seekers who are presumed to have an unfounded protection claim can now be processed within 48 hours. No other country in Europe processes unfounded asylum applications as quickly. Another reason for the sharp decrease in unfounded asylum applications is the numerous information campaigns distributed to international media.

(Aftenposten 3 May 2004, p.4)

Swedish press

Proposal: houses instead of apartments to large immigrant families

According to a proposal from the Left Party, the serious housing shortage among large immigrant families in Stockholm might be solved if the municipality let the families live in houses instead of apartments. A representative from the Left Party, Anne-Marie Strömberg, argues that the municipality should be allowed to buy houses for large immigrant families. The need for accommodation is very often acute since an asylum seeker, who has been granted a residence permit, often joins his or her family in Sweden. The integration administration, however, is not in favour of the proposal, since they expect the immigrants to find their own accommodation and the alternative offered is to move to another municipality. (Dagens Nyheter, 12 May 2003, p. 5.)

No support for asylum restrictions

The opposition parties did not support a government proposal to shorten the asylum process by limiting an asylum seeker's possibility to appeal a negative decision. Now, the decision is postponed until this fall. In the meantime, the government will try to reach a broader consensus concerning the asylum policies. (Dagens Nyheter, 12 May 2004, p. 12, Dagens Nyheter, 7 May 2004, p. 8)

Norwegian citizen sought asylum in Sweden

Last Friday, the Swedish police apprehended a Norwegian citizen suspected of crimes in Norway and wanted by the Norwegian police. When the police were about to hand over the man to Norway, he claimed that he wanted to seek political asylum in Sweden. Now, the man will spend his time in Swedish custody, waiting for an extradition to Norway. In the meantime, the Swedish Migration Board will handle the asylum request. (Dagens Nyheter, 9 May 2004, p. 5.)

Human Rights Watch criticises Sweden

Sweden does not defend human rights as strongly as before, the New York-based organisation Human Rights Watch (HRW) argues in connection with the

case of Ahmed Agiza, who was deported from Sweden to Egypt in 2001. Last week, Agiza was sentenced to life imprisonment in an Egyptian military court, and during the trial, he argued that he had been tortured during the imprisonment. Despite the fact that Sweden has agreed not to deport anyone to countries where they risk torture, the deportation was carried out once Egypt had promised not to mistreat Agiza. "You cannot trust guarantees like these," Julia Hall from HRW says. The Swedish Security Police suspected Agiza to be in a leading position in a terrorist organisation and to plan terrorist attacks in Sweden. Now, the Swedish government does not acknowledge any responsibility: "Egyptian authorities carry the full responsibility. The decision was made in order to protect Sweden and Swedish citizens. Sweden also has a responsibility to fight terrorism and under no circumstances give terrorists sanctuary", says Carl Henrik Ehrenkrona, Head of the Legal Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (Dagens Nyheter, 6 May 2004, p. 7, and Svenska Dagbladet, p. 6.)

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Danish Press

Business positive towards immigrants

An estimated 55,000 companies in this country would be prepared to employ an immigrant if formally approached by the local social authorities or job centre – that is the conclusion of a new integration survey by NXP publishers IFKA, on behalf of the Ministry of Integration. The survey reveals that up to half of all companies have never been contacted by the local authorities, even though two-thirds of public sector, and half of private sector companies, declared themselves willing to take on an immigrant. "Companies are wary, but our survey shows that if the job centre or local council presented Muhammad, then the majority would be more than willing to give him a chance," said an IFKA spokesman. Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder said he was 'extremely pleased' about the conclusions of the survey. "It's positive that there is such a level of goodwill, and it's an unexploited resource which could instead be utilised if local authorities took the time to contact businesses and do the groundwork," he said.

(Jyllands Posten, 18 May 2004, p. 5, NE translation)

EU should copy Danish integration efforts

The Liberal Party's leading candidate for MEP in the upcoming EU elections, Karin Riis-Jørgensen, has proposed that the EU should adopt some of Denmark's strict integration policies. According to Riis-Jørgensen, the EU should have an independent commissioner for integration, and at the same time should use more money and resources on promoting employment and preventing the formation of ghettos. "Integration is a pan-European problem, and Danish methods should be used by the EU,' she said.

(Jyllands Posten, 17 May, p. 2, NE translation)

School only for immigrants

After years of failing to make the Selsmoseskole in Høje Taastrup more attractive to Danish families, the policymakers now wish to turn the school into a school for immigrants. Today only five out of 247 pupils are Danish by heritage. Remaining pupils are of Pakistani, Turkish, Somali, Palestinian or Lebanese origin. The idea is that the first six-seven years in school will be together with other immigrants and thereafter the children will move to schools with larger Danish ethnic groups. Vibeke Winther at the Høje Taastrup Municipality's Child and Youth Committee says that it is not an attempt to turn the Selsmoseskolen into a school for immigrants, but rather an attempt to combine children's time in school and their spare time. She continues that it is time to accept that 98 per cent of the children in the school are bilingual and many tend not to participate in spare time activities and rarely leave the home environment. Ulla Mikkelsen, representative from the local teachers association criticises the idea to spread the children to other schools after sixth grade. According to Mikkelsen, there is a risk that 'weak' children will 'drown' in the new schools and she proposes that the children should stay at Selsmoseskolen and have internships after school. Thus, the children would

both be 'saved', socially and culturally, and at the same time get knowledge about how it is to work.

(Politiken, 13 May 2004, p. 6)

Pure Danish classes

Danish schools and municipalities separate schoolchildren with foreign family names and those with Danish names into different classes in order to please Danish parents. According to the Documentation and Advisory Centre on Racial Discrimination, the separation is a violation of both Danish law and UN conventions. In the city of Vejle, they have introduced separate classes after threats from Danish parents to take their children out of school if there are too many children with foreign background, in particular Turkish and Arabic minorities. The so-called 'ethnic' classes receive extra teachers or pedagogues in order to enhance the children's possibilities to learn the Danish language. Niels Erik Hansen at the Advisory Centre on Racial Discrimination concludes that this reminds him of the methods carried out by the former apartheid South Africa.

(Politiken, 12 May 2004, p. 4)

Finnish Press

Police sharpens measures against racist conduct

Racist criminal behaviour has in recent years diminished in Finland. The racist acts that are reported to the Finnish police mostly involve violent acts against foreign persons or their property. This spring a new wave of incidents has occurred, as a result of which the police have tightened measures aimed at preventing further clashes between young Finns and immigrants. The average age for those who commit racist crimes is lower than for other crimes. Normally the perpetrator is a 16-year old who wants to make a good impression in skinhead circles. These youngsters commit racist crimes without any strong ideological background, says Hannu Moilanen from the Finnish Security Police.

(Helsingin Sanomat, 15 May 2004, p. A8)

Swedish Press

Committee will investigate deportation

In 2001, two Egyptian citizens, Ahmed Agiza and Muhammed Al Zery were deported from Sweden to Egypt. According to Swedish media, the deportation was carried out by American agents in a US-chartered plane. The Egyptians have also been tortured in Egypt despite promises from Egyptian authorities to treat them fairly. Now, three political parties report the government to the Committee on the Constitution in order to investigate the role of the government and the Security Police in the deportation case. Neither the Minister of Justice Thomas Bodström nor the Minister for Foreign Affairs Laila Freivalds wish to comment on the matter.

(Dagens Nyheter, 19 May 2004, p. 5, & Svenska Dagbladet, p. 15)

Men also victims of honour related violence

Not only youth but also grownup men are in the risk of being victims of honour-related threats and violence. According to psychologist Nils Gunnar Petersson, honour related threats are not limited to girls, women and young boys. "Not only thousands of girls are in the risk zone, but also tens of thousand of persons who are not allowed to control their own life. We must dare to talk about these things in order to encourage and support those who are affected. This is a social problem and a ticking bomb." Petersson have met around 20 men with roots in the Middle East who have been threatened by their families following their wish to divorce, abdicate or refuse to accept an arranged marriage. "I am surprised over the power in those actions. There is absolutely no room for negotiations or any motivation to try to understand a person's own will. For some groups, divorce, individual choice or freedom of religion do not exist, despite the fact that these are opportunities each individual are entitled to – possibilities bounded by law in Sweden", he says. (Svenska Dagbladet, 17 May 2004, p. 10)

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Danish Press

Mayors skeptical towards ghetto plans

Local Mayors have accused the Government of being out of touch with reality by hoping that sending welfare recipients to the back of the housing queue will stop the growth of ghettos. A number of mayors said yesterday that although immigrants may be stopped from getting an apartment in heavily ethnic populated housing projects, no Danes had any desire to move to a ghetto, and apartments would therefore remain empty. Local councils are now demanding financial compensation if the Government's proposal leads to apartments standing empty for periods of time. At the same time, the Danish People's Party said yesterday that the authorities should be able to relocate immigrants on welfare, who reside in 'ghettos,' from one end of the country to the other, if it would make housing projects more attractive for Danes to move in.

(Berlinske Tidende, 26 May 2004, p. 6, NE translation)

Immigrants pushed to back in housing queue

Welfare recipients on waiting list for publicly owned apartments will in the future be pushed to the back in the queue, due to a new government initiative aimed to stop public housing projects turning into ghettos. Although this will create problems for Danes who receive social benefits, the new rules are primarily aimed at immigrants and their families who dominate the welfare lists, and are well represented in housing projects throughout the country. In the future, publicly owned apartments will primarily be offered to those who already have a job, are under education or are on a pension.

(Politiken/Jyllands Posten, 25 May 2004, front page, NE translation)

Young immigrants are often misplaced in school

Bilingual children are often wrongly put in the classes where they get special teaching. This misperception of their intelligence is based on psychological tests that are not adjusted to children with two languages. This creates a problem where retarded young immigrants do not get the special treatment they need. Allan Laursen in charge of the school project 'sputnik' in Nørrebro, Copenhagen, says that it is just as common that young immigrants that have a normal development are perceived as retarded and misplaced in classes with special teaching. The municipality of Copenhagen and the Pedagogical Psychological Advice Agency has initiated an investigation on how common the problem is but psychologists who already are aware of the situation says that it is important that the test never speak for it self but that other factors must be included. The municipalities have now been encouraged to update their test material so it is adapted to the children of today.

(Politiken, 24 May 2004, p. 5)

Fear of Muslim dominance

According to an opinion poll by Rambøll Management 1 million Danes believe that Muslims will become a majority in Denmark in the future, and of these, 59 per cent fear that it will happen within the next thirty years. The feelings of the population are in contrast to official Denmark Statistics Bureau prognoses predicting that immigrants and their descendants from non-western countries will form around 11 per cent of the population by 2040. Professor Lise Tøgeby, researcher in Danes' attitudes towards immigrants, says that although the population's fear is most probably wide off the mark, politicians have good cause to heed the findings of the poll, because the attitudes reflected will have a major influence on Danish politics in the near future. "The debate about immigration and refugees is very dominant in Denmark today, and Danes take this into account when they vote, which they didn't before," she said. Another immigration expert, Professor Jørgen Goul Andersen from Aalborg University, agreed, saying: "The findings of the poll indicate concern more than real expectation. A major group of the population is worried about immigration, and this is reflected in how they vote. It has also forced MP's to introduce as any restrictions in immigration policy as possible."

(Jyllands Posten, 23 May 2004, NE translation)

Haarder wants more immigrants

Minister of Refugees, Immigration and Integration, Bertel Haarder, supports the argument by Niels Blomgren-Hansen, Professor of Economics at Copenhagen Business School, that the Danish welfare system can be saved through increased immigration of well-educated people. The Government has facilitated certain professionals to receive a working permit in Denmark. The groups of professionals that have been emphasised are teachers, nurses, engineers, and most recently, IT-engineers. The main criticism of the list comes from the Danish People's Party, the Social Democrats and the Trade Union. All three argue that increased groups of employees with a foreign background may press Danish salaries down in order to compete on the market. Both Haarder and the Confederation of Danish Industries reject the criticism and believe that the job-list will give Denmark an international profile. Furthermore, Denmark must increase the amount of people that work in order to be able to keep the welfare on the same level as it is today. Blomgren-Hansen calculates that Denmark need about 20,000 immigrants on full-time contracts each year, if a future budget deficit of DKK 60 million is to be prevented. Blomgren-Hansen suggests a more progressive immigration policy, something along the lines of the Canadian model, where immigrants get points for education, work experience and language knowledge. Haarder do not want to go so far as the Canadian model but is happy to expand the list of professionals that are welcome to Denmark.

(Politiken, 21 May 2004, p. 14)

Female immigrants should be forced to learn Danish

Compulsory Danish language courses for reunited families may be a way to break women's isolation from the society, especially those who belong to an ethnic minority in Denmark. This is the background for a radical proposal that will

force reunited spouses to learn Danish. The language training will be free of charge if the person in question is available for the labor market. The Minister of Refugees, Immigration and Integration, Bertel Haarder supports the proposal and says it will be part of the next autumn's legal program. He continues that it also must be some kind of sanctions for those who do not take part in the Danish language training. Today, only half of the reunited spouses take part of the free language courses, which is provided the first three years after arrival. The new proposal would be a possibility for isolated women to leave their houses. Women's vulnerable situation when they reunite with their husbands in Denmark was the topic when the Parliament's Social Committee recently had consultations with participants from the Ministry of Integration, Justice, and Social Affairs. It was discussed whether or not women who have been 'imported' by Danish men and later abused, could keep their residence permit if they left their husbands. Haarder answered that they could, if they have been in Denmark for three years, sometimes for two, and have a strong connection to the Danish society. Upon this, Elsebeth Gerner Nielsen, chairwomen of the Integration Committee, concludes "foreign women in Denmark obviously must accept torture". (Politiken, 20 May 2004, p. 4)

Finnish Press

UVI gets critique from the State Audit Office

The State Audit Office demands that the Finnish Directorate of Immigration (UVI) shorten its processing periods for asylum and other applications. According to the State Audit Office the long waiting periods have been a problem ever since UVI was established in 1995. The delays take place in all stages of processing, starting from the asylum seeker's first contact with the local police. The State Audit Office also demands that the foreign register be better updated and that the information from other authorities be better made use of. Further UVI gets critique for having contracted a private company for call-centre tasks, giving the company the right to enter into parts of the asylum seekers' personal files. Some of the shortcomings have already been improved upon. By 1 May practically all asylum applications that were submitted before 2004 were processed. Further UVI has plans to computerise its application system making the processing more effective.

(Helsingin Sanomat, 26 May 2004, p. A7)

The President reproaches media for discriminating Romas

The President of Finland, Tarja Halonen, believes the Finnish media discriminate the Roma population in their news reporting. Halonen is specifically referring to the reporting on Roma asylum seekers coming from the new EU-countries. "The media has learned to use discriminatory words and expressions when commenting on Roma issues," she says. The President hopes for an in-depth discussion on the proper media terminology to be used. "Discriminating in a more subtle manner, is just not enough", she says.

(Helsingin Sanomat, 20 May 2004, p. A6)

Norwegian press

No mass of workers to Norway

Norway has not been overrun by workers from the new European Union countries as originally feared. The situation is rather the opposite. Only 1,529 workers from the ten new EU countries applied and received work permits in Norway in the period May 1 to 9. Many of the applications were received before May 1, and a total of 5,219 workers received work permits since January 1, a total of 1,668 fewer than last year, a decline of 24 per cent. Karl Erik Sjøholt, at the Directorate of Immigration (UDI), "this was one of the possible situations we predicted, so we are not totally surprised". He could not offer a good explanation for the poor interest, but said that UDI is prepared for an increased number of applications during the summer. "We have increased the number of caseworkers so that we can handle more applications than what we have received until now". "We must follow the development over a longer period of time before we can state what the reasons may be," Sjøholt says.

(Nettavisen, 21 May 2004)

Asylum seekers refuse to leave

The Government's goal of encouraging 3,700 asylum seekers from Iraq to leave Norway of their own free will does not seem to be reached for the moment. Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, Erna Solberg points to Norway's high standard of living as one reason for the asylum seekers' reluctance to leave. The Norwegian Organisation for Asylum Seekers (NOAS) is of the opinion that the Government has a completely wrong understanding of why people try to remain in Norway.

(NRK, 18 May 2004)

Swedish Press

Apathetic refugee children prioritised

In April, Swedish newspaper Svenska Dagbladet reported that hundreds of refugee children merely lie in their beds, totally apathetic. In many cases, their condition has a connection to the asylum process, since several children have become apathetic when their asylum application has been rejected. Now, the Swedish Migration Board has formed a working group in order to identify families whose children are in the risk zone of falling down into apathy. The Board has also decided to prioritise cases where physicians claim that children risk severe psychical suffering.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 24 May 2004, p. 7)

Double standards in Stockholm's largest mosque

Every Friday, around 2,000 Muslims gather in the Great Mosque in Stockholm to listen to the speeches of the Imam Hassan Mousa. A comparison between the Arabic and the Swedish versions of the speeches shows that much of the criticism against the USA and the western world never are translated into Swedish. For example, when the Imam roars "USA rapes Islam!" from the rostrum, it is translated into "We condemn USA's torture of Iraqi prisoners". In another part of the speech, the Imam says in Arabic, "How long will you endure this degradation without acting? American and British soldiers, grandchildren to Hitler, torture Muslims in Iraq". In Swedish, the American torture of Iraqi prisoners is condemned, but the translator maintains that USA earlier has done good efforts for Muslims, for example in Bosnia. The Imam admits that his speech was critical, but says that he needs to meet and damp the feelings of the Muslims, who have reacted very strongly on the torture scandal in Iraq. According to Anne Sofie Roald and Philip Halldén, researchers at Malmö and Lund universities, the Imam has two audiences, one Muslim and one Swedish, and he needs to please them both. In addition, the Muslims do not want to show internal conflicts, which they think might be used by anti-Islamic groups in Sweden.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 23-24 May 2004, pp. 7, 10)

Amnesty criticises deportation

Sweden and Egypt have agreed to put up an international investigation in order to examine the case where two Egyptians were deported from Sweden to Egypt where they might have been tortured. General Secretary of Swedish Amnesty, Carl Söderbergh, says that the deportation was not in line with international law. "This is a serious violation of a very important human right, the one that forbids deportation to a country where you risk being subjected to torture. The government needs to take responsibility and admit that the deportation was wrong", he says. Lawyer Kjell Jönsson, whose client is one of the deported Egyptians, says that the case is a clear example of a miscarriage **of justice / "judicial murder"**. Jönsson was never allowed to meet his client, and he did not know about the Egyptian guarantee that said that the men would be treated fairly. "If this case had gone to the European Court of Justice, they would probably have recommended the Swedish government not to implement the deportation", he says.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 22 May 2004, pp. 15, 19)

Bilateral discussions on deported Egyptians

Former Vice Prime Minister Lena Hjelm-Wallén is back from a two-day visit in Egypt, where she discussed new information regarding the two Egyptian citizens who were deported from Sweden to Egypt in 2001. The men were deported after Sweden were given guarantees by Egyptian authorities that the men would not be tortured, but rather get a fair trial, and not be sentenced to death if found guilty. According to new information, two of these three guarantees have not been upheld, which, however, is denied by the Egyptian authorities. Now, the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs might "refer to procedural errors in order to

get a new trial”, according to a press release. In addition, an investigation will take place in order to examine whether the information concerning the treatment of the Egyptians is correct. International independent expertise might be included in the investigation.

(Dagens Nyheter, 21 May 2004, p. 6)