

Nordic Headlines 4 November 2004

Danish press

Older refugees and illiterates – no thanks

Refugees who are illiterate or elderly are no longer welcome in Denmark because they have difficulties learning Danish and finding a job. Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder is ready with a new proposal that will sort out socially disadvantaged refugees from those who are educated, can read and write and who can speak foreign languages – “the ones that can contribute to Danish society and find themselves a job” according to Haarder. The proposal concerns the 500 persons Denmark receives every year upon request from UNHCR – the so called quota refugees. The Confederation of Danish Trade Unions (LO) has dismissed the proposal as “a completely unacceptable view of human life”. “If we go from being humane to just looking at things from an economic viewpoint it would be a sad development for Denmark”, said an LO spokesman. “Denmark has always had a reputation for looking after the under privileged”. Denmark will still accept an annual amount of 20 refugees in need of extensive medical treatment under the so called ‘Twenty or More’ plan, but a part from this arrangement, Denmark will refuse to accept refugees suffering from serious diseases. The individual need for protection will still be central in the selection process when it comes to quota refugees. However, by introducing the new concept ‘integration potential’, the government also makes sure that Denmark gets the strongest of the weak.

(Politiken, 4 November 2004, p. 11)

Fewer asylum seekers

The number of people heading to Denmark to seek asylum continues to fall. 764 people applied for asylum in the first three months of this year, 30 per cent less than the same period last year which was already down on previous years’ figures.

(Jyllands Posten, 4 November 2004, p. 5, NE translation)

Foreigners drop language lessons

Foreigners in Denmark get up to four times as much language tuition than those in other European countries, but many still drop out because they believe teaching methods aren’t good enough. Immigrants arriving in this country receive an average of 2,000 hours of Danish lessons, a European record, and four times more than in Sweden. However, according to new figures from the Ministry of Integration, just over 50 per cent are still attending classes 18 months after they have arrived. The government is preparing a law proposal that will allow the authorities to financially penalise those who don’t attend lessons.

(Politiken, 2 November 2004, p. 9, NE translation)

Budding Buddhists

Over the past 25 years the number of Buddhists in Denmark has risen from 2,000 to 17-18,000, although most still remain fairly 'invisible'. The majority of Buddhists in this country come from Vietnam or are women from Thailand who have gained residency via family reunification. In addition, an unknown number of Danes have converted to Buddhism.

(Jyllands Posten, 2 November 2004, p. 6, NE translation)

Haarder to review family reunification law

Danish immigration legislation does not breach any human rights – so said Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder, when he found himself having to defend Denmark's controversial family-reunification ruling yet again during a public committee meeting, Friday. However, in a more conciliatory tone, Haarder said he could not completely dismiss the claim that mistakes could have been made and the Ministry of Integration is now prepared to review 40 different cases where residency applications have been rejected. He also said that he was also preparing to put a new proposal before parliament that will alter the formulation of the contentious law so that it doesn't breach human rights as claimed by the Council of Europe's Human Rights Commissioner Alvaro Gil-Robles. "We take Mr Robles criticism seriously, so although we are not prepared to alter the legislation we can change how it is interpreted," Haarder said.

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

Deportation settles asylum dispute

The rejected 31-year-old asylum seeker Antoinette Kerdahi, whose case has been highlighted in recent weeks after it was revealed that she has been in detention for the past 15 months even though she has officially committed no crime, will now be deported back to the Lebanon at the end of this month. Her lawyer is now threatening to appeal to the Supreme Court, claiming that his client has received a number of death threats and could be killed if she is forced to return home.

(Jyllands Posten, 30 October 2004, p. 2, NE translation)

DF blocks budget on asylum-seekers

Demands for the repatriation of rejected asylum applicants from the rightist Danish People's Party's (DF) are blocking an agreement with the government on next year's budget. At a meeting yesterday, Minister of Finance Thor Pedersen and party chairman Pia Kjaersgaard could not find agreement on what to do with the rejected applicants, who primarily come from Somalia, Iraq and Iran. The party has vowed not to vote to the government's budget proposal, unless the government falls in with the party's demand for immediate repatriation. Kjaersgaard said that the use of the withdrawal of development aid could be used to pressure countries to take back asylum applicants, just as the use of special camps. "We have always been interested in setting up camps, and we welcome the fact that Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder is also Minister of Development, so we can link the two things together", she said.

(Berlingske Tidene, 29 October 2004, p. 9, NE translation)

Finnish press

Tampere becomes Haag

Finnish Minister of the Interior, Kari Rajamäki, does not like the Dutch initiative to rename the updated Tampere program the 'Haag program'. He suggested on Monday that the program should be named 'Tampere-Haag'. Though he can not accept not being taken seriously, he still believes that the content is much more important than the label. The crucial thing is that the objectives set in Tampere take effect. Finland is planning to take back the name 'Tampere II' in 2006, when the halfway report on refugee policy will be evaluated during the Finnish EU presidency. Finland's official standpoint is that the Haag program is a good basis for freedom, security and justice. Finland also demands that EU should as soon as possible start taking decisions by qualified majority. This would enable the EU to force unruly states to improve their refugee policy. However, this means also that Finland's opinions can be run over. Finland has adopted a waiting attitude to the idea of a common EU migration board, and suggests that the question should be raised in the 2006 halfway report. When it comes to the issue of border control, Rajamäki's is of the opinion that it is a national concern. However, at the same time he is lobbying actively for his fellow country man, Ilkka Laitinen, to become the new head of EU's Border Guard which will come into force 1 May 2005.

(Hufvudstadsbladet, 31 October 2004, p. 7)

Norwegian press

Asylum after four rejections

An Iranian woman who has lived in church asylum in Oslo for two and a half years has received permission to live in Norway, despite having had four applications rejected. Only long and concerted efforts prevented the woman and her child from being sent back to mortal danger. The woman and child came to Norway in 2000 to visit family members and then chose not to return to a threatening and violent husband. Her husband accused her of infidelity and she was threatened by her in-laws' family. Amnesty International argued that she would risk being lashed or stoned if sent back, and the woman went from an asylum center to a church hall, where members of the parish worked to secure her residence in Norway. Her application was turned down four times before she was finally accepted. "The authorities have argued that the woman could have received protection from Iranian authorities. This has never been a real option for her. We found principle weaknesses in their attitude and we found that documentation from serious human rights organizations were ignored," a church member said. "What we in the parish have contributed is the collection of information. We have been in touch with countless authorities, sent letters to

functionaries, politicians, the government and bishops. We have also had free assistance from the Norwegian Bar Association (DNA)," the source said. Only a parliamentary ruling that expulsions involving children not being actively processed were to be reexamined in a positive way came to the Iranian woman's rescue. Arild Humlen, head of the DNA's committee for asylum and immigrant law, believes Norway's screening process is far too strict. "I don't know the details of this case but I can nevertheless say that Norway has an extremely low approval rate. In a study of 44 nations the average (approval rate) is 14.5 per cent while Norway approves residency permits in just 2 per cent. In my opinion we are so strict that we to a great extent do not meet our obligations to refugee and human rights conventions," Humlen said.

(Aftenposten, 4 November 2004)

Norwegians not very tolerant

Norwegians are among the happiest and most trusting in Europe, but they are not particularly tolerant, according to the European Social Survey. The Survey interviewed 40,000 Europeans regarding their subjective experiences of their life situation. "Norwegians rank high on the list of the happiest people in Europe, but not on top," said Kristen Ringdal, professor in sociology. "Denmark is on top, far above countries like Sweden, Finland, Switzerland, Luxemburg, and Norway. Ringdal stated, as expected, Norwegians are among the least religious. "It's more surprising that we do not score particularly high on tolerance," Ringdal said. "We end up somewhere in the middle, and we have nothing to brag about when it comes to tolerance towards immigrants or homosexuals."

(Nettavisen, 3 November 2004)

'Tampa' caught up in new drama

The merchant vessel 'Tampa' from the celebrated Tampa incident, in which the crew of the vessel rescued more than 400 refugees from their sinking boat, only to be refused permission to set them on land in an Australian territory, was in late September suddenly stormed by a large group of commando soldiers while lying in port at Los Angeles. The heavily armed soldiers, numbering around 20, refused to identify themselves, nor would they say why they were boarding the vessel. According to the Oslo-based ship owner Wilhelm Wilhelmsen, they stripped Norwegian Captain Ove Øvergaard of his command and proceeded to ransack the vessel for the next three hours. Crew members were searched as well. Five weeks later, Wilhelmsen still has received no explanation for the incident, much less any apology. He says he can only assume that the soldiers were tied to the relatively new US Department of Homeland Security. Wilhelmsen has filed a complaint to US officials through Norway's Foreign Ministry. He called it 'serious' when a captain is stripped of command. "That unleashes a risk in itself", Wilhelmsen said.

(Aftenposten, 2 November 2004)

Asylum-seekers right to appeal to be weakened

As from 1 January 2005 the Immigration Appeals Board (UNE) will have to use the same country information as the Directorate of Immigration (UDI) when assessing appeals from asylum-seekers. The Norwegian Organisation for Asylum Seekers (NOAS) and Amnesty International Norway consider the new system to be a weakening of the genuine right to appeal. Secretary General of Amnesty, Petter Eide, believes the absence of a second opinion in individual appeal cases will weaken the system when the two previous independent instances fuse. "The whole idea of having an appeal instance is that one can get new and relevant information, says NOAS Secretary General, Morten Tjessem. Frode Forfang of UDI, however, believes the new system will strengthen the field of expertise. He underlines that the information still will be collected on a general basis and that the country advisors will not get involved with individual cases, for instance when deciding whether a person is trustworthy or not.

(Aftenposten, 29 October 2004, p. 4)

Swedish press

Göran Persson wants supranational asylum rules

In connection with the upcoming EU summit in Brussels this week, where a program concerning asylum and migration issues will be adopted, PM Göran Persson has informed the government EU Committee that he wish supranational asylum rules. Some members of the Committee have expressed concern about making too fast decisions on supranational rules. They believe there is a risk that asylum policies will harden despite the fact that the number of refugees is not increasing. Persson, who used to be an opponent of supranationality by principle, says that common rules are needed. "I fear a competition between countries when it comes to having the most restrictive refugee policy. In this case there is an obvious need for common rules and a fair burden sharing", Persson says.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 4 November 2004, p. 20)

Harder refugee policy in the EU despite less asylum-seekers

This week the European leaders will come to a decision on a common European refugee policy. During the autumn, the politicians have discussed more restrictive border control and camps for asylum-seekers outside Europe. There have also been many reports on asylum-seekers risking their lives in the Mediterranean. According to a representative of UNHCR in Brussels, the debate is characterized by an exaggerated picture of crisis. In reality the stream of refugees has steadily decreased since the end of the eighties and the main stream does not either come from the south via the Mediterranean, but from Russia and the former Soviet Union. "We think that the politicians have a responsibility when they talk about these issues. The statistics are extremely important", UNHCR says. However, UNHCR's figures are based on statistics on asylum-seekers and there is a problem with concepts in the debate. 'Asylum-seekers', 'refugees' and 'illegal immigrants' are used in a confused mixture and

according to Madelaine Seidlitz, legal expert and refugee desk officer at Amnesty International Sweden, this is an example of changed attitudes. "It is noticeable in every part of Europe. One used to talk about refugees' exposed situation with respect, but today one regards them as a problem. Refugees are seen as people coming to us to profit from our welfare", she says. She believes this is also visible in the political debate. In Sweden, the human rights organisations have noticed that less and less asylum-seekers get to stay in the country. "It has become more common that the Migration Board doubts information given by asylum-seekers and that one writes 'lack of trustworthiness' in the decision. To us this indicates a sharpening of practice", Seidlitz says.

(Dagens Nyheter, 1 November 2004, p. 14)

Abandonment of children new tendency in the asylum process

The Migration Board has decided to deport two children from Azerbaijan in spite of their mother's disappearance. The children fled to Sweden together with their mother in July 2002. In Sweden their asylum applications were rejected. The mother tried to commit suicide and, after a short stay at the hospital, she disappeared. The Migration Board decided to deport the oldest son, who turned 18 in October this year. His younger sister is allowed to stay in Sweden until the mother is found. The program counsellor for international law and refugees at the Red Cross in Sweden has informed the Board about his standpoint, saying that families should not be broken up, and if the decision on deportation is to be put into force, the mother should travel with her children. The boy has stated that he will not leave without his sister and the Board has now decided to deport the children together, without their mother. At the Migration Board one fears that abandonment of children is a new tendency in the asylum process. The Board's practice is that abandoned children are deported without their parents after an implemented investigation. According to Ewa Lindström, reception expert at the Board, the children should be regarded as orphaned. Hence, it is up to the authorities in their native country to decide what will happen to them. She also says Sweden cooperates with its embassies in the countries of origin. If it turns out that the children risk ending up in a terrible situation, their representative could submit an appeal to the Aliens Appeals Board. Kristina Swiech, legal expert at Save the Children Sweden, says that many investigations are of low quality. According to her, children are deported despite the fact that they will not receive any long term care in their country of origin. "According to the Aliens' Act, the section about the child's best should be applied in the asylum process, but we can see that this is not happening", she says.

(Dagens Nyheter, 31 October 2004, p. 8)

Vanunu's asylum application rejected

Israeli Mordechai Vanunu, who was jailed for 18 years for allegedly relating the country's atomic secrets to a British newspaper, is denied asylum in Sweden. Mats Baurman at the Migration Board says that the rejection is based on a formal decision. "According to the Geneva Convention and the Aliens' Act he can not be regarded as a refugee in his own country. He has to come to the country where

he applies for asylum”, Baurman says. Vanunu, who is not allowed by the Israeli authorities to go abroad, is very critical of the decision. “Sweden and other countries must stop ignoring Israel’s violation of human rights”, he says. (Svenska Dagbladet, 30 October 2004 & Dagens Nyheter, p. 25)

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Danish press

UN criticism

The UN's refugee organisation, UNHCR, has publicly criticised a new proposal from Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder and says it is 'extremely concerned' about the Danish government's intention to screen refugees according to their ability to integrate into Danish society rather than their need for assistance. "The expression 'integration potential' seems to stress immigration criteria instead of the need for protection," says the UNHCR. Denmark has promised to accept up to 500 refugees annually, mainly the elderly and sick, but under the new proposal more emphasis will be put on the individual's possibility of successful integration.

(Politiken, 10 November 2004, p. 4, NE translation)

Repatriated refugees fear attacks

Very few of the rejected Iraqi asylum-seekers currently in Denmark will accept the government's offer of DKK 17,000 to voluntarily return home over the next few months because they fear that they will be assaulted and robbed. This is the view of Nahda J. Jassem, coordinator of the Iraqi Network in Denmark, who says that rumours of Iraqi refugees returning home with cash have already reached Iraq.

(Jyllands Posten, 10 November 2004, p. 2, NE translation)

Foreigners desert Denmark

Foreign residents are leaving Denmark in droves. Denmark's Statistics reports that 5,597 foreign nationals left the country in the third quarter of this year, a record number and the highest figure since 1980. Although the stark figures give no indication of why more and more foreigners are turning their backs on Denmark, the Centre for Documentation and Advice Relating to Racial Discrimination (DRC) has registered a significant rise in the number of foreigners disturbed by the constant immigration and integration debate in this country. "Foreigners living here don't experience problems in the workplace – they just feel marginalized in society and generally victimised by the media and the political debate," says a DRC spokesman.

(Politiken, 10 November 2004, p. 6, NE translation)

Financial restrictions on immigrants do not work

The government's 'carrot and stick' approach to getting newly arrived immigrants into work as quickly as possible is not working, according to a new yet to be released report from the Centre of Alternative Society Analysis (CASA). The government introduced new 'start help' benefits for immigrants in 2002, considerably lower than the normal rate of social help available, in an effort to motivate them to find work as quickly as possible. However, the new CASA

report concludes that the cutbacks haven't led to increased employment and after two years just 27 per cent of the recipients of start help are self-sufficient and no more than 3 per cent under some form of training or education. "Reducing immigrants' social benefits has had no apparent effect on their possibilities of becoming self-sufficient and there are no indications that it will help in the future," says a CASA spokesman. The Social Liberals spokeswoman on integration, Elsebeth Gerner Nielsen, says that giving immigrants reduced social benefits has only succeeded in stigmatising a certain group and splitting Danish society into 'us' and 'them'.

(Information, 9 November 2004, Front, NE translation)

DF and the government in refugee agreement

The Danish People's Party (DF) and the government have reached agreement on a number of initiatives designed to reduce the number of rejected asylum seekers who refuse to leave the country. The government has reportedly accepted DF's demands that countries that refuse to accept their own citizens should be punished financially, in return for DF's support for the 2005 budget. "The government and the Danish People's Party are in tentative agreement that if countries don't live up to certain demands regarding our refugee and asylum policies, then it will lead to a reduction of their development aid," said DF's spokesman on finance Kristian Thulesen Dahl.

(Jyllands Posten, 6 November 2004, p. 4 & Politiken, 7 November, p. 9, NE translation)

Denmark supports refugee registration initiative

In the future, refugees in UN camps in trouble spots around the globe will, with Danish help, be registered by fingerprints and other biological recognition techniques. Denmark has entered into an agreement with the UN's refugee organisation UNHCR, to support the setting up of a new system that will ensure better identification of refugees. "We're talking about a total biometric registration of all refugees that will reduce the chance of deception and swindle," says Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder. "It will also improve the possibilities of reuniting families and save a lot of bureaucracy." Denmark has made a concrete agreement with the UNHCR and Kenya to set up a trial centre where the new forms of identification can be tested, mainly on Somali refugees.

(Jyllands Posten, 7 November 2004, NE translation)

Four year wait for asylum-seekers

Nearly 700 asylum seekers have been detained for over four years at one of the country's asylum centres, a policy that could, according to the Danish Red Cross, create serious psychological and emotional problems. Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder said that the majority of the 400 have had their applications for asylum rejected but have refused to leave the country. Whilst the Social Liberals claim to be 'disgusted' at the situation, the Danish

People's Party is demanding that the rejected asylum seekers be deported as soon as possible.

(Berlingske Tidene, 7 November, NE translation)

Haarder to breach EU promise

Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder is ready to breach an agreement with the UN by refusing to accept refugees who do not live up to the government's definition of possessing 'integration potential.' Denmark has an agreement with the UN to take in around 500 refugees a year from various trouble spots around the world but Haarder now wants an amendment so that if Denmark can not find 500 people who it feels can be successfully integrated into society then it can carry its quota over to the next year or use the money on projects close to the countries they come from. All opposition parties expressed dismay at Haarder's latest initiative. "We already accept very few quota refugees and we should not be thinking about taking in less," says the Social Liberals spokesperson on integration Elsebeth Gerner Nielsen. The Social Democrats' spokesperson on integration, Anne Marie Meldgaard, also dismissed Haarder's plan to use some of the money saved on refugees to set up camps in border areas close to the countries they are fleeing from. "We can't just say sorry, there aren't any refugees that live up to our demands so we'll send the money elsewhere. It's an embarrassment to Denmark if we can't accept 500 refugees every year," Meldgaard said.

(Politiken, 5 November 2004, front page, NE translation)

Haarder's cash offer not enough says DF

Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder's offer of a cash bonus to rejected asylum seekers from Iraq who return home voluntarily is not enough for the Danish People's Party (DF), who want to see all native countries with a history of refugees made responsible too. To encourage the 2,200 rejected asylum-seekers currently stranded in Denmark to return home, Haarder is proposing that they be given between DKK 12-15,000 each, also seen as an effort to persuade DF to support the 2005 budget. Whilst welcoming the new initiative, DF's spokesman on immigration, Peter Skaarup, claims it is not enough. "It's a step forward but we want to see countries financially penalised if they will not accept their own citizens back. The government has previously aired the possibility that these countries could have their aid subsidies slashed if they don't cooperate and that's the kind of initiative we're looking for." DF's demands have delayed negotiations about the 2005 budget which the government had hoped to see concluded today.

(Politiken, 5 November 2004, p. 6, NE translation)

Norwegian press

Bordello raid spurs deportations

More than half of a large group of foreign women evicted from what police claim was a bordello in Oslo are being sent out of Norway. Two have sought asylum. Police detained 49 women, while three men and another woman in her 40s were arrested later on charges of violating Norway's solicitation laws. While prostitution is legal in Norway, organizing it is not. Most of the women are from Nigeria, while three are from Brazil and one from Romania. Police believe they're part of an organized effort to bring women to Europe for prostitution purposes. 25 of the women faced immediate deportation. They were given 48 hours to leave the country, at their own expense. Human rights activists protested the move, saying it made it even more difficult to get women to eventually testify against those allegedly organizing prostitution rings.

(Aftenposten, 5 November 2004)

Swedish press

All asylum-seekers will be HIV tested

The Integration Board wishes to introduce compulsory HIV-testing for asylum-seekers. An increasing number of HIV cases are being reported in Sweden and according to the Swedish Institute for Infectious Disease Control, almost two thirds of the infected persons are recently arrived immigrants. During last year, merely 50 per cent of the asylum-seekers were HIV tested. Björn Colliander of the Integration Board says they do not want 'such serious examinations' to be voluntary. "The asylum-seekers are living under a lot of pressure. The Board also suggests that all arriving persons, regardless of reason, should be offered a medical appointment and a HIV test as an introduction to Swedish health care. Måns Nyberg, Head of Information at the UNHCR Regional Office for the Baltic and Nordic Countries, is critical towards the proposal. "Why should asylum-seekers be selected as a group for mandatory testing? If the test in any way affects the asylum process that is totally unacceptable. This sounds like another step in the direction towards demonizing and criminalizing asylum-seekers", Nyberg says.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 7 November 2004, p. 7 & Dagens Nyheter, 8 November 2004, p. 6)

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Danish press

International focus on immigration policies

Foreign newspapers and TV stations, such as The Times and the BBC, are providing more and more coverage of Denmark's strict immigration legislation. The international French language TV5, which will later this month air an extremely critical programme about the harsh Danish rules for family reunification, is just one of a number of international news organisations that has been in Denmark recently to portray Denmark's controversial immigration legislation. A spokesman for Marriage Without Borders, a Copenhagen-based group that helps foreigners denied residency in this country find accommodation in the Swedish city of Malmö, claims to have been in contact with at least 12 foreign media outlets over the past four months, including German TV channels ZDF and TV1, BBC, the French ARTE TV, the Los Angeles Times and the London Times, as well as a large part of the Swedish media. A Times article describes how a Danish graphic designer is forced to commute between his home in Malmö and work in Copenhagen every day because he is married to "that type of woman that the Danish government doesn't like – a Turkish woman." A French journalist for TV5 said he was rather taken aback by Danish legislation. "We feel that it's rather odd that love between two people should be limited in this manner in a free and democratic society such as Denmark, which has always been proud of its human rights record," he says.

(Information, 16 November 2004, p. 3, NE translation)

'Punish the parents' proposal

In the wake of a series of violent stabbings, police solicitor Michael Jørgensen has proposed that the parents of juveniles who bear knives should be punished. Two adult immigrants were stabbed in the back and thighs by a gang of younger immigrants in the Palads cinema in Copenhagen, Sunday, just days after two young Turkish cousins were given jail sentences for murdering an Italian tourist. Jørgensen said that if parents were fined it would encourage them to keep a tighter rein on their offspring's' behaviour.

(Berlingske Tidene, 16 November 2004, Front page, NE translation)

Haarder keeps lid on immigration cases

Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder stands accused of purposely impeding the functions of parliament by refusing to hand over copies of the paperwork in a number of concrete cases of family reunification. The Social Liberals' Elsebeth Gerner Nielsen asked three months ago to see documentation of how the Ministry of Integration handles applications for residency via family reunification, in response to criticism from the Institute for Human Rights, but Haarder has been reluctant to comply with the request.

(Politiken, 15 November 2004, Front page, NE translation)

17 year old deported – faces marriage with 48 year old

A 17 year old Iranian refugee asylum-seeker who has had her application for residency on humanitarian grounds rejected and ordered to leave Denmark no later than 20 November, will, according to her lawyer, be forced into marriage with a 48-year old married Mullah who she can not stand on her return home. Although all legal means of appeal have been exhausted, the girl's lawyer, Jytte Lindgaard, will today make a final appeal to the official ombudsman in a last-minute effort to get the deportation order rescinded.
(Politiken, 15 November 2004, p. 3, NE translation)

Educated immigrants kept out

The government may claim that it wants to attract more highly educated immigrants to Denmark but a new report shows that it continues to shoot itself in the foot – Danes are too xenophobic and immigration rules are too restrictive. Although Minister of Business, Industry and Economy, Bendt Bendtsen stresses in Growth Report 2004 the importance of Denmark being able to attract researchers and IT professionals from the USA, Russia and India, the report reveals that Denmark lags behind Norway, Sweden and Holland in attracting the 'brightest and the best.' As well as potential immigrants being put off by high taxes and bad weather, the report also states that "Denmark is well-known for being a closed country with harsh immigration policies."
(Information, 15 November 2004, front page, NE translation)

Intelligence warning

The Danish National Security Service (PET) warns that members of extremist Muslim groups and people on the far right in this country are using threats and intimidation to escalate the current tense situation in the wake of the murder of film director Theo van Gogh in Holland. "Certain people seem to be speculating in the possibility of religious violence with the aim of creating confrontation between two cultures and religions in Denmark," says head of PET Lars Findsen, revealing that a number of people are currently being kept under surveillance.
(Berlingske Tidene, 14 November 2004, Front page, NE translation)

New Swedish-Danish asylum dispute

A new Norwegian survey reveals that Danish immigration restrictions are proving to be expensive for Swedish society. Whilst Denmark accepted 31 per cent of all asylum-seekers in Scandinavia in 2000 and Sweden took 41 per cent, in 2003 Denmark accepted just 9 per cent, whilst in Sweden the figures had rose to 60 per cent. However, Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder continues to reject Swedish calls for pan-EU immigration legislation and blames Sweden for rejecting joint Scandinavian asylum policies. "We've studied the figures and nothing indicates that our asylum policies have caused a rise in asylum-seekers heading for Sweden," says Haarder. "The decrease in Denmark is only a minor percentage of the rise in the rest of Scandinavia. We've suggested a joint Nordic policy but it was rejected by Sweden." Swedish Minister of Immigration, Barbro Holmberg says that the Norwegian report underlines the

need for joint EU immigration legislation. "It's quite obvious that when one country in the region puts a limit on how many asylum-seekers it will accept, then these people will seek asylum elsewhere. We have to share the responsibility." Denmark is unable to participate in joint EU immigration legislation because of the country's EU opt-out on justice.

(Jyllands Posten, 14 November 2004, p. 2, NE translation)

Danish immigration debate 'primitive'

Leading Swedish author Jan Guillou has attacked the Danish intellectual elite for refusing to condemn the Danish People's Party's (DF) 'demonising' of Muslims. 'I am constantly surprised that my colleagues in Denmark refuse to address this problem. They seem to have the attitude that discussing DF isn't worthy of their time, but that's an irresponsible attitude,' says Mr Guillou, characterising the tone of the immigration debate in Denmark as 'primitive.'

(Information, 13 November 2004, front page, NE translation)

Denmark faces rebuke in UN for immigration policy

Danish immigration policy is again the centre of international criticism, this time from the United Nations. European Human Rights Commissioner Mr Gil-Robles reported this summer that Danish regulations violated human rights. Now the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights will criticise the country, albeit in diplomatic formulations. It is the low so-called introduction benefit, which discriminates against refugees, that is the object of criticism, according to sources among 12 Danish officials from the Ministry of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration and the Ministry of Justice that have answered questions on the Danish legislation from the committee. The committee will release its conclusions in a report in three weeks time.

(Information, 12 November 2004, front page, NE translation)

Finnish press

Finland deports rejected asylum-seekers quickly

The Finnish police is said to be most effective in Europe when it comes to enforcing decisions of rejected asylum. National Bureau of Investigation has no exact figures on how many persons, whose asylum claim has been rejected, have gone underground but according to police sergeant Jukka Martikainen, there are warrants out against 50 to 200 persons. That is significantly less than for example in Sweden. Those whose asylum claims are rejected are as a rule deported as soon as possible. "We are the most effective in Europe", Martikainen says. Another explanation for the relatively low figures when it comes to persons sought after by the police is that the number of asylum-seekers in Finland is much lower than in other European countries. However, effective it may be but the Finnish Police is criticized for keeping persons whose asylum claim has been rejected detained in custody. In Helsinki, rejected asylum-seekers waiting to be deported are kept in a centre which used to be a prison. Elsewhere in the country

they are locked up in prison cells. "It's very bad that people who not have committed any crime are place with crime suspects", says Reetta Helander from the Finnish Refugee Advice Centre. In addition to those persons sought after by the police, there might be as many as a hundred persons who have never been in any contact with the Finnish authorities.
(Hufvudstadsbladet, 14 November 2004, p. 5)

Norwegian press

Record number of foreigners deported

During the first nine months of this year more than 1,000 foreigners were deported from Norway. If the trend continues, there will be a record number of deportations this year. Most of the deported are Russians, followed by Somalis. Of the 1,021 deported, 632 have been expelled because of a breach of the Immigration Act, while 389 were deported following a breach of the Criminal Code, according to figures from the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. The total number expelled for the same reasons last year, came to 1,141 persons.

(NRK, 18 November 2004)

Norway grants most work permits

Norway may insist on remaining outside of the European Union, but the country granted more work permits to new EU nationals than the other Nordic nations combined, Norwegian Broadcasting (NRK) reports. According to new statistics released by the Directorate of Immigration (UDI), Norway has granted 6,000 work permits to Eastern Europeans from the new EU member states from 1 May to 1 October 2004, 60 per cent of the permits given in the Nordic region. Norway's contribution is three times larger than second-best Sweden's and dwarfs Finland's 900 permits, and both of those countries are EU members. The UDI offered "Norway's tradition for many Eastern European seasonal workers" as an explanation for the high figures.

(Aftenposten, 18 November 2004)

Young immigrants aim higher

The number of immigrant students starting at the University of Oslo has increased by 30 per cent. Most of these students choose popular courses of study which will secure them work abroad as well. With more education the greater their chances become with involvement in the Norwegian society. The exact figures are not yet available, but the first half of the year revealed an increase in immigrant students at the university by over 42 per cent compared to the same period in 2003. Sharan Alghasi, student counsellor and project leader for an information campaign aimed at attracting matriculation students from schools with a high percentage of immigrant students in Oslo, expects an increase of at least 30 per cent. He believes the increase is a direct result of the information campaign. Particularly parents of immigrant students need this

information as they often guide their children's choices. Every third final year matriculation student involved in the project chooses higher education compared to every fourth student not participating in the project. The University of Oslo wishes to incorporate even more schools in the campaign. The immigrant students' wish to take higher education increases proportionally to the length of time resided in Norway. Only 18 per cent of first generation immigrants between 19 and 24 years of age began higher education studies in 2003. However, the figure was 27 per cent for the same age group of immigrants born in Norway of immigrant parents.

(Aftenposten, 17 November 2004)

Ethiopians out in the streets again

Ten Ethiopian refugees have been kicked out of a shelter centre in Oslo where they had received temporary accommodation. They were all picked up by the police for ID check-up. The Ethiopians are the same who got media attention last month by hunger striking in Oslo Cathedral. City councillor Margaret Eckbo is asked to do something with the situation for the homeless refugees whose case is stuck between the State and the municipality. All ten have had their asylum applications rejected but are considered 'non-returnable' persons.

(Aftenposten, 11 November 2004, p. 4)

Swedish press

Lack of money causes more expensive asylum trials

Researcher Marie Bengtsson writes in a report, commissioned by the Committee on Social Insurance, that increased financial resources would reduce the overall costs of refugee reception and make it more humane. She has revised the Swedish Migration Board during 2002 and 2003. She believes that the main problem is the absence of long-termed planning. The lack of desk officers leads to suffering among asylum-seekers who have to wait, but also to increased accommodation costs. Bengtsson believes that the Migration Board should have a more extensive organization and that the staff should be able to change their tasks depending on the number of asylum-seekers. She also writes that any governmental infusion of new capital should come as fast as possible when the number of asylum-seekers increases. Otherwise there will be an increased number of people in the reception system and hence, the costs will rise.

(Dagens Nyheter, 18 November 2004, p. 10)

Kofi Annan rejects accusation of sexual harassment against Lubbers

The United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) found the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Ruud Lubbers, guilty of sexual harassment but did not write about this in their official report. However, a 'revised' report recently appeared, saying that UN Secretary General Kofi Annan had decided to disclose the case due to lack of evidence. At a press conference in New York it was

explained that the Secretary-General has the opportunity to make such a decision and that the absence of comments on the case in the official report was caused by a 'technical hitch'. Lubbers deny the accusation. According to him the woman misunderstood a friendly gesture. He has tried to convince her to withdraw the accusation.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 14 November 2004, p. 18)

Asylum-seekers will keep their housing allowance

The Government has proposed to abolish the housing allowance offered to asylum-seekers living in private accommodation, the so called 'Ebo' system. According to local politicians in Gothenburg and Malmö, this subsidy causes cramped housing accommodations and social problems. In their parliamentary bills, submitted last Friday, all opposition parties, except for the Moderates, have called the proposal to be rejected. The Liberal Party accuses the Social Democrats for "turning all these exposed persons into scapegoats for a disastrous unsuccessful integration policy". According to the Left Party, the proposal is a part of the "hardened situation in Swedish refugee policy".

(Dagens Nyheter, 13 November 2004, p.11)

Lawyer's appeal rejected

Last month, the Migration Board deprived refugee lawyer Hans Bredberg four cases because he refused to follow their new procedures. The procedures mean that the asylum process will be more of a discussion than an examination. Bredberg and other lawyers are accusing the Board for forcing them to perform tasks that are against Swedish law. Bredberg's appeal to the Aliens Appeals Board has now also been rejected.

(Dagens Nyheter, 11 November 2004)

Nordic Headlines 25 November 2004

Danish press

Opposition demand for new immigration tribunal

The political opposition in parliament is demanding the setting up of a new independent tribunal which would have the power to invalidate rejections of immigrants seeking residency via family reunification. According to a coalition of Social Democrats, Social Liberals, Christian Democrats, the Socialist People's Party and the Unity List, the current appeal procedure does not ensure families' legal rights. "It's unsatisfactory that right now it's the Ministry of Integration that handles all complaints about its own decision," says the Social Liberals' spokeswoman on integration, Elsebeth Gerner Nielsen. "We need more transparency and adherence to individuals' legal rights and the new tribunal could provide that", she said

(Jyllands Posten, 24 November 2004, p. 4, NE translation)

Aid organisation should utilise immigrants

The DKK 800 million that Denmark donates annually to voluntary charities and aid organisations for developing countries could be utilised better if refugees and others with an immigrant background participated more actively in the work of the organisations – that is the latest initiative from Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder, who as well as challenging Danish humanitarian organisations to hire more people from ethnic minorities, is also hoping to give refugees and immigrants better possibilities of setting up their own aid organisations. "It's quite natural to draw on the knowledge and understanding that many immigrants and refugees resident in Denmark have of those countries they come from. It provides possibilities that we should be exploiting in both development and integration efforts," says Haarder, who is also planning to set up a special DKK 10 million trial project under which immigrants and refugees can be sent out to a project in a developing country alongside a coordinator or advisor from a humanitarian organisation.

(Berlingske Tidene, 24 November 2004, p. 5, NE translation)

Kindergarten needs Danish children

The parents of a three-year-old Danish girl are so concerned that their daughter will soon be the only ethnic Dane in her Valby kindergarten that they have now lodged an official complaint with the relevant Copenhagen Council authority. Although the parents have so far failed to receive a response, Minister of Social and Family Affairs Henriette Kjær has challenged all local authorities to ensure that children of immigrants are evenly distributed throughout their districts, as allowed by law. "Children don't learn Danish, don't get Danish friends and won't have any knowledge of Danish culture if they don't mix with Danish children," she said.

(Berlingske Tidene, 24 November 2004, front page, NE translation)

Immigrant parents in school of democracy?

It is immigrant parents who should be encouraged to attend lessons about democracy and freedom of speech, not their children. Immigration consultant Fahmy Almajid distances himself from Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen's demand that schools should increase teaching in democratic principles such as freedom of speech and the right to choose by claiming that it is ethnic minority parents who do not know anything about Danish democracy or its rules and institutions and should be forced to attend class.

(Jyllands Posten, 23 November 2004, p. 5, NE translation)

Moderate Muslims abused and attacked

Death threats, abuse, attacks – that is what moderate Danish Muslims who dare to publicly criticise Islam have to suffer from the more extreme factions of the Danish Muslim milieu. Mohammed Rafiq, who has publicly criticised arranged marriages, claims he and his family have often been verbally and physically threatened by extremists and as recently as last weekend was abused by a group of young immigrants whilst in a restaurant with a girlfriend. Leading immigrant MP Naser Khader has received death threats from both Muslim extremists and Danish Nazis and has been under police protection for the past two years. "It's not the death threats that are worst, because you can deal with them," says Khader. "It's the abuse, and the accusations that I'm a traitor and a dog, whilst I'm out shopping or in Tivoli with my family. Previously this kind of thing only happened at political meetings or lectures. Now it's an everyday occurrence."

(Politiken, 22 November 2004, front page, NE translation)

Islamic network revealed

A network of extremist Muslims in the city of Århus is allegedly far more involved in criminal and terrorist related activities than previously assumed. A police investigation has now linked the head of the network, the Algerian refugee Athmane Mehiri who has been sentenced to jail with subsequent deportation for his part in a 2001 bank robbery in Frederiksberg, to a Danish-Syrian national, Abu Rached who himself has been linked with an al-Queda cell in Spain. According to the police, the three bank robbers spent a night in Rached's apartment whilst Rached himself moved in with a fellow Syrian in Randers – an individual who has now been deported for slitting the throat of an Iraqi Kurd in Auning. All men have affiliations with the notorious Brabrand mosque in Århus, which is kept under constant police surveillance.

(Politiken, 21 November 2004, front page, NE translation)

PM: 'Freedom of speech sacred'

At the Liberal Party congress in Herning, Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen used the presentation of a freedom award to launch an attack on those Muslim Imams who proclaim that freedom of speech should be limited. "I am deeply concerned that certain Imams have in all seriousness suggested that there should be limits on an individual's rights to freedom of speech. They just

don't seem to understand what the expression means in Danish – that anyone can speak out critically about anything and anyone,” he said. A number of Imams have condemned the murder of Dutch film director Theo van Gogh but at the same time criticised him for misusing his right of freedom of speech to defame Islam. The Liberal Party's freedom award was given, in absentia, to the female Dutch politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the inspiration for Van Gogh's film about Muslim repression, who has been forced into hiding and is under constant police protection.

(Politiken, 21 November 2004, front page & Berlingske Tidene, p. 7, NE translation)

Muslim fundamentalist invited to integration summit

The Danish People's Party (DF) is demanding that Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen withdraws an invitation to Khalid Alsubeihi, an alleged Muslim fundamentalist, to participate in the upcoming Marienborg summit on integration. According to sources close to the immigrant milieu in Nørrebro, Khalid, chairman of a local parent's association, is “a Muslim fundamentalist disguised as an integration worker.” DF has now asked the PM for an explanation as to how and why Khalid, who has reportedly praised the radical organisation Hitz ut-Tahrir's activities and is also a renowned homophobe, received an invitation.

(Berlingske Tidene, 20 November 2004, p. 5, NE translation)

Norwegian press

Immigrant youth content with life

A new international study finds that youth from an immigrant background are at least as content as their Norwegian counterparts. “Youth with an immigrant background say that they are satisfied with life. It is good for their self-image to be part of a group and they do not let condescending remarks influence their lives,” said psychologist David Lackland Sam at the University of Bergen. Sam is one of the researchers taking part in the ICSEY (International Comparative Study of Ethno-cultural Youth), which examined 8,000 youngsters between 13-18 years of age in 13 countries and gauges their adaptation to society. Sam believes the results are startling because they defy the conventional wisdom that immigrants have it worse than natives. A few factors indicate that some classic obstacles have gotten worse for immigrants. After September 11 2001, it has in many ways become more difficult to be dark-skinned. Many have also become more skeptical towards Muslims,” said Viggo Vestel at the Norwegian Social Research (NOVA).

(Aftenposten, 24 November 2004)

Compulsory Norwegian course for Imams

Norway's Labour Party has proposed a mandatory course in Norwegian language and culture for those who intend to preach religion. The proposal comes after Islamic Council Norway's spokesman, Zahid Mukhtar, refused a

clear repudiation of the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh. Islamic Council Norway (IRN) welcomes the proposal. Labour Party leader Jens Stoltenberg said that Muslim representatives damage the fight against fear of foreigners when they create doubts about van Gogh's death. "There are limits to our tolerance. Our society is built on values that apply regardless of religious faith," Stoltenberg said, and added that he was not afraid to give the impression of following in the wake of the controversial Progress Party. Stoltenberg said that Progress Party leader Carl I. Hagen was intelligent enough to balance his criticism of Islam without falling on the side of racism, but that Hagen "builds walls where we build bridges".

(Aftenposten, 24 November 2004)

Raid against illegal immigration

Four men and a woman have been apprehended after a major police action in Stavanger. The raid was a joint operation between the foreign section at the local police, Customs, the Food Safety Authority and regional and local tax assessment authorities in order to put focus on illegal immigration and the use of illegal labour force. The detained persons are from Turkey, Iran and Tunisia.

(Aftenposten, 24 November 2004, p. 3)

Swedish press

Government disagrees on decision of deportation

In April this year a 26 year old man from Iraq was detained as a suspect after a suicide attack in Arbi in the Kurdish parts of Iraq. The Court of Appeal dropped the initial charges, but the Swedish Security Police, however, placed the man in custody referring to the Act concerning Special Control in respect of Aliens. According to the Act, a foreign citizen can be taken into custody and deported without a trial simply for preventive reasons. The man's lawyer says that his client risks capital punishment or inhuman treatment if he returns to Iraq. In one of two statements to the government, the Swedish Migration Board writes that there is no reason to expect that the man will be tortured upon return to Iraq. Moreover, the judicial system works well in the Kurdish northern part of Iraq, according to the Board. In the other statement, however, the Board states that the Iraqi government has reintroduced capital punishment in cases where the crime is perceived as a violation of national security. The Board is not able to say whether the man in 'this very special case', face the risk of being executed. The final decision will be taken by the Swedish government within short.

(Dagens Nyheter, 21 November 2004, p. 11)

Lengthy asylum process severely criticised

In a new report, the Swedish National Audit Bureau harshly criticizes the Migration Board. Almost half of the asylum-seekers have to wait more than six months for a decision. Six months are the government's goal when it comes to proceeding asylum applications, but the Migration Board has introduced their

own goal of eleven months. In addition, the Board is criticized for being less effective even though the number of asylum-seekers is decreasing. Today, one out of four asylum-seekers has to wait more than one year. "When asylum-seekers are waiting for a permit of stay they are not allowed to work and therefore they cost a lot of money", national auditor Lennart Grufberg says. Furthermore, the money intended for reception of asylum-seekers has been used by the Board to finance asylum trials, which is forbidden as stated in the government's letter of regulation. Janna Valik, Director-General of the Migration Board, believes that the criticism is well-founded. "We have a lot to do in order to improve ourselves. But there is an efficiency process already going on. The report shows that we are on the right way in that respect", Valik says. Even the Government is criticized in the report, for not trying to change the present subsidy model. Today, temporary subsidies from the Government to the Migration Board are often received eight months too late despite that the funding is needed for 'immediate action'. Swedish Minister of Development Cooperation, Migration and Asylum Policy, Barbro Holmberg, says via her press secretary that if the information to the government does not work they will "get to the bottom of the case in order to see where the problem is".

(Svenska Dagbladet, 19 November 2004, p. 13 & Dagens Nyheter, p. 8)

Deported girl sets herself on fire

A 15 year old girl from Kosovo set herself on fire after receiving a decision on deportation of her and her family. Jan Gerhandsen, coordinator at the Migration Board's unit in Sundsvall, confirms that the family has been asked to leave the county. "The case has been handed over to the police, and will not be tried in Sweden but in Germany", he says. The girl was taken to hospital with minor injuries.

(Dagens Nyheter, 19 November 2004, p. 8 & Svenska Dagbladet, p. 13)

Witness of war crimes might be sent back to Bosnia

Bosnian "Jasmina" has assisted the International War Crimes Tribunal in Haag by collecting evidence of crimes committed by one of Bosnia's worst war criminals, Milan Lucics. If he is arrested she will be summoned by the Tribunal as a witness. The Tribunal has stated that she needs protection, but the Swedish Aliens Appeals Board rejected her application for asylum anyway. This happened in spite of the fact that the Government granted asylum to a Bosnian asylum-seeker two years ago in a similar case. The man had also been called as a witness by the Haag Tribunal. In this case the Government referred to the fact that the trial was well-known in the man's home country and that he therefore was in danger. According to Björn Törnkvist, desk officer at the Aliens Appeals Board, "Jasmina's" case is not comparable, mainly because she has not yet been summoned by the Tribunal. He also says that it is not confirmed that her case is known in her home country. "Jasmina" and her family have now submitted a new application to the Aliens Appeals Board. "If I have to go back to Bosnia I will not be able to live as other people. I will be threatened, attacked and maybe even killed", she says. (Dagens Nyheter, 19 November 2004, p. 8)

Nordic Headlines 30 November 2004

Danish press

Proposal for state control of Imams

When Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen and Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder meet with 22 leading representatives of the immigrant community at the integration summit at the PM's residence at Marienborg they will be met with a proposal that Muslim religious teachers, Imams, should be placed under state control. According to Muharrem Aydas, former chairman of the umbrella organisation for ethnic minorities, POEM, even though the PM has chosen not to invite Imams to the summit, their significance cannot be dismissed. "In Denmark there are Imams whose knowledge of Danish society's rules, norms and values are so minimal that they holding back and even worsening integration," claims Aydas. "There should be more control from the Danish authorities about who is preaching what in mosques throughout the country", Aydas stresses that he is not interested in getting involved in the Imams' religious orientation, but would like to see certain demands placed on them, such as the ability to speak Danish so they interpret Islam from a Danish point of view rather than in a Middle Eastern context. Ahmed Akkari, Imam at a mosque in Århus, agrees that Imams should know more about the workings of Danish society, but rejects the idea of more control from the state, saying it would only exacerbate the relationship between Muslims and Danes.

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

Message to PM: Forget Muslims in election campaign

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

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

Muslims consider legal action in freedom of speech debate

Leading members of the Islamic Faith Society are considering whether to take legal action against state run TV channel Danmarks Radio (DR) and partially state-owned TV2, because they have both transmitted the murdered Dutch director Theo van Gogh's controversial film 'Submission.' In an effort to make a legal test case of freedom of speech, Muslim leaders claim that by showing the film Islam is being exposed to derision, contempt and abuse that contravenes Danish legislation. "We are exploring the possibility of legal action, not just for the

sake of suing DR and TV 2, but also in protest that Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen has given the film's screenwriter an award, thereby sending a signal that people can freely abuse, violate and exploit Muslims and the Koran," says a spokesman for the Islamic Faith Society.
(Politiken, 30 November 2004, p. 2, NE translation)

Ethnic children, youths top summit agenda

Why do not Danes have friends from ethnic minorities? Why do so many children of immigrants drop out of high school? Why is immigrant parents' knowledge of education possibilities so limited? These are just some of the items on the agenda when Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen convenes the highly anticipated summit on integration at the PM's residence at Marienborg, tomorrow. The 22 specially invited guests from the immigrant community will also discuss topics such as the controversial 24 years of age stipulation for people seeking residency via family reunification, the state's right to protect freedom of speech and democracy, and how to improve relations between Danes and ethnic minorities in the media, places of work and schools.
(Berlingske Tidene, 29 November 2004, p. 4 NE translation)

No change in immigration laws despite UN criticism

Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder is defiant that there will be no change in Danish immigration legislation, despite UN criticism of the 24-years of age stipulation for immigrants seeking residency via family reunification. "This matter has been thoroughly analysed by the Danish Institute for Human Rights who have concluded that the law doesn't contravene international conventions. However, there can be administrative problems and we have agreed to reassess 40 cases where mistakes can have been made," he says. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights concluded in a recently released report that the Danish government should either retract or change the age regulation.
(Jyllandsposten, 28 November 2004, p. 7, NE translation)

PM: No room for extremists

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

this case a religious leader. We have to reject it, just as we have rejected Nazism.”

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

Finnish press

PM Vanhanen calls for population policy

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

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

Norwegian press

Support for status quo – fewer want stricter asylum policy

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

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

Swedish press

More and more asylum-seekers turn to church

According to a group deacons working in Stockholm, almost 30 per cent of those who come to the parish are asylum-seekers or people hiding from deportation. According to the deacons asked this depends on the fact that it has become more difficult to be granted asylum in Sweden. In despair people turn to the church for help, but the church can not in a proper way help those who are hiding from the authorities. "Since they may not be seen officially we can not apply for any subsidies in order to help them. But we do our best", one of the deacons says. When the Swedish Migration Board can not find asylum-seekers who are to be deported, they hand the case over to the police: However, many persons are never found and stay illegally in the country. "We only find some 10 per cent of those who are to be deported. It is simply a matter of resources", Ove Neselius, inspector at the Stockholm Police Force, says. City Commissioner for Social Affairs in Stockholm, Margareta Olofsson, is familiar with the problem but she does not believe that the city can do anything in order to solve it. "This is caused by the existing Swedish refugee policy", she says. Minister for Development Cooperation, Migration and Asylum Policy, Barbro Holmberg, believes that the situation in Sweden is not that serious compared to other countries. "I am aware of the fact that we have an increasing number of asylum-seekers whose claims have been rejected, and that they therefore chose go into hiding, but we must remember that Sweden has a better and more humane deportation procedure than many other countries", she says.

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