

Nordic Headlines 1 March 2004

Danish press

Immigrants look left

The Government's hard line immigration policy has, naturally, minimal support amongst immigrants themselves. A new Catinét Research poll shows that the two coalition parties and their parliamentary backers, the Danish People's Party, would only receive around 5% of the votes of resident immigrants and refugees if an election was held today. However, there is massive support for the left-leaning parties. The Social Democrats would receive a whopping 60.3% of all immigrant votes, far-left Socialist People's Party 16.1%, and the Social Liberals nearly 10%. The Conservative Party's spokesperson on immigration, Else Theill Sørensen, expressed surprise at the figures. 'It's obviously because of our strict immigration policy, but also because we're not good enough at explaining the details. We're not trying to harm the individual, but just reduce the number of people arriving and integrate those that are here.'

(News Ex-Press, 1 March 2004, pol5 1/3)

Integration policy splits SF

A proposal to launch a new, more offensive integration initiative has split the left-wing Socialist People's Party (SF). Four party MP's have proposed that SF should oppose the formation of immigrant-dominated ghettos, reduce the number of classrooms with a predominance of immigrant children, and oppose arranged marriages – all centre-right issues. The new proposal, seen as an effort to finally reject the misguided 1990's left-wing policy of expressing complete solidarity with immigrants, dominated SF's executive committee meeting over the weekend. 'This proposal could just as well have been written by the Danish People's Party or the Social Democrats,' said one member of the committee. 'What ever happened to solidarity with the less fortunate in our society?'

(News Ex-Press, 1 March 2004, pol4 29/2)

Lawyers say new immigration law goes against conventions

A government, Social Democrat and Danish People's Party sponsored bill to tighten immigration legislation so that even petty crimes will lead to expulsion, is met by harsh criticism from lawyers and legal experts. The Council of Lawyers criticise that officials at the Danish Immigration Service can revoke residence permits for minor infringements that normally would give a fine. 'The question of expulsion due to crime has normally been left to the courts. Now they have given themselves the possibility of expulsion out the back door, and I find this alarming,' says lawyer Mr Gunnar Homann, chairman of the Council of Lawyers immigration committee.

(News Ex-Press, 27 February 2004, br p6)

Big drop in asylum seekers

Denmark's refugee and asylum policies are totally at odds with its Scandinavian neighbours. New figures from the UN's High Commission for refugees, UNHCR, reveal that whilst the number of asylum seekers arriving in this country between 2001 and 2003 fell by 76%, in Sweden, Finland, Iceland and Norway, the numbers rose by 35%, 98%, 107% and 9% respectively. Danish immigration restrictions mean that this country now receives just 2% of all applications for asylum within the EU.

(News Ex-Press, 25 February 2004, p3)

First verdict in case of forced marriage

A 49 years old Iraqi father has been sentenced to one-year imprisonment for trying to force his fifteen years old daughter to enter an arranged marriage. This is the first case of its kind in Denmark and the prosecutor emphasises that the sentence sends an important signal.

(DR Nyheder online, 25 February 2004)

Finnish press

First ever deportation of Somali

Finland will for the first time deport a Somali who has a temporary permit of stay in the country. The 30 years-old man who has been sentenced to several prison terms in Finland will soon be sent back to Somalia. He arrived in Finland with the first group of Somali asylum-seekers in 1991. According to the Finnish Aliens Board, the man can well be deported to the northern areas of Somaliland and Puntland without any risk of being subjected to "inhumane treatment". The Aliens Board however points out that this does not mean that Finland now would be assessing Somalia as a safe country to return to. No such decision has been made, and every case is being decided on an individual basis.

(Helsingin Sanomat, 28 February 2004, p. A6)

Finland gives 25 million Euro to humanitarian aid

Countries in Africa get the largest part of the aid, 15.6 million Euro. Also the most important humanitarian organisations get a share, among them UNHCR's work around the horn of Africa and the Great Lakes area where there are around 2.4 million refugees. Finland also takes part in WFP's distribution of food to approximately 6 million people in the same area. The humanitarian work in Angola is supported with 1.9 million Euro, which is channelled through the Finnish Red Cross and UN organisations. Sudan is supported with two million Euro, and Liberia with 1.3 million. Others that are supported are Afghanistan, Chechnya, and North Korea.

(Hufvudstadsbladet, 24 February 2004, p. 5)

Norwegian press

Man was sentenced after having denied his wife integration

For the first time, Norwegian courts have stated that it is punishable to deny your spouse to integrate in society. Oslo District Court has used a 102-year-old section in the Criminal Code, which states that a man can be punished if “he seriously violates his duties towards his wife or children” against a 48-year-old man of African origin. The court claims that he actively opposed his 28-year-old wife’s integration when he denied her contact with other Norwegians. She was 19 years old when he brought her to Norway from Algeria, and was after that not allowed to leave the home without permission from the man and had to wear traditional clothing in public. Oslo’s prosecuting authority says that this sentence paves the way for a more frequent use of the Criminal Code in integration policies. The Chairman of NOAS, the Norwegian Organisation for Asylum Seekers, says that he is sceptical about the general use of punishment in the integration process, but that it can be right to use the Criminal Code in extreme cases such as this one.

(Aftenposten, 1 March 2004, p. 3.)

One out of three sense discrimination by UDI

A Report from the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) shows that one out of three asylum-seekers sense discrimination from UDI and is dissatisfied about the handling of their case.

(Aftenposten, 28 February, 2004, p. 2)

Refugees deported to Chechnya

Russia is not keeping its promise to the UN not to deport refugees to Chechnya, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC) claim after visiting Chechnya. The promise was made to UN Deputy Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Jan Egeland, who visited Ingushetia and Moscow last month. But Anne Marit Austbø (NRC) and Aage Borchrevink (NHC) say that the Russians continue to threaten and use bribes in an attempt to close the last camps housing 6,500 people in Ingushetia. Abductions have been an issue in Chechnya for years, but according to Borchrevink it has also reached Chechnyans living in Norway now. Borchrevink and Austbø are worried how the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) will handle asylum-seekers from Chechnya and other nationalities who have fled the war. The applications will be taken up for renewed treatment from the beginning of March. UDI should at least follow the UN directives recommending protection. There is no real alternative for refugees in Russia.

(Aftenposten, 26 February, 2004)

New trace after the double-murder

The pictures of the murdered Chinese couple could have given the police a new trail. One speculation is that the couple had money problems and debt incurred for travelling to Norway on a Student Permit. The police are aware that many

Chinese are coming to Norway on a Student Permit and upon reaching a Schengen country they suddenly disappear. The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) can see a trend where Norway is not only the recipient country of immigrants but also a transit country. The Chinese are very active finding routes to get people into Western Europe. Norway has thus become a transit country for Chinese, who want to go to Great Britain and USA, says Frank Sandsund from UDI.

(Aftenposten, 26 February, 2004, p. 3)

More unemployed immigrants

Unemployment among immigrants continues to rise but at a lesser pace than earlier. Statistics show that 9,6 percent or 15,239 immigrants were unemployed in November 2003. This is a one-percent rise from November last year. Unemployment increased from 3,3 to 3,7 percent for the population as a whole. Unemployment is highest among African immigrants among whom 17,4 percent are without a job.

(Aftenposten, 26 February, 2004, p. 3)

Double debt for students from China

In some parts of the Chinese-Norwegian society, people think that it was a student agent who killed the two Chinese students yesterday. Four to six such agents operate and live in Norway. They primarily demand money from students, but also from arranged marriages. If you do not pay, the debt is doubled. Today, students in Norway who arrived with the help of the same agent as the murdered students are very worried. The University in Oslo says that they turn down all agents, and only receive students through exchange programmes.

(Aftenposten, 25 February 2004, p. 3)

Chinese are enticed by promises of luxury life in Norway

Illegal agents are using web pages where they promise high standard of living and high incomes in Norway if you pay up to 250,000 NOK. The agents arrange everything that is needed for a stay in Norway; visa, admission to a field of study, and plane tickets. This is totally illegal in China.

(Aftenposten, 25 February 2004, p. 3)

The Children's Ombudsman wants to give asylum-seeking children a new hearing

The Children's Ombudsman suggests that asylum-seeking children, who have been in a refugee centre for more than three years, should have the legal right to a new hearing. Also children who live at refugee centres when the family's asylum application has been rejected, should also have this second chance. From a series of calls and reactions from children, adolescents and people in the local environment, "we have learned that children are often integrated...", the Ombudsman says. He also calls upon the immigration authorities to adjust their practice, "so that the rights and interests of the children are ensured in a satisfactory way".

(Aftenposten, 24 February 2004, p. 4)

Swedish press

Proposition that will stop criminals from former Soviet Union

Travel Agencies in Russia are advertising “asylum trips” to Sweden in newspapers and on the net. The trip costs around 30,000 SKR and includes a Working and a Residency Permit. Additionally, the purchase includes an exam, which tests your skills on decoding the Swedish system. The Russian authorities think the business is legal as the agencies only inform the buyers. Between 2001 and 2002 the number of asylum-seekers from the former Soviet Union increased from around 2,800 to nearly 6,200 persons. Last year the number decreased with a couple of hundred. Nearly none of these could show any identity papers when seeking asylum and hardly any had a reason to seek asylum. Among this group of asylum-seekers 20 percent were living from crimes. Most of them were single men in the age of 20-35.

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

Refugee children threaten with hunger strike

Asylum seeking youths that have arrived unaccompanied to Sweden are threatening to go on hunger strike as a protest against the long asylum assessment period. They are placed in Skellefteå and some of them have been waiting for more than a year for a decision from the Swedish Migration Board. The municipality of Skellefteå is the only municipality in Sweden having sheltered housing for unaccompanied refugee children. During the assessment period the children are living in this homelike environment which is to be a short time solution. The Migration Board however has not fulfilled the government's assessment goal of three months max for any of the youths.

(Dagens Nyheter, 29 February, 2004, p. 6)

The municipalities could be handled the responsibility for the children

A proposal on how Sweden is going to receive unaccompanied asylum-seeking children will be presented within a couple of weeks. Today no one is taking the full responsibility for these children. The proposal will outline the responsibilities of the municipalities and the Migration Boards respectively.

(Dagens Nyheter, 29 February, 2004, p. 6)

Secret legal process in the spirit of Kafka

Op-ed by Bo Strömstedt, professor in Journalism

When seven-year old Nadina Imamovic came to Sweden to seek medical help for her incurable eye disease every step in the legal process except the decision was kept a secret. Her Swedish spectacles are no longer good. But a person at the Swedish Embassy in Sarajevo refuses to give Nadina Imamovic a three-week permit to go to Sweden to get new ones. The Embassy refers her to a temporarily equipped eye centre in Sarajevo even when the University hospital in Sarajevo is unable to help her.

(Dagens Nyheter, 29 February, 2004, p. 4)

Integration: the driving force for economic growth

In a proposal, the Social Democrats have prioritised four areas in order to achieve stronger economic growth in Sweden: better conditions for companies, measures to find more jobs, higher education level and sustainable development. Sweden is going to be a leading country within integration issues and the fight against discrimination, says Mona Sahlin, Minister for Democracy and Integration Issues. The proposal says for example that a person who has been granted asylum should find a work where his/her knowledge is useful, the workplaces should be free from discrimination and the labour market should mirror the ethnic composition of the Swedish people. Immigrants should without delay be integrated into the labour market, for example through practical training that does not require a perfect Swedish, Sahlin says.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 28 February, p. 10.)

No rush from the new EU countries

A new investigation from Eurofound in Dublin estimates that approximately one per cent will be moving from the new EU countries over five years. "This investigation confirms the view of the European Commission that those who fear an immigration wave after the 1st of May are mistaken," Sweden's European Commissioner Margot Wallström says. She mentions that those moving will make up a very needed contribution to the labour market in the old EU countries. There is a risk however that the new EU countries will lose young and well-educated people necessary for their economic growth.

(Dagens Nyheter, 27 February 2004, p. 14, and Svenska Dagbladet, p. 22.)

EU citizens' benefits in Sweden

There are a number of benefits only requiring that you live in Sweden. Among those are child allowance, national basic pension, basic parental allowance and housing allowance. All EU citizens have the right to work in all EU countries, but if you look for work more than three months in Sweden, you need to apply for residency permit. Everybody who lives in Sweden have the same right to health care and education. The benefits from the social insurance system can be exported to other countries. This means, for example, that if you work in Sweden and your family lives in another EU country, you have the right to obtain child allowance. You only need to work for one day in Sweden to be granted unemployment benefits. After four months of unemployment in Sweden, you are allowed to bring your unemployment benefit to your home country. The basic unemployment benefit is approximately 4900 SEK per month, which can be compared with an average salary in Lithuania, 3000 SEK. "We will soon see changes in our welfare system", an expert in social insurance says.

(Dagens Nyheter, 27 February 2004, p. 14.)

5000 Iraqis could be forced to return home

Most of the 5,000 Iraqi asylum-seekers in Sweden will be forced to return home albeit the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR is asking countries not to deport them. The Swedish Migration Board has taken decision in three precedent creating asylum cases. One concerns a man from the Kurdish minority in Iraq. He refers to the Saddam regime as well as the ongoing power struggle in the country as reasons to stay in Sweden. With the violence mainly targeting the coalition and its collaborators, the Migration Board however now considers the situation in Iraq to be secure enough for Iraqis to return. The Board is not considering the social situation in the country, says Nedhal Mahmood, who is responsible for refugee issues at the Federation of Kurdish Association in Sweden. Kiki Rodriguez at UNHCR's Regional Office in Stockholm is pointing at the insecurity as well as the difficult social situation in Iraq. She does not recommend returns yet. Two Iraqi women, who have been ostracised by their families, have also had their cases heard. One of the women is allowed to stay in Sweden, while the other woman coming from the Kurdish governed part of Iraq must return. The situation for women in the Kurdish part is considered much better than other parts of the country. Nedhal Mahmood cannot understand the reasoning since both these women are exposed to honour-related situations.

(Svenska Dagbladet & Dagens Nyheter, 26 February, 2004, pp. 9 & 5)

Fewer asylum-seekers to EU last year

UNHCR High Commissioner, Ruud Lubbers, was pleased about the latest statistics on Asylum Trends. They were published on Tuesday. He points to last years' negative public attitudes in the EU countries towards asylum-seekers. The EU, minus Italy, had a total of 288,000 asylum-seekers, a decrease of 22 percent compared to last year. In relative terms, Sweden and the non-EU country Norway receive more than double the number of asylum-seekers compared to the average EU country. The two countries' asylum seekers have increased since the Danish government sharpened its asylum policy. Most asylum applicants in 2003 came from Russia, mainly from Chechnya.

(Dagens Nyheter, 26 February, 2004, p. 11)

Nordic Headlines 5 March 2004

Danish press

Government parties ridicule DF's problem with Qureshi's clothes

Governing Liberal and Conservative parties now distance themselves from right wing opposition Danish People's Party nationalism and intolerance. This is after the Danish People's Party criticised Socialist People's Party MP Kamal Qureshi for wearing a knee-long north Indian Shervani at the Queen's New Year's ball. "Now it has become more clear how nationalist the Danish People's Party way of thinking is. If you don't have the right skin colour, nose size and don't dress the way they think you should, then you don't belong. I must reject this completely, and I am sure everyone else in the Liberal Party will too," says Liberal Party integration spokeswoman Irene Simonsen. Conservative political spokeswoman Pia Christmas Møller also draws the line. "I have never seen the likes of such an un-Danish attack. It is an expression of condescension and intolerance towards others that is unprecedented," she says.

(News Ex-Press, 3 March 2004)

National costume creates trouble

The Danish People's Party has launched a vicious attack on leading immigrant politician, Kamal Qureshi (SF) for appearing before Queen Margrethe at a royal court ball dressed in a national Indian costume, instead of traditional evening wear. A vitriolic article in DF's latest members' magazine states: "Qureshi's egocentric, defiant, and self-assertive manner demonstrated his contempt for the Royal Family and the country that has provided him with Danish citizenship. It's quite obvious that he can't stand Denmark, and one can ask oneself why he bothers to stay here." According to DF's deputy leader Peter Skaarup, the article has the full backing of party leadership. Qureshi has refused to comment on the article, but has previously claimed that he had asked the court if national costume was appropriate, and they approved it. SF has now accused DF of misusing the monarchy in a political matter. "This is a primitive and rather sad affair," said the head of SF's parliamentary group, Aage Frandsen. "It also says a lot about those who have written the article, but freedom of speech also means the freedom to express some ridiculous opinions."

(News Ex-Press, 2 March 2004)

Fee for interpreter at the doctors

Immigrants and refugees who after seven years in Denmark do not speak enough Danish for a medical check-up have to pay for an interpreter, the government believes. Minister of Health, Lars Løkke Rasmussens has put a proposal out for hearing

(Politiken, 2 March 2004, p. 2)

Finnish press

Finnish asylum seeker denied asylum in Belgium

The Belgian High Administrative Court has decided against the appeal by Jussi Hermaja, who had applied for asylum in Belgium after having been sentenced to 197 days in prison in Finland for refusing both military and the alternative civilian service. Earlier, his application had been rejected by the Belgian Refugee Board. Although there is a warrant of arrest against Hermaja in Finland, the Finnish authorities are not planning to ask for his extradition from Belgium. Within the EU, only Belgium is processing asylum applications from citizens of other EU countries. In Belgium, total conscientious objection is not a crime like in Finland. (Helsingin Sanomat, 4 March 2004, p. A9)

Norwegian press

Asylum seekers refuse to leave

Around 50 asylum seekers who have lost the right to stay at reception centres still refuse to leave. They now face eviction by the police. From 1 January, asylum seekers who have been refused asylum also lose the right to stay on at reception centres and to receive economic support. However, one out of five who have received a final refusal to their application for asylum, still refuse to leave the reception centres. In December last year, there were 18,050 refugees living at 145 reception centres in Norway. This number has now been reduced to around 16,000. It is expected that the number will be reduced to around 11,000 by next January. Official estimates show that each refugee costs the state NOK 108,000 a year.

(Aftenposten, 1 March 2004, p. 3)

Swedish Press

Municipalities wish to stop refugees

Municipalities that accommodate many immigrants wish to put restricts to the possibility for refugees to choose where they want to live. Botkyrka municipality outside Stockholm believes it is unreasonable that a few urban municipalities accommodate the largest proportion of newly arrived refugees. The Municipal Commissioner refers to the problem of housing shortage. He suggests that refugees have to prove that they have accommodation, otherwise the State should relocate them to another municipality. The Municipal Commissioner in Huddinge, also outside Stockholm, wishes to abolish the current system where refugees automatically 'belong' to the municipality where they first settle. Instead, the Swedish Migration Board should offer a 'settlement package', which should include job opportunities, education and accommodation. "The consequences of the current legislation are unreasonable", the Municipal commissioner says, but she does not want to entirely stop refugees from coming to Huddinge.

(Dagens Nyheter, 5 March 2004, p. 7.)

The decision concerning tightened asylum rules is near

The Parliament is going to discuss the governmental proposal concerning a tightening of the refugee policy. Three of the proposals are considered controversial. Firstly, it will no longer be possible to reapply for asylum if the first application is rejected. Secondly, airlines and travel agencies are to be fined up to SEK 46,000 if they allow passengers without proper documents. Finally, asylum seekers without proper documents will get lower daily allowance. All parties agree on the first proposal, however it is still doubtful whether it will pass in the Parliament since none of the opposition parties wish to remove the possibility to reapply before there is a secure asylum seeking process. Instead, they wish that the courts would replace the functions of the Aliens Appeal Board. The final decision is due to be made 12 May 2004.

(Dagens Nyheter, 2 March 2004, p. 7)

Nordic Headlines 9 March 2004

Danish press

Right to file a complaint about job discrimination

Political compromise found so immigrants and refugees can complain to the Danish Institute for Human Rights about differential treatment at the work place. More than a year of strife between the government and the opposition has ended in this compromise from Employment Minister, Claus Hjort Frederiksen (Liberal Party). The proposal gives the Institute the right to express its position and recommendations but not to make binding decisions. Since last Summer Denmark has violated a binding EU-directive prohibiting differential treatment. (Politiken, 5 March 2004, p. 4)

Haarder asked to answer

Christian Democrats spokes woman on integration matters, Bodil Kornbek has asked Minister of Integration, Bertel Haarder to document that foreign priests and missionaries constitute an actual problem. The Minister's law proposal make stronger demands to foreign missionaries' Danish skills, their background and education as well as their relation to basic Danish values. The demands "...conflict directly with the constitutional freedom of religion," says Kornbek. (Politiken, 5 March 2004, p. 4)

Norwegian press

Norway criticised for deporting Chechens

Norwegian authorities are criticised for deporting Chechens to Russia. Because the number of asylum seekers from the republic increased greatly last year, the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) wants to send Chechen asylum seekers to Russia. "We are evaluating it so that Chechen asylum seekers can take up residence other places in Russia than in Chechnya," said Paula Toloen, Assistant Director General at UDI. Anne Marit Austbø at the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) warns against deportation, and said that Chechens will not get any protection by Russian authorities. "They have problems getting housing and problems being allowed to settle in other places within Russia," Austbø said. (Nettavisen, 8 March 2004)

NOAS warns against new asylum rule

The Norwegian Organisation for Asylum Seekers (NOAS) – celebrating its 20th Anniversary 8 March – is very concerned about the government's last restrictions for asylum seekers. "Unfortunately is Norwegian asylum policy on its way towards something not representative for this society's basic values", says NOAS Secretary General Morten Tjessem. Especially the 48-hours rule is under attack by NOAS. Tjessem believes this arrangement will make it difficult to bring forward all information when asylum seekers are interviewed. "The danger being

that people with real protection needs are being weeded out ". Tjessem believes that asylum applications should be made into different categories and rather reject the manifestly unfounded cases quickly.

(Aftenposten, 7 March 2004, p. 2)

Swedish press

Sexually persecuted will get refugee status

According to a law proposal that was presented to Migration Minister Barbro Holmberg yesterday, persecution based on gender or sexual orientation should give refugee status, and not just subsidiary protection, as the case is today. "This may look like a legally very technical point, but it is not without significance," says the chairman of the commission. There are real differences in the situation of those who are granted refugee status compared to those allowed to stay for other reasons, for example a faster naturalisation process, as well as extra benefits for family reunification. The number of refugees in Sweden will eventually increase when some of those who now have subsidiary status will be reclassified as refugees.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 9 March 2004)

Holmberg agrees with critical municipalities

Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy, Barbro Holmberg, agrees with the municipalities who are criticising the current system in which refugees are free to choose where they wish to settle. "The current system is contributing to the segregation. The settlement needs to be directed in another way than today, but we do not know how yet. The whole system needs to be changed. It is not enough just to transfer more money to the municipalities. The current system might seem humane, but it is not", Holmberg says.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 7 March 2004, p. 14)

Municipalities demand that the state pays for refugees

In a letter to the government, 17 Swedish municipalities ask the State to bear the whole cost for asylum seekers. "It is not easy to explain the costs for our inhabitants", says Municipal Commissioner in the southern municipality of Hultsfred, Bo Bergsten. "I can see a change in attitudes, the solidarity towards refugees is decreasing – it is a ticking bomb. And it is not about racism, but about rights. The situation is the same in other municipalities", he says. The municipalities are also criticising the Swedish Migration Board by saying that the competence in the reception centres is notably low and that the immigration policy is no longer comprehensive.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 6 March 2004, p. 12)

There is no time to integrate the students

The pressure on the schools in Botkyrka – a municipality outside Stockholm where many asylum seekers settle – is so high that the teachers have no time to integrate the children. "The State needs to more actively solve the housing

shortage, and not just transfer the problems to us”, Hans Nylund, administrative manager in Education and Labour Market Administration in Botkyrka says. In one school in Botkyrka, 99 per cent of the students have immigrant backgrounds. “There is no integration at all, and many children have problems to find somewhere to do their homework due to the housing shortage”, teacher Ulla Bergh says.

(Dagens Nyheter, 6 March 2004, p. 7.)

Nordic Headlines 17 March 2004

Danish press

Iraqis going home

Rejected Iraqi asylum seekers, who voluntarily want to leave Denmark, should now be able to return home far quicker as the result of a bilateral agreement between Denmark and the US. Up until now, the temporary administration in Iraq, the CPA, has only agreed to accept no more than ten rejected asylum seekers from Denmark per month, but the new agreement provides the possibility of at least 200 being sent home within the very near future. Rejected asylum seekers who accept voluntary deportation receive DKK 18,000 plus travel expenses.

(News Express, 15 March 2004)

DF wants to force Iraqis out

The Danish People's Party (DF) has dismissed Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder's deal with the US authorities, that allows more Iraqi refugees to be repatriated, as insufficient. According to DF, this country should be following the UK and force Iraqis to leave. "The British authorities are ready to use force to make rejected Iraqi asylum seekers leave the country, and we should be doing the same," says DF's spokesman on immigration, Peter Skaarup. Haarder has rejected the use of force, pointing out that 220 Iraqis have already gone home, and the US deal paves the way for another 200 to be sent back in the near future. Another 125 who were granted residency in Denmark have accepted the authorities' offer of DKK 18,000 plus travel expenses to go home.

(News Ex-Press, 16 March 2004)

Finnish press

Stop the asylum tourism

After a short lull, the number of asylum-seekers from East European countries is on the rise again. This year so far, 86 Romas from Slovakia have arrived to Helsinki airport, and 20 have crossed the border from Sweden. More Slovaks are rumoured to be on their way in coming weeks. More than half of the newcomers have already earlier applied for asylum in Finland or in another EU country. These asylum-seekers who are criss-crossing the continent often admit themselves that they are not being persecuted in their home country, but are migrating in search for job opportunities. Although very few asylum-seekers arrive in Finland compared to other countries, the large number of manifestly unfounded cases is weakening the position of those who are in real need of protection. Those who file unfounded applications are not in need of protection, their problems are social. And asylum tourism is not the right solution. Slovakia, as a country which becomes an EU member on May Day, must be put under

pressure to improve the situation of ethnic minorities so that people would not be forced to seek asylum in order to secure a living.
(Helsingin Sanomat, 11 March 2004, editorial)

Behind the headlines

Denmark is playing a central role in the Swedish refugee debate. Swedish politicians and opinion makers, campaigning for a continuation of the generous Swedish refugee policy, often use Denmark as an example of what could go wrong. One example of this is the recent broadside against Danish refugee policy delivered by the Swedish daily *Dagens Nyheter*. It is fine that DN and other Swedish opinion makers are keeping their eyes on the increasing xenophobia on the other side of the Sound. That however makes their silence about what is going on on the other side of the Gulf of Bothnia even more strange. Because the toughening of the Danish refugee policy feels like a mild summer breeze compared to the draconian aliens policy in Finland. Last year, seven individuals were granted refugee convention status in Finland. The same figure in Denmark was 716. Yes, you read correctly. Seven. And this is no exception. In 2002, 14 persons were granted asylum in Finland and in 2001, it was four. The same years, 2001 and 2002, over three thousand persons were granted asylum in Denmark. So if Swedish opinion makers were looking for a bad example to give, then their binoculars should be directed at Finland, not Denmark. Perhaps the explanation for this is that events in Denmark are still fairly recent and newsworthy, while the Finnish nonchalance towards refugees is old, grey and boring. It is of course a relief for the Finnish government that this kind of simple media logic is saving Finland from being blasted in the biggest newspapers of the neighbouring countries. It would be embarrassing for a state which sees itself as one of the model pupils in the EU to be known internationally as a country which evades its responsibilities and shifts the burden onto the shoulders of others, such as the other Nordic countries and the EU.

(Hufvudstadsbladet, 12 March 2004, p. 14)

Norwegian press

Norway defies UN warning

Norwegian authorities decided 16 January that the situation in northern Iraq is good enough to start sending back refugees. This means that Iraqi asylum seekers will get a final rejection on their application and are asked to leave the country. Those who already have a work permit will lose it unless they chose to voluntary return to Iraq before 1 April. Due to the unstable situation in Iraq some 2,000 Iraqis got prolonged work permits last year, even though they had received a final rejection on their asylum application. UNHCR underlines that forced returns to Iraq are premature and requests states not to adopt any measures which are intended to encourage voluntary returns, including of rejected cases. Recent events have confirmed that the security situation in Iraq is still dangerous and extremely uncertain. Political advisor at the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development (KRD), Roger Iversen, however, believes the

situation in northern Iraq is safe. Upon question why the refugees are not forced to leave the country Iversen replies: "because it doesn't exist authorities or infrastructure in the country, which makes this possible". "The asylum seekers are rejected and are now going home", Iversen says. The Iraqis are offered NOK 10,000 if they voluntarily leave Norway within the deadline. On the question on why KRD are sending people back to Iraq despite other UN recommendations, Iversen says: "We are following UN's recommendations on no forced return. In addition we are in line with all the other European countries". (Aftenposten, 8 March 2004, p. 3)

Swedish press

"Transition rules serve everybody's interests"

Today, the government is presenting the controversial proposal regarding transition rules for workers from the new EU countries. In an op-ed, Barbro Holmberg, the Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy and Hans Karlsson, Minister for Employment, present a detailed package of measures in order to prepare free movement within the union. Workers from all new EU countries will be allowed to work in Sweden, but they need to apply for a working permit already in their home country, and they must have been offered an employment under a collective agreement. In addition, the worker should arrange accommodation before arrival. The ambition is to make the transition period as short as possible, and the government will return to the question within two years.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 12 March 2004, p. 5.)

Political mistake increases unemployment among immigrants

A report from a governmental commission on the integration of immigrants in Sweden shows that the status of immigrants on the Swedish labour market has steadily decreased the last 20 years. This does not only harm the national economy but also increases the risk of xenophobia, the commission argues. The political decision to spread refugees over Sweden meant large regional differences in the employment rate of the refugees, since the access to accommodation rather than to employment directed the resettlement.

(Dagens Nyheter, 12 March 2004, p. 4.)

Swedish standards unfair to immigrant pupils

A new study about integration and power in the Swedish school system shows that the teachers have the best of ambitions concerning the integration of immigrant pupils. In practice, however, the focus is on the shortcomings of the immigrant pupils as they constantly are being compared with Swedish pupils. Both the school system and the integration system are built up according to Swedish standards, and those who diverge from these standards are seen as insufficient, the ethnologist Ann Runfors says. The solution, according to the Teachers' Union, is to employ more teachers with immigrant background.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 11 March 2004, p. 6.)

Refugee relatives can be DNA tested

The Swedish Migration Board will get the possibility to make DNA analyses of persons who are coming as relatives to refugees in Sweden, in order to confirm that a claimed relationship is real. The background is several cases where children have been placed in families where they do not biologically belong. The Swedish Migration Board has tried to get this possibility for several years. (Svenska Dagbladet, 10 March 2004, p. 8.)

“University graduates are selected according to their skin colour”

A new report from the Swedish Integration Board shows that only 60 percent of university graduates born outside Sweden have a job which matches their qualifications, compared to 80 percent of Swedish-born university graduates. Among university graduates from Africa, only 20 percent have a job that is matching their qualifications. Anders Carlgren, Director General of the Integration Board, writes in an op-ed that important potential for Sweden’s competence supply is lost when university graduates are unemployed or employed in a sector where their competence is not utilised.

(Dagens Nyheter, 14 March 2004, p. 4., and Svenska Dagbladet, 15 March 2004, p. 10.)

Arklöv’s victim of torture is granted permit of stay

An asylum-seeker from Bosnia, who had been the victim of torture by the Swedish mercenary Jackie Arklöv in Bosnia, has been granted permit of stay. The Aliens Appeal Board is thereby turning down an earlier decision of deportation by the Swedish Board of Migration. The Bosnian man is not given refugee status but is granted permit of stay on humanitarian grounds, despite the fact that he has been tortured by Arklöv and witnessed against him in court. The Aliens Appeal Board does not think that the man has protection needs in Bosnia, since he has not yet been called as a witness to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. The Board also distrusts the man’s statements concerning an attack directed towards him after the testimony against Arklöv. In the end, however, the Aliens Appeal Board states that they agree with the statement made by UNHCR that persons who have been severely traumatised during the war cannot be expected to return to their homeland. The asylum-seeker’s lawyer, Sten De Geer, says that he is not satisfied with the decision not to give his client refugee status, among other things because the Aliens Appeal Act ignored UNHCR’s statement concerning protection of witnesses not yet called to the Tribunal. (Dagens Nyheter, 8-12 March 2004.)

“Change the law for the sake of the Roma”

A new government report shows that there is an extensive discrimination of Roma, for example on the labour market. More than 10 percent of the complaints to the Ombudsman against ethnic discrimination (DO) come from Roma, but the hidden numbers are high since discrimination is so common that many Roma do not care about making a complaint. Now the DO Margareta Wadstein wants to

change the law and accept affirmative action of Roma, in order to give this group a possibility to catch up.

(Dagens Nyheter, 16 March 2004, p. 4, and Svenska Dagbladet, 17 March, p. 6.)

UN is criticising Sweden for racism

The UN Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination has in a report criticised Sweden on a number of issues, among other things the rights of the Sami minority and the Roma community, the situation of Muslims after the 11 September events, the lack of explicit legal provisions banning racist organisations, and the denial of appeal to foreigners subjected to expulsion for being a security threat. Carl-Henrik Ehrenkrona, Ambassador and Director General for Legal Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, does not think that the criticism is especially serious, but is emphasising that the government is attaching great importance to the UN report.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 13 March 2004, p. 22.)

Not easy for immigrants to get a job in Sweden

Sweden has one of the highest unemployment rates among immigrants in the world, an international comparison in a new report from the Swedish Integration Board shows. However, the statistics are misleading, says Lena Schröder, expert on labour market issues. There is an important difference between countries with an extensive influx of foreign labour, such as the USA, Canada and Australia, and countries where many refugees seek asylum, such as Sweden, Denmark and France.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 14 March 2004, p. 10.)

The Swedish Board of Migration will be revised

One third of the asylum applications that were finished by the Swedish Board of Migration last year took more than 10 months to investigate. The ambition of the government is six months, and because of this, the Swedish National Audit Office has decided to revise the time and quality aspects of the handling of the applications. Applications from Afghan asylum seekers took the longest time to handle last year; only 50 percent of these applications were finished within 10 months.

(Dagens Nyheter, 17 March 2004, p. 9.)

Nordic Headlines 23 March 2004

Finnish Press

Wrong picture of Slovakian Romas

According to the Finnish Roma Council, the media picture of Slovakian Romas is distorted. The Romas have been accused of coming to Finland in search of social benefits, when in reality they have been exposed to serious human rights violations and are the victims of organised crime. The Romas of Slovakia are suffering from violence at the hands of the police and are being discriminated against by the authorities. This situation has been known to the EU for years, says the Secretary General of the Roma Council Sarita Friman. The Slovakian government has not been able to better the lot of the Romas, which according to Friman makes them vulnerable to organised crime. The Romas are being given wrong information about the suitability of the Nordic countries as asylum countries. They are being cheated to pay huge sums of money to the travel agents, who also lend them money at usury rates, says Friman. (Helsingin Sanomat, 20 March 2004, p. A9)

Almost all Slovaks are being returned

Already this year, 210 Slovakian Romas have sought asylum in Finland. Last Sunday, 25 of them arrived at Helsinki airport on a direct flight from Prague, and today, 50 more are believed to be arriving on the Prague flight. Of those who arrived so far, almost everyone already received a negative decision, says the Director of the Aliens Board Matti Heinonen. Every fifth of the Romas who have applied for asylum this year have applied for asylum in Finland once before. The return of the Romas is now being planned. The Helsinki police is looking for the most economic alternative and is negotiating with the Czech airline about how many people can be sent back to Prague at one time. According to the Aliens Law, the airline company which brings a rejected asylum seeker to Finland has the obligation to transport him back. The other option would be to charter a flight. The Finnish police wants to resolve this issue as soon as possible, in order to send the message to those in Slovakia who may be planning to go to Finland that they cannot expect to stay long in the country. (Helsingin Sanomat, 18 March 2004, p. A6)

Norwegian Press

Oslo politician felt pressured by Pakistan's ambassador

A member of Oslo's City Council who was born in Pakistan but now holds Norwegian citizenship has twice been called to Pakistan's local embassy. Both times, Pakistan's ambassador to Norway questioned her political standpoints, and now Norway's foreign minister Jan Petersen has been told that she felt pressured. It is highly unusual for a Norwegian citizen to be asked to meet up in another country's embassy to draft political issues with an ambassador. City

Council member Samira Munir has lived in Norway since the early 1970s and has been a Norwegian citizen for more than 20 years. The calls from Pakistan's embassy came after Munir became the first known Muslim woman in Norway to support a proposed ban on the use of head scarves and other religious symbols for youth. She then became a target of criticism within the local Pakistani community. Pakistan's ambassador, Shahbaz Shahbaz, noted in his second meeting with Munir that she still has family in Pakistan. Shahbaz confirmed he has had two meetings with Munir in his office since she went public with her position on religious headscarves called hijab in February. They had no contact prior to that point. Shahbaz denied he has put any pressure on Munir. He said he did not call her in because of her hijab standpoint, saying he and his staff merely have regular contact with politicians in the Norwegian-Pakistani community. (Aftenposten, 23 March 2004)

Record number wins asylum

Nearly 600 persons were granted asylum in Norway last year, up a whopping 71 per cent over the year before. Most came from Chechnya, Iraq and Afghanistan. Never before have so many applicants received a positive answer. All told, more than 3,500 asylum seekers were granted at least residence permission on humanitarian grounds. Immigration officials said there were fewer cases where asylum claims were clearly groundless. Most of such claims come from eastern European countries, where residents have tried to seek a better life by coming to Norway. The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) however, has conducted major so-called "information campaigns" in countries such as Bulgaria, to stem the tide of would-be immigrants who end up being turned away. UDI Director General Trygve G. Nordby attributes the rise in asylum approvals to better use of UNHCR refugee guidelines in recent years. Norwegian Organisation for Asylum Seekers (NOAS), which advocates asylum seekers' rights, claims Norway should grant even more asylum claims. NOAS Secretary General Morten Tjessem said a majority of those seeking residence on humanitarian grounds should be classified as refugees, to enhance their rights. He is also highly critical of the recent changes in Norwegian asylum policy, and in particular the new 48 hours procedures.

(Aftenposten, 22 March 2004, p. 4)

Moroccans fear racism after Madrid bombings

Moroccans in Norway fear they might be experience racism after several of their countrymen are charged with the terrorist bombings in Madrid 11 March. Some 3,500 people from Morocco live in Norway and their community condemns the acts in Spain, says a member of the Moroccan religious community in Norway.

(Aftenposten, 22 March 2004, p. 4)

Government supports elderly immigrants

The government has proposed that elderly immigrants who have not been long enough in Norway in order to receive full retirement pension, will be granted economic support. The implication of the proposal will be that approximately

2,000 elderly immigrants receive full retirement pension instead of living on social welfare.

(Aftenposten, 16 March 2004, p. 2)

Swedish Press

Honour related violence against one thousand young women

Between 1,000 and 1,500 young women are becoming victims of honour related violence each year, and in 10 per cent of the cases, the life of the woman is endangered, a report from the County Administrative Boards shows. The report has, however, been criticised, among others by the expert Kickis Åhré Älgamo, who is in daily contact with these girls and argues that the hidden numbers are substantially higher. The cases are also becoming increasingly violent, according to Åhré Älgamo. The co-ordinator of the project, Maria Lindberg, states that the mission from the government should have been better pronounced in order to secure the real number of threatened women.

(Dagens Nyheter, 23 March 2004, p. 8.)

The right of free settlement is questioned

The Swedish Supreme Administrative Court will test a case in which the Stockholm municipality of Nacka intends to accommodate two large immigrant families in Sorsele – a town located some 1,000 km north of Stockholm – against their will. Nacka municipality is arguing that no landlords within the municipality are accepting large immigrant families whilst in Sorsele, the families are guaranteed suitable accommodation and education. If Nacka municipality wins the case, it might imply that other urban municipalities are going to use the possibility to resettle immigrants to other municipalities in an attempt to solve their own social problems.

(Dagens Nyheter, 19 March 2004, p. 8)

Nordic Headlines 30 March 2004

Danish Press

Norwegian Press

Stricter enforcement of law against sexual mutilation

Refugees and asylum seekers arriving in Norway will have to sign a declaration, stating that they understand that arranged marriage and sex mutilation of girls is forbidden in Norway. Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, Erna Solberg says that this will be enforced from this fall. She says that the new regulation was to have been in place earlier, and that she is dissatisfied with the fact that it has take so long to put it in place. Solberg says that the aim of the new regulation is to inform about which laws and regulations apply with regard to the circumcision of girls and forced marriages. The Directorate of Immigration (UDI) will also register those children or youths who are already circumcised.

(NRK, 28 March 2004)

Oslo to get Jewish Museum

The Jewish Community and the Oslo City Museum have received NOK 900,000 (USD 131,000) from Arts Council Norway to establish a Jewish museum in the Norwegian capital. "Opportune, and important for us to show the exhibitiv side of our culture. We are the oldest immigrant group in Norway," said Rolf Kirscher, leader of the Jewish Community in Oslo. A similar project in Trondheim display life in Jewish communities there and further north. "Here there will be presentations and enlightenment. The level of knowledge about minorities in Norway is regrettably low and the young are an important target group", Kirscher said. The project aims to collect and preserve objects and memories that can illuminate the Jewish history and culture in Norway, with an emphasis on the immigration and integration into society from 1851 to the present day. The museum is to be ready in 2005.

(Aftenposten, 24 March 2004)

UDI: "Too early to extend the 48 hour rule"

The Directorate of Immigration (UDI) deems it too early to extend the 48-hours proceedings in asylum matters. UDI Director General, Trygve G. Nordby believes the arrangement is too new and that more experience is needed. Minister for Local Government and Regional Development, Erna Solberg has asked UDI to explore the possibility of using these procedures for all asylum seekers who chose to come to Norway. All manifestly unfounded asylum seekers have had their applications proceeded within two days since the beginning of the year.

(NRK/NTB, 23 March 2004)

Swedish Press

Harsh criticism towards EU asylum proposal

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees Ruud Lubbers together with nine refugee and human rights organisations are directing harsh criticism against the draft directives aimed at harmonising asylum policy across the EU, which are due to be discussed by justice and interior ministers from the EU member states today. The proposals could be an effective denial of the right to seek asylum under international law, UNHCR warned. The criticism is also directed towards the proposal to deport refugees before they had a chance to appeal a negative decision, despite the fact that 30 to 60 percent of initial negative decisions are subsequently overturned on appeal. The Swedish Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy, Barbro Holmberg, does not think that the criticism is well-founded. "We have the possibility in Sweden of sending home clearly unfounded applicants and let them appeal from the home country, but this procedure is strictly safeguarded", she says. In the discussion concerning "safe third countries", Sweden wishes to try every "safe" country separately, instead of having a fixed list of countries. Holmberg said she was not able to foresee the decision on this matter. (Dagens Nyheter, 30 March 2004, p. 8.)

Deportee put himself on fire

A man of Eastern Europe origin put himself on fire at the Landvetter airport when he was going to be deported to Norway, his first country of asylum. Two passengers assisted in putting out the fire, but the man suffered serious burn injuries. (Dagens Nyheter, 26 March 2004, p. 5.)

The subject Swedish as a second language not approved

In a new government report, the Swedish National Agency for School Improvement argues that the subject Swedish as a second language (SVA) has a segregating effect and should be abolished. Instead, a new, widened subject for teaching Swedish should be introduced. "By dividing the subject the delusion of the school as monolingual and monocultural is supported, and the pupil studying SVA is seen as an exemption", they write. Moreover, fewer parents want their children to study SVA and the percentage of pupils studying the subject has decreased, from 6.6 percent in 1995/1996 to 5.5 percent in 2001/2002. (Dagens Nyheter, 26 March 2004, p. 5.)

The government appoints a commission on how to increase foreign labour

Simultaneously to the debate concerning transition rules for workers from the new EU countries, the government appoints a commission on how to increase the influx of foreign labour. The commission, which is the result of a Parliament decision over a year ago, has directives to attract foreign labour to occupations with a great shortage of trained people. (Dagens Nyheter, 26 March 2004, p. 16.)

The Swedish Board of Migration evacuated due to bomb threat

Parts of the premises of the Swedish Board of Migration in Hallstahammar, west of Stockholm, were evacuated due to a bomb threat. Bomb experts were summoned, but no bomb was to be found. (Dagens Nyheter, 26 March 2004, p. 6.)

The government wishes to restrict the right of free settlement

The Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy Barbro Holmberg wishes to restrict the asylum seekers' right of free settlement. "As soon as possible, we will put forward a proposal to abolish the compensation immigrants are granted when they choose to settle somewhere else than where they have been offered accommodation", Holmberg says. "The current law probably creates considerable social problems and increases the segregation", she continues. Several municipalities with a large number of immigrants have been criticising the right of free settlement. The municipal commissioner of Botkyrka, Anders Arnesson, welcomes the initiative and says that it is important that the state accepts responsibility for the refugee reception. (Dagens Nyheter, 27 March 2004, p. 9, and Svenska Dagbladet, p. 13.)

Leaflets outside mosque agitated against Jews

During the Friday prayer in the Great Mosque in Stockholm, the sheik Hassaan Musa condemned Israel's assassination of the Hamas leader Yassin, but he also encouraged Muslims not to direct hatred against Jews - Muslims and Jews need to live side by side, he maintained. Outside the mosque, however, two young men from an extremist Islamic party spread leaflets with the message that "it is time for Muslim armies to exterminate the Zionist state" and that Muslims "should in the name of God kill the Jews in Palestine". The leaflets will be reported to the police since they might be a case of incitement to racial hatred. (Svenska Dagbladet, 27 March 2004, p. 6.)

The Swedish Board of Migration handles complicated visa cases

Last year, 150 000 foreigners applied for a Swedish visa, and most of them were approved, although 15 percent were rejected. Most visa applications are handled by the embassies in the respective countries, but the complicated cases, around four percent, are sent to the Swedish Board of Migration for appraisal. The Board rejects 56 percent of these cases. (Svenska Dagbladet, 29 March 2004, p. 7.)

Malmö takes position on banning immigrants

The Municipal Commissioner of Malmö, Ilmar Reepalu, created debate recently when he proposed a five-year stop for unemployed immigrants to come to Malmö, the third largest town of Sweden. The proposal later mitigated to include only asylum seekers, not immigrants with residence permit. Today, the municipal council will take a position on the issue.

(Dagens Nyheter, 25 March 2004, p. 6)

Disagreement on how to organise immigrant introduction programme

The governing majority coalition in Stockholm agrees on the fact that the immigration reception is not working well in the capital, but they disagree on how to organise the Swedish for immigrants (SFI) education. A new evaluation report shows that 90 per cent of all immigrants depend on social security benefits after having finished the 18 months

long introduction program. Since the town districts finance the social security benefits, they should take over the responsibility for SFI from the state, the author of the report, Bitte Davidsson, argues. The governing coalition cannot agree on whether to follow the recommendations of the evaluation.

(Dagens Nyheter, 25 March 2004, p. 10)

Nordic Headlines 30 March 2004

Danish Press

DF: Undesirables should be thrown out of the country

Both Danes and foreigners who are suspected of carrying out 'unwanted activities' should be ordered out of the country immediately without due process of law or administrative procedure. That is the latest proposal from the Danish People's Party (DF), which is challenging the government to copy legislation that the German Social Democratic government coalition party, SPD, is pushing for in Germany. Although Danes are mentioned in the proposal, the party's foreign affairs spokesman and deputy leader, Peter Skaarup, stressed that it is primarily foreigners that will be targeted, and especially those suspected of having links to terrorism. "There are indications that certain individuals in this country may have had close contact to terrorists, but the police are unable to do anything about it until they actually break the law. When terrorism comes to Denmark we will be pulling our hair out and asking ourselves why we didn't do more to stop it," said Skaarup. Although DF, backed by the Conservatives, will now make a formal request to Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder to examine whether the German legislation can be used here, both the ruling Liberal Party and the Social Democrats have already rejected the proposal. "It stinks of discrimination," says the Social Democrats' foreign affairs spokesman. "We'd be heading towards a society where we can simply say to people that we don't like you, so we're throwing you out." The Liberal Party's integration spokesperson, Birthe Rønn Hornbæk, said that countries should be built on law and order, and not the feelings of the Danish People's Party.

(Information, 27 March, fp & Berlingske, 28 March, p. 3, NE 29 March 2004)

Lykketoft's new image

New image, new younger girlfriend, and continuing success in the opinion polls – Social Democrat leader Mogens Lykketoft has shed his image as the stern, grey man of Danish politics and now appears a viable, and realistic, alternative to Anders Fogh Rasmussen as the country's next Prime Minister. In an in-depth interview in Jyllands-Posten, Sunday, Lykketoft lays out the changes in Social Democrat policies, and reveals his thoughts about welfare, terrorism, responsibility, his public image – and being in love. He also admits that the party's immigration policies caused its defeat at the last election. "We Social Democrats were too slow in understanding the strong feelings that many Danes have towards immigrants. For the majority it's nothing to do with racism and antipathy towards people who look different, dress and eat in a strange manner, or believe in another God – it's concern for the social division that's manifesting itself because of ghettos, unemployment, lack of integration and criminality," he claims. (JyllandsPosten 28 March, fp, NE 29 March 2004)

You must learn Danish at three

The government has majority support in favour of a proposal for forced language stimulation for immigrant children. The objective is to ensure that immigrant children do

not fall behind. Experts, however, are sceptical. The law proposal is expected to come into force 1 August.

(Politiken, 24 March 2004, p. 4)

Norwegian Press

Lower immigration surplus from abroad

Norway had a net immigration from abroad with 11,285 in 2003 – almost 6,000 less than last year. Even if the net immigration was much lower than in 2002, it was above the average for the past ten years. In 2003 there were 35,955 immigrations and 24,670 emigrations. Since 1958 the number of emigrations has only been higher in 1989, 2000 and 2001, and only in 1998-2000 and 2002 have there been higher immigration. After 1971 Norway has had an immigration surplus every year except from 1989. The number of immigrations varies slightly from one year to another due to variations in immigration policies, as well as changing needs for immigration and protection in Norway. Among foreign citizens the highest net immigration was for Russians with 1,580, an increase of almost 300 from 2002. The last years there have been an increase of Russian women who have received a resident permit to get married. There was also a large net immigration by Somalis with 1,450, Afghanis with 1,335 and Thais with 770. Iraqis, who had the largest net immigration in 2002, only had a net immigration of 255. The decrease in the number of Iraqis is due to both increased emigration and decreased immigration. Citizens from Liberia had for the first time a larger net immigration to Norway with 240. The immigrants from Liberia are refugees from the war actions there. It is important to note that figures for immigration are referring to the year a resident was granted a permit, and not necessarily the year of arrival.

(Statistics Norway, 30 March 2004)

Less asylum seekers to Norway

The number of manifestly unfounded asylum seekers has decreased from 254 persons in the three first months of last year to 80 persons as of 25 March 2004. When it comes to unaccompanied minor asylum seekers, the trend is even more clear: in 2003 a total number of 916 minors came to Norway whilst during the first ten weeks of this year only 42 minors applied for asylum. Age testing by using x-ray is considered to have had great effect – four out of five being caught lying about their age. The Directorate of Immigration (UDI) considers it good news that only 1,944 persons had sought asylum so far this year compared to 3,632 persons the three first months of 2003. The prognoses for 2004 is that 10,000 persons will apply for asylum – in 2003 a total number of 16,200 applications were lodged. UDI considers the new 48 hours procedure to be a success. So far 80 claims have been assessed within 48 hours whilst one applicant has been ‘moved over’ to the ‘regular’ proceedings. The biggest groups among those who get their asylum claims processed within 48 hours are people from the Czech Republic, Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine.

(Aftenposten, 27 March 2004, p. 2)

New crackdown on forced marriages and female circumcision

All would-be immigrants seeking residence in Norway will soon have to sign a declaration confirming that they understand that forced marriages and female circumcision are forbidden under Norwegian law. Officials hope the move will enhance human rights, especially for women. Minister for Local Government and Regional Development, Erna Solberg said the new written declarations will be demanded of all men and women seeking residence permission or asylum in Norway, beginning this autumn. Genital mutilation and forced marriages are illegal in Norway, yet they continue to occur within immigrant communities. Solberg told that Norwegian authorities must make a new effort to make all immigrants aware that it is illegal to force women into arranged marriages or subject them to female circumcision. She said information on the subjects and acknowledgement declaration forms are being translated into a variety of foreign languages, so that no prospective immigrants can later plead ignorance. Norwegian immigration officials will also be given the authority to question would-be immigrant families whether any underage females already have been subjected to circumcision. A database will also be set up in order to register everyone who has received such information and signed declarations confirming that they understand it. "This will primarily be directed at ethnic groups that have a tradition of this," Solberg said. Norwegian embassies in countries where forced marriages and female circumcision occur will also be required to distribute information about Norwegian laws against the practice, when local citizens apply for visas to Norway.

(Aftenposten, 30 March 2004)

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(NRK/NTB, 23 March 2004)

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Harsh criticism over EU asylum proposal

UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Ruud Lubbers, together with nine large international refugee and human rights organisations are harshly criticising the draft directives aimed at harmonising the EU asylum policy, which are to be discussed by justice and interior ministers from the EU member states today. The proposals could be an effective denial of the right to seek asylum under international law, UNHCR warns. The criticism also points at the proposal to deport refugees before they have had a chance to appeal negative decisions, despite the fact that 30 to 60 per cent of all initial negative decisions are subsequently overturned when appealed. The Swedish Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy, Barbro Holmberg does not think that the criticism is well founded. "We have the possibility in Sweden of sending home manifestly unfounded asylum seekers and let them appeal from their home country – an arrangement which has strict safety procedures", she says. In the discussion concerning 'safe third countries', Sweden wishes to try every 'safe' country separately, instead of having a fixed list of countries.

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Swedish for immigrants (SFI) education. A new evaluation report shows that 90 per cent of all immigrants depend on social security benefits after having finished the 18 months long introduction program. Since the town districts finance the social security benefits, they should take over the responsibility for SFI from the state, the author of the report, Bitte Davidsson, argues. The governing coalition cannot agree on whether to follow the recommendations of the evaluation.

(Dagens Nyheter, 25 March 2004, p. 10)