

.Nordic Headlines 3 March 2005

Danish press

Many farm workers are illegal immigrants

Up to one in four of all young immigrant farm workers working in Denmark are staying illegally. According to agricultural organisations it takes so long for the Immigration Agency to process applications from immigrant workers that farm owners, who need manpower here and now, are often willing to take a chance and employ them anyway until permission is received, which can take up to nine months.

(Jyllandsposten, 3 March 2005, front page & DR news, NE translation)

Denmark tops the list in reducing refugee influx

New UNHCR figures reveal that fewer refugees are heading for Europe than at any time during the past sixteen years – and Denmark, where the influx has been reduced by 74 per cent since 2001, tops the list. In response to the new figures the UN has now challenged Denmark, alongside other European nations, to ease asylum restrictions and allow more refugees in. However, Denmark's new Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Immigration, Rikke Hvilshøj says she has no intention of responding to the UN's request. "We will continue with our policy of providing help to refugees in the vicinity of where they come from and where it is easier for them to return to their native countries. In this way we can help many more," she says.

(Politiken, 2 March 2005, p. 7, NE translation)

Iraqi repatriation halted

Only 17 Iraqi asylum-seekers have accepted the government's offer of DKK 17,000 to voluntarily return to Iraq during the so-called second period of repatriation, compared to the 332 who returned home after accepting DKK 18,000 during the first period which ended last November. The amount on offer is gradually being reduced over a period of time, but there are now fears that the stream of Iraqis heading home will dry up as the money gets less and less.

(Politiken, 1 March 2005, p. 3, NE translation)

Norwegian press

Asylum seekers face new hurdle

Norway requires visas from a wide range of countries, and tourists hailing from them soon may need to put up a bank guarantee as well. The goal is to discourage them from seeking asylum once they have arrived in Norway. Norwegian politicians are considering requiring a deposit of NOK 50,000 (about USD 8,500) from would-be tourists who come from countries where visa are still required. That includes Russia, India, China and African nations, among many

others. The proposal calls for companies or persons who invite visitors from non-visa-exempt countries to Norway to put up a financial guarantee, basically that they will go home again. If the visitor seeks asylum, the deposit would go straight into the state treasury. The idea stems from Denmark, which has instituted several measures in recent years to crack down on immigration. The Norwegian proposal is being fronted by politician Jan Simonsen from the tiny Democrats party and the Government will now review the proposal. Figures show that an annual 100-200 persons will apply for asylum whilst staying in the country on a visa issued by the Directorate of Immigration (UDI).
(Aftenposten, 28 February & 1 March 2005, p. 8)

Swedish press

A fast asylum system might lead to incorrect decisions

The Swedish Migration Board processed more asylum cases last year than any of the previous ten years. According to critics, however, the inquiries are insufficient as a result of the faster processing. Newspaper Dagen writes that staff at the Board is keeping track of number of completed inquiries by the senior management, which might encourage them to work faster. Lars-Gunnar Lundh, Deputy Director-General of the Board, is aware of the arrangement but believe it does not affect the quality of the work.
(Dagen, 2 March 2005, p. 2)

Extradited after four years

A retired couple has been extradited to Egypt after four years of waiting in Sweden. The husband is a stateless Palestinian and they have not lived in Egypt for 30 years. Their children with families are living in Sweden. The wife is an Egypt citizen but her husband can not be assured that he will be granted a stay permit in Egypt. Neither does the couple have friends or family who can support them when they get there.
(Dagen, 2 March, p. 2)

Liberals want foreign criminals out

The Liberal Party's integration group is proposing tougher measures against foreign criminals who carry out crimes in Sweden. One of the suggestions is that people who have been sentenced to prison three times be ordered to leave the country. However, the party's legal policy spokesman Johan Pehrson is more in favour of looking at each case individually. Chairman of the integration group Mauricio Rojas presented the group's report yesterday, which includes 25 points for a new integration policy from new anti-discrimination laws to making services more accessible. But it was the tough proposal on foreign criminals that got the most notice. "Those who come to Sweden should not be allowed to abuse hospitality," says Mauricio Rojas. He does add, however, that in some cases there may be humanitarian reasons not to send someone out of the country. "But

in that case they must be very strong (reasons),” he says. Pehrson comments, “I always think that one should act on a case-by-case basis. But we’ll have a proper discussion about this and I am in favour of the general intention that more people who have carried out serious crimes should be ordered to leave.”

(Dagens Nyheter, 3 March 2005, p. 12 & Svenska Dagbladet, p. 13, SPR translation)

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Danish press

Imam reported to police

A group of around forty immigrant women have reported leading imam Raed Hleihel to the police for making derogatory and discriminatory remarks about women during a Friday prayer. The Islamic Faith Society has also been reported for failing to distance itself from the controversial imam's comments and for taping his speech with the intention of distributing it to Muslim schools. Hleheil claimed in his speech that women are Satan's weapon against men and that women who go to the hairdressers and use make up and perfume will never be allowed into heaven. A spokeswoman for the women's group, Nahid Riazi, said yesterday: "Encouraging men to look down at women, considering them to be personal property and controlling them and treating them like slaves shouldn't be allowed." Imam Raed Hleihel has refused to comment on the matter but has let it be known through the Islamic Faith Society that he stands by what he said.

(Jyllandsposten, 9 March 2005, p. 2, NE translation)

Social Democrats candidates divided on immigration

There is deep division between the two leading candidates battling for leadership of the Social Democrats as to the party's official policy on immigration and integration. Frank Jensen said yesterday that Danish legislation has to be brought in line with European human rights conventions and that the minister of integration has a 'major responsibility' to change the current laws. His opponent, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, immediately dismissed his claim as a change in party policy that will create uncertainty amongst the electorate as to whether the Social Democrats would maintain the current stringent legislation if they regained power. Minister of Integration Rikke Hvilshøj categorically denies that Danish legislation is in breach of any human rights conventions.

(Jyllandsposten, 8 March 2005, front page, NE translation)

Norwegian press

Krekar faces deportation

The Directorate of Immigration (UDI) says it will recommend that government officials deport the Norway's most controversial refugee, Mullah Krekar. The man suspected of links to terrorist groups vows to fight a deportation order in court. Krekar first came to Norway from northern Iraq in the early 1990s, and won asylum. He later was found, however, to have travelled back and forth to northern Iraq and also to have led guerrilla group Ansar al-Islam, which has been linked to terrorist group al-Qaida. Immigration officials at UDI decided as early as 2003 that Krekar should be stripped of his refugee status, his travel documents and both his working and residence permission in Norway. UDI determined at the

time that Krekar was a threat to the nation's security and had repeatedly given incorrect information to immigration officials. Krekar appealed the UDI decision and was allowed to stay in Norway while his case was reconsidered. He later was jailed twice, charged with terrorist activities, but was released for lack of evidence. Now UDI has come to the same conclusion that it did two years ago, largely citing the incorrect information Krekar has given immigration officials and the security of the nation against alleged terror suspects. Krekar's long time defence attorney, Brynjar Meling, blasted the conclusion and vowed to challenge it in court. He claimed it is not possible "to send people back to Iraq now," calling the looming deportation 'wishful thinking' on the part of government officials. (Aftenposten, 8 March 2005, p. 11)

NCA: Stop Trafficking

On the International Women's Day, the Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) launched an appeal, directed at Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, Erna Solberg, calling for increased protection for women victims of trafficking. NCA believes the needs and rights of victims of human trafficking are not given high enough priority in Norway. Norway is obliged by international law to offer protection for victims of human trafficking. In its appeal the NCA demands that Norway's obligations towards victims of human trafficking are fulfilled. Moreover, that Norwegian Immigration Law makes better provision for victims and that victims of human trafficking are granted residence in Norway by the authorities. (Norway Post/NCA press release, 8 March 2005)

Swedish press

Rape victims often immigrants

A disproportionate number of immigrant women are victims of rape, according to newspaper DN, which has taken a look at 103 sex crimes that went to trial in 2003. The newspaper notes that immigrants are over-represented both as perpetrators and victims in these cases. In 2003, immigrants made up 5.3 per cent of the population. However, in 36 of the cases – almost 35 per cent – the accused was either a foreign citizen or had recently arrived in Sweden. In 13 of the cases, the immigrant women had been abused by someone in their near vicinity – often a husband or partner. Jerzy Sarnecki, professor of criminology, warns against drawing far-reaching conclusions from this data however. Rapes within socially well-adjusted families are not reported as often, he believes. Immigrants in Sweden often live in environments that are more socially excluded, which means that they are often over-represented in the statistics. (Dagens Nyheter, 8 March 2005, p. 8, SPR translation)

Pekgul accuses colleagues of racism

Nalin Pekgul, chair of the Social Democratic Women in Sweden, accuses her colleagues of racism. She considers that she has been subjected to discrimination on a number of occasions since she took over as chair in 2003

because of her immigrant background. In a radio interview of Sunday, Nalin Pekgul described how one official at the association's offices, accused her of ringing relatives in Turkey at the party's expense when in fact she was calling the Swedish embassy in Turkey. Groundless rumours have also been spread that she had recruited three of her cousins to the association's offices. Pekgul has considered resigning from her post but Marita Ulvskog, party secretary of the Social Democrats, says that she hopes that she will not do so. "She is an excellent chair. In addition, I believe it is the case that the problems Nalin Pekgul describes must be fought by ensuring that there are many members with immigrant backgrounds who can speak from their own experience," says Ulvskog.

(Dagens Nyheter, 7 March 2005, p. 8 & Svenska Dagbladet, p. 10)

Chinese children disappear without trace

Swedish police are currently investigating some 60 cases of suspected human trafficking. Since last autumn many young Chinese have sought asylum in Sweden and then disappeared without trace just a few days later. Since November 60 young people, aged between 13 and 18, have sought asylum but then just days later disappeared from the Migration Board's reception centres. Police have discovered a similar pattern in that none of the youngsters appear to stay in Sweden but it is almost impossible to trace their onward movements. The most likely explanation is that the Chinese minors who fly with Aeroflot or Air China and land in Sweden are in transit to Britain or North America. Representatives of the National Criminal Investigation Department ('Rikskriminalen') are to raise the issue at an Interpol meeting in Brussels in a bid to coordinate the search for the young people.

(Dagens Nyheter, 6-7 March 2005, pp. 8,7 & Svenska Dagbladet, 7 March, p. 6, SPR translation)

Christian Democrats defend refugee children

The Christian Democrats want to make it easier for refugee children to get residence permits on humanitarian grounds. The party feels that the government's refugee policies have become increasingly inhumane and refugee children are suffering the most. In a report the party notes that Sweden is not living up to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. "Many are extremely upset about the way we treat children. We are not living up to the noble documents we have signed," said Christian Democrat leader Göran Högglund at a press conference yesterday.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 4 March 2005, p. 2, SPR translation)

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Danish press

Danish citizenship – no thanks

One third of all second generation immigrants are still citizens of another country even though they were born in Denmark and have lived here all their life. According to Sükru Ertosun, head of the Council for Ethnic Minorities, the figures reveal a combination of bureaucratic obstructions and a general feeling of alienation from Danish society. "It's become far more difficult to achieve Danish citizenship but at the same time many immigrants don't feel welcome here so they have no wish to become citizens," says Ertosun. He is backed by Leif Randeris, head of department at the Immigrant Advisory Service, who says many immigrants just don't have the will or energy to go through the whole citizenship application procedure.

(Berlingske Tidene, 17 March 2005, p. 8, NE translation)

Somalis desert Denmark

Around 1,000 well-educated Somalis have left the Århus region and headed for England over the past four years. And according to a spokesman for the Somali community the same mass migration is being reported throughout the country because of poor integration, unemployment and the ever-present heated debate about refugees and asylum seekers. 'It's a sad development,' says Abdirashid Sheikh Mohamud. "Families will always head for there where the grass is greener and right now that's England." Mayor of Århus Louise Gade said that it is 'annoying' that the local council uses a great deal of resources and money educating people just so other countries to reap the benefit.

(Jyllandsposten, 17 March 2005, p. 3, NE translation)

Deportation OK for serious crimes

According to a new report from the European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia the Danish population is more opposed to the deportation of immigrants than any other country in Europe – however, it depends upon how the figures are interpreted. The Danish National Institute of Social Research, which supplied the statistics for the new European report, now reveals that when asked if immigrants who commit serious crimes should be deported, 78 per cent gave a resounding yes.

(Berlingske Tidene, 17 March 2005, p. 8, NE translation)

Danes against deportation

A majority of the electorate is against the policy of deporting immigrants who have committed serious crimes. A new European survey, released yesterday just as two young Turkish nationals had their deportation orders confirmed by the Supreme Court, shows that just 43 per cent of people in Denmark agree with the policy, the lowest in the EU.

(Berlingske Tidene, 16 March 2005, front page, NE translation)

Supreme Court confirms deportation for murderers

The Danish Supreme Court has shown no mercy to the two young immigrant cousins convicted of the brutal murder of an Italian tourist two years ago. The court yesterday overruled their appeal and after serving their sentences of eight and ten years respectively they will be placed on a plane and deported to Turkey, even though they have families and have grown up in this country. Lawyers for the two described the verdict as 'shocking' and 'sinister'.

(Jyllandsposten, 16 March 2005, Cop. front page, NE translation)

Danish candidate for UNHCR post

The Danish Foreign Ministry has put forward Søren Jessen-Petersen as official candidate for the key post of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The post is vacant following the recent premature resignation of Dutchman Ruud Lubbers over a sex harassment scandal. Jessen-Petersen, who has extensive experience working for the world body, is currently the United Nations' special envoy to the troubled Serbian province of Kosovo. Lubbers's successor will be appointed directly by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Denmark has held the important UNHCR post previously – former Liberal Prime Minister Poul Hartling was UN refugee commissioner from 1978-1985.

(Jyllandsposten, 11 March 2005, p. 2, NE translation)

Norwegian press

Expelled after 16 years in Norway

The Supreme Court of Norway has decided to maintain the expulsion order for 28-year-old Phi Hung Tran. The order was put into effect last year and Tran has since then been living in his native country Vietnam. Tran came to Norway as a boat refugee in 1986 but did not obtain a Norwegian citizenship like the rest of his family. He was in 1997 convicted for gang-related violence after having participated in a fight causing the death of one man. Lawyer Sol Gunnes will now try to appeal Tran's case to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. "I spoke to Tran this weekend and he does not feel well. I don't know how he'll survive this, Gunnes says.

(Aftenposten, 15 March 2005, p. 7)

Iraq clears way for Krekar expulsion

The deportation of controversial mullah Krekar could be a step nearer if Iraq has given guarantees that he does not risk the death penalty on his return to the country. Iraq's Minister of Justice Malik Dohan Al-Hasan told 'TV 2 Nettavisen' that Krekar will not face the death penalty, but he could not guarantee Krekar's safety from possible enemies in the country. Minister of Local Government and Regional Development Erna Solberg said that she could not treat statements to the media as official but stated that if the minister guaranteed that Krekar did not face legal prosecution in Iraq, then the case for Krekar's deportation was strengthened. The Directorate of Immigration (UDI) has previously recommended

that Krekar be expelled from Norway. UDI believes Krekar has links to both al-Qaida and those charged with the terrorist train bombing in Madrid last year. (Aftenposten, 10 March 2005)

Swedish press

More and more protests

There is an immense response on "The Easter appeal" launched on Sunday by the Swedish Christian Council. The Swedish Muslim Council has already affiliated to the appeal, which demands an 'amnesty' for all refugees presently in Sweden. New partners – social groups, religious associations and even political parties – are joining every day. In the Parliament, the Left Party and the Green Party have signed up and there are negotiations with the Christian Democrats as well as the Parliament's cross-political group to affiliate. The topic regarding the situation for refugees is pressing at the moment also in the press. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) yesterday issued new figures revealing how refugees who are hiding are treated. "The Swedish legislation regarding hiding refugees is one of the most restrictive in Western Europe", says Mattias Ohlson at MFS. "One of the biggest problems is that these hiding people feel such great fear for being reported to the Migration Board or the police if they visit the medical services", Ohlson continues. Yesterday, 17,000 signatures originating in a Christmas speak by the archbishop demanding amnesty for asylum seekers were handed over to Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy, Barbro Holmberg. (Dagen, 16 March 2005, p. 2)

Faster asylum system

According to Migration Minister Barbro Holmberg, Sweden will have a faster asylum system and more asylum seekers will be allowed to stay as a result of the government's proposal for a new Aliens' Act. When the Swedish Aliens' Appeals Board closes down at the end of this year, changes will be made to the existing aliens' act. The concept of residency permits being granted for "humanitarian reasons" will no longer exist - instead residency permits may be granted for "protection reasons," according to a resolution the government will decide upon tomorrow. The minister says that it will be easier to assess the need for protection. "Many people who today receive residency permits on humanitarian grounds, but who perhaps are persecuted, will in future receive a permit sooner and for reasons of protection. I believe it will have an impact on integration, since the process will be shorter," she says. Last year, the number of asylum seekers fell by 26 per cent in relation to 2003. According to Statistics Sweden, 23,161 individuals were granted asylum. Some 2,600 were granted residency permits on humanitarian grounds and 2,600 on protection grounds. (Svenska Dagbladet, 16 March 2005, p. 9, SPR translation)

“Asylum seekers will plead their cases”

Newspaper Dagens Nyheter today publishes an article by Ulla Hoffman and Kalle Larsson, Left Party MPs, and Mona Jönsson and Gustav Fridolin, Green Party MPs. The four point out that the Aliens' Appeals Board will close on 1 January 2006 and asylum seekers' appeals will instead be heard in the county courts. This will allow asylum seekers to plea their own cases and at the same time more consideration will be given to children's own asylum grounds. This is the content of tomorrow's government resolution and while this is a huge step forward for the legal rights of the individual, more needs to be done. One of the great problems is the insufficient use of the 1951 Refugee Convention, they conclude.

(Dagens Nyheter, 16 March 2005, p. 6, SPR translation)

Swedes tolerant of minorities

A report on attitudes towards migrants and minorities by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia has revealed that Swedes are among the most open people towards ethnic minorities. The study has revealed that social status impacts on the level of openness towards minorities. High levels of unemployment and poverty lead to greater intolerance.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 16 March 2005, p. 14, SPR translation)

Immigrants get tougher punishment

Newspaper Svenska Dagbladet reports that immigrants are treated worse than Swedes by the legal system in Sweden. A research report reveals that suspects with an immigrant background are reported more, investigated more thoroughly, have their cases taken to court more often and if a sentence is given, it is tougher. “There can be no doubt that it's a disadvantage to be an immigrant when one is a suspect or victim,” says Christian Diesen, Professor of Procedural Law at the University of Stockholm. Discrimination Ombudsman Katri Linna is not surprised and says that the problem of structural discrimination within the judicial system is particularly serious. “The judicial system should be based on equal treatment for everyone and should also correct the distortions that occur. It's extremely serious and it's also about having confidence in the courts, prosecutors and police,” says Linna.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 14 March, p. 6, SPR translation)

Manifestation demanded amnesty for all refugees in the country

The Swedish Christian Council started a campaign called “Easter appeal for a more humane refugee policy” with a manifestation in Stockholm on Sunday. The ‘Easter appeal’, which has also been joined by the Swedish Muslim Council, wants all refugees without permits of stay in Sweden to be granted amnesty and thus given stay permits. The amnesty should be issued from January 2006, when asylum appeal cases are to be handed over from the Aliens Appeals Board to the county courts. “There is a need to set the system to zero when the new rules based on the rule of law are introduced”, says Sven-Bernard Fast, Secretary-General of the Swedish Christian Council. “We must confess that we have an

inhumane refugee policy where many refugees are forced through long processing”, Fast continues.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 14 March 2005, p. 10)

”War criminals should not be able to get asylum”

“The right to asylum should be for people running from injustice, not from justice”, says Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy, Barbro Holmberg, “Therefore, it is tremendously important that people who have committed war crimes shall be excluded from the right to asylum and sent back to the country where they can be trialed”, Holmberg continues. Head of the war crimes commission at the National Criminal Investigation Department, Hans Ölvebro, estimates that there are at least 1,500 war criminals in Sweden. Not a single one of the cases handled by Ölvebro has lead to a charge. The policy of the Swedish Migration Board is that probable war criminals should be reported to the police. However, out of 42 cases where the Migration Board had classified a person as a war criminal, only one case led to a report to the police. Secretary General of Amnesty International, Sweden, Carl Söderbergh says Swedish authorities do too little in bringing to justice war criminals that have been accepted as refugees. “I have now been in contact with the management of the Migration Board and assured that this is something that is being prioritized, and that there is training in detecting war criminals”, Minister Holmberg says.

(Dagens Nyheter, 12 March 2005, p. 8 & Svenska Dagbladet, p. 11)

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Danish press

Denmark hits rock-bottom in integration

Denmark now officially holds the record of being the country in the OECD that has integrated the fewest number of immigrants into the labour market. A new OECD report, 'Trends in International Migration,' reveals that just 52 per cent of all immigrants in Denmark have a job or are prepared to take one, compared to 80 per cent in Switzerland and Portugal which top the table. David Rae, head of the Danish wing of the OECD's economic department, says there are a number of factors contributing to Denmark's position at the bottom, including a high minimum wage, generous social benefits and the lack of unskilled jobs in the service sector. However, he also claims that Denmark isn't as bad at integration as the figures seem to show. 'Denmark suffers because the country receives many immigrants and refugees from extremely poor countries who are virtually uneducated, which makes it difficult to integrate them.' However, Richard B.Larsen, deputy chief executive of the Confederation of Danish Industries (DI) says that Denmark's poor position is entirely due to the fact that people will be looked after even though they aren't part of the labour market. 'In Switzerland they wouldn't dream of supporting people who haven't made any effort to join the labour market,' he says.

(Berlingske Tidene, 23 March 2005, p. 3, NE translation)

Passport official charged with racism

A passport official at Copenhagen Airport has been reported to the police for racism and discrimination against a Somali national who arrived seeking asylum. A group calling themselves the Support Group for Refugees in Danger claims that the Somali man was constantly referred to by the passport official as 'that black man' and even though he speaks poor English was forced to sit on a stool for three hours until, according to the police report, he could 'clearly state why he was seeking asylum.'

(Jyllandsposten 22 March 2005, cop fr translation. NE translation)

Deportation for 70-year old

A 70-year-old Iraqi woman, diagnosed by doctors as 'fragile, suicidal and depressive' has been ordered leave the country and her 35 year old Danish citizen son, and return home to Iraq. According to the immigration authorities the woman doesn't fulfil the conditions required for asylum here be-cause Saddam Hussein is no longer in power and therefore she has no reason to fear persecution on her return. The woman has no family in Iraq and her lawyer called the deportation order 'inhuman'. Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Immigration Rikke Hvilshøj has promised to look into the matter.

(Berlingske Tidene, 22 March 2005, p. 3, + dr online. NE translation)

Finnish press

Rajamäki admits human trafficking via Finland.

Minister for interior Kari Rajamäki says Finland may be the annual transit country and in some cases even the final destination for hundreds of victims of human trafficking. Among these are also minors, and the victims end up at the market for illegal labor or prostitution, said Rajamäki yesterday in the town of Rovaniemi. The European police authority Europol estimates that half of the 500,000 illegal immigrants in the EU are smuggled in by organized crime syndicates. Minister for interior is now starting an investigation of in what ways the Aliens Act should be emended when it comes to the situation for victims of trafficking. Especially the conditions regarding the victims that are willing to cooperate with the authorities will be in focus.

(Huvudstadsbladet, 21 March 2005, p. 7)

Swedish press

More support to asylum seeking children

In a government bill that will enter into force in July the government proposes that the legal guardians appointed to lonely asylum seeking children will be given greater authorities. The legal guardian shall decide about housing and education. If the child is given permit of stay the legal guardian should be replaced by a specially appointed custodian. Last year 388 children arrived alone to Sweden, the year before the figure was 561.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 24 March 2005, p. 6)

Greens and Left demand amnesty

The Green and Left parties are demanding an amnesty for asylum seekers who have been waiting a long time and refugees in hiding. Apathetic refugee children should also be granted leave to stay, and all this before the Aliens Appeal Board is shut down at the end of the year. After the board is shut down appeal cases will be decided instead by county administrative courts and administrative courts of appeal. However, it has already become clear that the courts are at risk of inheriting a huge backlog of thousands of unresolved cases. Prime Minister Göran Persson has made it clear that he is against such an amnesty. However, he is coming under increasing pressure to act on the issue in the run up to the budget negotiations next week.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 24 March 2005, p. 6, SPR translation)

Integration policy under fire

In a newly published report the State Audit Institution criticizes the government's integration policy, suggesting that the government still focuses on immigrants as a group and does not look at the individual needs of people. Minister of Integration Jens Orback says that the government has come to similar conclusions and is now making improvements. He does however criticize the authors of the report for not considering the efforts that have been made which

have benefited people of a foreign background. He also states that it is a general problem that there is a “us and them” mentality in society and that this form of discrimination must be countered.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 23 March 2005, p. 8 (SPR translation) & Dagen, p. 2)

Discord over amnesty

Estimates suggest that some 7,000 asylum cases will be pending when the Swedish Aliens' Appeals Board closes at the end of this year and calls are being heard among the Left and Green parties for some kind of amnesty; this so that the courts are not overburdened with work when they take over the hearing of cases. Left MP Ulla Hoffmann says that talks are being held with the government on how to resolve the problem of the outstanding cases and that the party is pursuing the line that those who have been waiting for a ruling more than 18 months should be granted residency. Prime Minister Göran Persson is opposed to such an idea however and says that he finds it hard to see how an amnesty for those who are in Sweden would create a proper legal situation. The PM warns that the risk of amnesty is that it sets a precedent for a new amnesty.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 21 March 2005, p. 10, SPR translation)

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Danish press

Afghan refugees to stay

Danish Refugee Council (DRC) has ruled that 3,100 Afghan refugees with residence permits cannot be repatriated at the present time due to the fragile security situation in Afghanistan. The Danish Immigration Service has this year sent eight test cases to DRC for a ruling, the conclusion being that conditions in Afghanistan remain too unsafe to allow the return of the refugees. Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Immigration Rikke Hvilshøj has no powers to overrule DRC's decision.

(Politiken, 30 March 2005, p. 4, NE translation)

Finnish press

UN organ withdraws from Aceh

UNHCR is phasing out its emergency relief operations in Indonesia's Aceh province. The withdrawal is due to new restrictions made by the Indonesian government. UNHCR states that the organisation wish to finish the work included in an aid package, worth more than 40 billion euro, aimed to help more than half a million people victims of the tsunami catastrophe. The Indonesian government, however, has explained that there is no longer need for the aid.

(Hufvudstadsbladet, 25 March 2005, p. 15)

Norwegian press

War criminals go free in Norway

Around 40 self-declared war criminals who sought asylum in Norway remain at liberty. Local police have not even questioned many of them. The asylum seekers have themselves told immigration authorities that they are guilty of such war crimes as assassinations, torture and rape. "These are serious crimes," police inspector Terje Kristiansen says. He blames a lack of funding and staffing for the failure by local police to follow up on the would-be refugees' admissions. "When an alleged crime from 10 years ago is competing against a fresh murder in Oslo for attention, we have to set some priorities," Kristiansen said. Information gathered during interviews with asylum seekers arriving in Norway is automatically sent to the immigration authorities. Local police, however, must try to verify the information, including admissions of alleged war crimes. That can be a time-consuming and difficult process, Kristiansen said. He said there have been few if any formal probes launched during the past year. He said he thinks many would-be refugees admit to crimes from their war-torn homelands in the hope of being able to stay in Norway.

(Aftenposten, 29 March 2005)

Swedish press

Dahlgren one of eight fighting for UN top post

State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Hans Dahlgren is one of eight who will be interviewed for the job as head of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR. "Kofi Annan considers this to be a very strong list of candidates and is looking forward to appoint the right person for the post," says Fred Eckhard, spokesperson for the Secretary General. The job demands political skillfulness. A major task is to get the donor countries to grant money for humanitarian assistance to people forced to flee their homes – the budget of UNHCR is based on voluntary contributions. Hans Dahlgren is said to have been particularly interested in the job as head of UNHCR. When the post became available the Swedish government chose to nominate him, despite the fact that some sources claimed there was a chance Sweden could get the strategically more important post as head of the United Nations Development Program, UNDP. Among the merits of Dahlgren is his time as UN ambassador representing Sweden in the Security Council, and his post as EU representative in many West African countries with large refugee populations. The nomination has been criticized by the chairman of the Christian Democrats Göran Hägglund who labels the Social democrats' asylum policies "hard and inhumane". (Svenska Dagbladet, 26 March 2005, p. 12)