

Nordic Headlines 3 May

Debate: The Right to Asylum

In a debate article, Sanna Vestin criticizes the Nordic governments regarding their standpoint towards Serb and Roma asylum-seekers from Kosovo. The Nordic governments claim that granting asylum to them contributes to ethnic cleansing. In several letters to UNMIK and the UNHCR, the Nordic governments have expressed regret that the two agencies are making it difficult for them to carry out decisions to reject applicants. Particularly the guiding recommendations by the UNHCR are regarded as an obstacle. Sanna Vestin argues that the Nordic governments are undermining the right to asylum by defining away all grounds for asylum. Instead of trying to influence the UN experts to adopt their view, Vestin writes that the Nordic governments should target their complaints on those in Kosovo that are responsible for the ongoing persecution.

(Dagens Nyheter, 3 May 2005, p. 7)

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Danish press

Support for new integration bill

A proposal to tighten the rules for social benefits for married couples and at the same time reduce child support payments for deadbeat parents, integral elements of the government's new integration bill which was unveiled yesterday, has been met with enthusiasm by the Danish People's Party and scepticism by the opposition. However, despite expressing concern, the Social Democrats' integration spokesperson, Anne-Marie Meldgaard, says that her party's misgivings aren't a hindrance to further negotiations. Only the left wing Socialist People's Party and the Unity List have come out against the proposal. Danish People's Party leader Pia Kjærsgaard says that although she supports the government's latest integration efforts, "...immigrants and foreigners shouldn't be integrated in Denmark but sent back to there where they come from."

(Jyllandsposten, 12 May 2005, p. 4, NE translation)

Lower salaries for immigrants

Minister of Labour Claus Hjort Frederiksen is asking trade unions and employers to use their collective bargaining agreements so that immigrants and refugees can be employed on minimum wages. Starting hourly rates in the industrial sector are currently around DKK 142 per hour, far more than minimum wage, which, according to Frederiksen, often prevents employers from hiring immigrants. "We see that new workers are being hired at high union agreed hourly salaries, which unfortunately creates a barrier for the majority of immigrants and refugees," he said yesterday.

(Erhvervsbladet, 12 May 2005, front page, NE translation)

New integration focus

The government and the opposition are in agreement to shift integration focus away from newly arrived immigrants and towards those who have lived here for many years without ever becoming a part of society. "20,000 immigrants who arrived here years ago have never become an active part of the labour market and are still living on the fringe of society," says Morten Østergaard, the Social Liberals' spokesman on integration. "These people have never received the correct help or been given any demands." 55 per cent of all immigrants from non-Western countries are currently unemployed.

(Politiken, 10 May 2005, p. 6, NE translation)

Norwegian press

Fear refugee can kill

Police assess a man convicted of violence to be a potential assassin, and fear he can kill a top politician, including Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik. A security report has concluded that the man, who claims to be a former child soldier in Angola, poses a potential threat for Bondevik, Progress Party deputy leader Siv Jensen and Socialist Left Party leader Kristin Halvorsen. The man has twice been in physical contact with PM Bondevik and his wife, newspaper VG reports. Siv Jensen and Kristin Halvorsen have both been equipped with security alarms. The man has been convicted for several instances of serious violence and in December 2004 a deportation order was issued. This has not been carried out because the man lacks travel documents. The Norwegian Police Security Service (PST) assessment recommended that the man "should be seen and treated as a threat until we have established the opposite", according to VG. The PST report also said that they believe it is a question of time before the man commits a serious crime of violence that could end in a death.

(Aftenposten, 12 May 2005)

Asylum-seekers get speedier process

Refugees seeking asylum in Norway will now have their applications processed in a maximum of seven weeks, according to the Directorate of Immigration (UDI). UDI plans to have the new procedures in place within weeks, and applicants will be broken down into three basic categories and given swift treatment, Norwegian Broadcasting (NRK) reports. "Unfounded applications" will continue to be rejected within 48 hours, in accordance with regulations in effect from this year. A new limit of three weeks processing for applicants from countries with a good network of contacts with Norway has been created with a seven-week limit for the other, most difficult cases. Minister of Local Government and Regional Development Erna Solberg believes the new approach will lead to fewer groundless applications. The Norwegian Organisation for Asylum Seekers (NOAS) said that they would monitor how the UDI carried out the new procedures. NOAS Secretary General Morten Tjessem fears that caseworkers will drop necessary research due to the deadline pressure getting top priority.

(Aftenposten, 4 May 2005)

Swedish press

Aliens' Act rejected

The Council on Legislation (*Lagrådet*) has once again given the thumbs down to the proposal on a new Aliens' Act. But Minister for Migration Barbro Holmberg insists that the government still has plans to introduce the law by the end of the year. The proposal, which aims to shut down the Aliens Appeals Board, was sent to the Council for comment after being reworked as a result of previous criticism. However, the Council has said that the proposal is too similar to the original one

and that the government has not implemented the changes required. In particular the Council comments that the criteria that will lead to a person being granted permission to stay in Sweden are too vague and not comprehensive enough. Holmberg says that the government will now analyze the comments but is keen to keep to the government's timetable. "The Council on Legislation is an important authority that one should respect but I can't see any reason to delay bringing the proposal into force," she comments.

(Dagens Nyheter, 11 May 2005, p. 13, SPR translation)

Cuts hit asylum-seekers

The Swedish Migration Board proposes cuts in the reception capacity for the detention centers in the Swedish cities of Märsta and Malmö. The reason is that the number of asylum-seekers in Sweden has dropped from some 31,000 in 2003 to an estimated 19,000 this year. Employees at the detention center in Märsta claim that more asylum-seekers will end up in police custody if these cuts are implemented, which goes against the goal set up by the Swedish government. During the last couple of years, the number of asylum-seekers that are detained in police custody has increased sharply. The increase has caused Minister for Justice, Thomas Bodström, to initiate an inquiry regarding the matter. However, according to the Migration Board the proposed cuts will not lead to more people in police custody. "It is not an alternative that asylum-seekers are placed in police custody", says Anna Wessel, Head of Division at the Migration Board. Instead, she argues that resources will be used more efficiently in order to prevent detention centers from growing too big and to speed up the application process, making it more humane.

(Dagens Nyheter, 10 May 2005, p. 8)

Demonstration for refugee amnesty

Thousands of people demonstrated in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö on Saturday, calling for a general amnesty for asylum-seekers in Sweden and more humane refugee policies. Newspaper Dagens Nyheter reports that several of the speakers on 'Sergels Torg' in Stockholm directed severe criticism at Minister for Migration Barbro Holmberg and the Social Democrats' and Moderate's no to an amnesty for apathetic refugee children. Chairman of the Moderate Party Youth League (MUF), Johan Forsell, urged the Moderates to "break the axis with the Social Democrats", and refugee lawyer Anna Dahlbom spoke of how asylum-seekers are being ground down by the authorities in the struggle for permission to stay. "Even if a general amnesty is perhaps not the best solution I'd rather see ten without cause to stay in Sweden than send one back to torture in their home country," she said. Newspaper Svenska Dagbladet writes that the Church of Sweden has gathered 76,000 names in support of its campaign for an amnesty.

(Dagens Nyheter, 8 May 2005, p. 10, & Svenska Dagbladet p. 10, SPR translation)

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Danish press

Social Democrats will scrutinize immigration laws

If the Social Democratic Party wins the next election they will launch a thorough investigation into whether Danish immigration laws are in breach of human rights legislation. The party had, alongside the Socialist People's Party and the Red-Green Unity List, proposed that a committee of experts should review current immigration statutes, in the light of criticism from various human rights groups, but the party's spokesperson on immigration affairs, Anne-Marie Meldgaard now says she does not believe that this is the solution. "We can't put together a majority in parliament so we're going to have to wait until after the next election and review the situation ourselves," she said. The Social Democrats, in contrast to the Social People's Party, support current immigration legislation.

(Jyllands Posten, 17 May 2005, p. 3, NE translation)

Dane in running for top UN job

Søren Jessen-Petersen is through to the final round of interviews for the top job of UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) where he will be up against candidates from Australia, France, Tunisia and Portugal. Minister of Foreign Affairs Per Stig Møller said it is 'impressive' that a Dane is still in the race despite the fierce competition. "Denmark is one of major contributors to the UN so we would like to have the possibility of greater influence," he said. Jessen-Petersen is currently Kofi Annan's special emissary to Serbia's Kosovo province.

(Berlingske Tidende, 13 May 2005, p. 7, NE translation)

Government unwilling to cooperate on integration

The Danish government is so dependent upon the support of the Danish People's Party (DF) that its talk of cross-party cooperation on integration is nothing more than hot air. As well as protesting the government's unwillingness to negotiate local government reform, the Social Democrats and Social Liberals are also united in their criticism of the new integration proposals, "A new chance for all. This is a prime example of bloc politics," claims the Social Democrats' spokeswoman on integration Anne-Marie Meldgaard. "I believe that Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Immigration Rikke Hvilshøj would like to put together a broad political consensus on integration but unfortunately the coalition partners have painted themselves into a corner by their reliance on DF for a majority." She was backed by the Social Liberals' integration spokesman Morten Østergaard, who said: "It's clear that the government's relationship with DF prevents it from providing the necessary funds that will help integration efforts."

(Politiken, 13 May 2005, p. 8, NE translation)

Norwegian press

'Ticking bomb' arrested in Bergen

A man the authorities have labeled a potentially lethal threat to several prominent Norwegian politicians was taken into custody by police on Friday. The man, in his twenties, came to Norway from Angola in 2000 as a stowaway in a boat and afterwards sought asylum. He received a residency permit a year later. After a series of crimes the Directorate of Immigration (UDI) decided to expel him. A report carried out by the Police Security Service (PST) concluded that he was to be considered dangerous and prominent politicians, including PM Kjell Magne Bondevik, were considered to be at risk at his hands. UDI said Friday that the man had received a final expulsion order and now had a deadline in which to request a postponement.

(Aftenposten, 13 May 2005)

Mullah Krekar to be expelled

Controversial mullah Krekar, former leader of Ansar al-Islam, will be expelled from Norway, on the instructions of Minister of Local Government and Regional Development Erna Solberg. Solberg instructed the Immigration Appeals Board (UNE) to uphold the decision to expel Krekar on the grounds of national security. "This is something we have been waiting for some time. For my client and me it is neither new nor surprising that the UNE has received instructions from the ministry," said Krekar's legal counsel, Brynjar Meling. The ruling means that Krekar now loses his asylum status, travel documents, residency and employment permission. He can nonetheless not be sent back to Iraq at once due to the unstable conditions there. "An agreement with the Iraqi authorities to return Krekar can not be reckoned as in agreement with the European Human Rights Convention before the new constitution is in place there," Solberg told a press conference on Thursday afternoon. Iraq's new constitution is scheduled to be ratified in a referendum in October.

(Aftenposten, 12 May 2005)

Fight over sick boy

Last year, newspaper Aftenposten wrote several articles concerning a seriously ill 11 year old boy, whom the Immigration Appeals Board (UNE) has decided to send back to Turkey in order for him to reunite with his mother. The boy has mental injuries after being abused by his father and has been living in different child welfare institutions for a long time. Now the County Committee for Social Affairs in Oslo & Akershus has done a new evaluation of the boy's situation and decided to transfer him to a foster home. In practical terms this means that the Committee strongly disagree with UNE's decision to send him back to Turkey. The boy's legal counsel, Trine Beate Omland, has asked UNE to reconsider the case, arguing that Turkey will not be able to offer the boy adequate treatment in order to give him a fairly normal life as an adult. Uncertainty in connection with the whereabouts of the boy's mother and whether an expulsion order is against UN and Save the Children guidelines

are central parts of the case. Turkish authorities have now found the boy's mother but she is not willing to take the responsibility for the boy due to economic reasons.

(Aftenposten, 12 May 2005, p. 12)

Solberg in talks with Somalis

Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, Erna Solberg has invited the Somali community in Norway to a dialogue. The background being that this ethnic group is by far the biggest in the country when it comes to young members. At the same time a disproportionate high number of these youngsters have been involved in criminal activities. The purpose of the discussions was to find out how the Somali community and Norwegian authorities can find solutions together in order to improve integration and prevent more Somalis from becoming outcasts of the society.

(Aftenposten, 12 May 2005, p. 12)

Swedish press

Five parties call for amnesty

On Monday Swedish church leaders handed over a petition signed by more than 157,000 people to Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy Barbro Holmberg calling for a more humane refugee policy. The church leaders have received support for their call for an amnesty from five of the parties represented in the Parliament. In a joint motion the Centre Party, the Liberal Party, the Christian Democratic Party, the Green Party and the Left Party propose that refugees who applied for asylum before the end of 2004 should be granted permanent residence in Sweden. The five parties also propose that war criminals and refugees who have been sentenced to jail for serious crimes should not be included in the general amnesty. Refugees will also have to prove their identities and may not have left the country after applying for asylum. If the proposal is to pass through Parliament however, the parties will have to persuade either the Moderates or the Social Democrats to vote with them. "The biggest obstacle is their prestige, but I still believe we have a good chance," says Green MP Gustav Fridolin. In their motion, the parties also stress the necessity of ensuring that there is not a backlog of cases for the courts to hear when the Aliens Appeals Board closes at the end of the year. "The system must have a reasonable chance to work and not be blocked by old issues," says Christian Democrat MP Sven Brus. As of 1 March there were 12,735 asylum applications that had been submitted to the Migration Board over a year ago. In addition, there are 2,800 people who have had their applications for asylum rejected but who cannot be sent back to their countries of origin as well as a number of refugees who have gone into hiding in Sweden after having their applications turned down.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 18 May 2005, p. 16 & Dagens Nyheter, p. 12, SPR translation)

Petition for humane asylum policy

Some 160,000 people have signed a petition calling on Sweden to treat asylum-seekers more humanely and representatives from the Christian Council of Sweden yesterday handed over the petition to Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy Barbro Holmberg. Holmberg chose not to see the petition as a form of criticism of the government's asylum policy. Instead she said that she saw the petition as an expression of commitment. "It is unique that so many people are so involved in the reception of asylum seekers," she said and referred to the reforms the government is now working on. Archbishop K G Hammar said yesterday that he has noticed a change in the government's attitude, largely as a result of all the media attention given to the issue of asylum seekers.

(Dagens Nyheter, 17 May 2005, p. 14, SPR translation)

UNHCR worried over developments

Following Friday's shootings in Andijan thousands of people are now trying to flee Uzbekistan and the UN's Refugee Agency is on full alert as over 500 refugees have crossed the border into Kyrgyzstan. Some of them state that they have been fired upon at the border. The local office of the UNHCR in neighboring Kazakhstan has sent a three-man team to the border to evaluate the need for help to the refugees from Uzbekistan. However, the UNHCR has not been allowed to visit the Uzbek side of the border. "We do not know exactly what is happening on the other side. But we are of course worried about more violence in the area, which could lead to another wave of refugees across the border," says Jack Redden at the UNHCR's office in Islamabad, Pakistan, to Svenska Dagbladet.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 17 May 2005, p. 19, SPR translation)

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Danish press

Civil servant jailed in residence permit bribery and corruption case

A 41-year-old former civil servant in the Danish Immigration Service has been remanded in custody on charges of bribery and corruption. The case involves the alleged taking of money in exchange for issuing residence permits to 21 Chinese immigrants in the period January 2003 to March 2005. The civil servant is believed to have charged the immigrants DKK 38,000 per permit, meaning he earned some DKK 250,000 on his illegal activities. If found guilty, the suspect could face six years imprisonment. Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Immigration Rikke Hvilshøj said the 21 Chinese immigrants will be traced, stripped of their illegal residence permits and expelled from Denmark. "It is obviously very regrettable when such cases arise," Hvilshøj said. "The Immigration Service did the right thing and contacted the police when they realised something was wrong." The minister has promised a full investigation into the Immigration Service's operations to ensure that there are no other cases of false residence permits being issued through bribery among officialdom.

(Politiken, 21 May 2005, front page, 22 May, p. 6, NE translation)

Few Iraqi asylum-seekers to Denmark want to go home

Out of some 650 Iraqi asylum-seekers, whose applications for residence permits to Denmark have been rejected, only 52 have accepted the government offer of financial assistance to return home. The lack of interest in going back to Iraq has sparked demands from the far-right anti-immigration Danish People's Party for the government to force the asylum-seekers to go home, but Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Immigration Rikke Hvilshøj has refused to take action until the scheme runs out at the end of May. Iraqis represent about one third of all refugees in Denmark without residence permits. "We hope that the Danish effort in Iraq will have a beneficial effect on the country's post-war rehabilitation, making it more attractive for the refugees to want to go home," Hvilshøj said.

(Politiken, 20 May 2005, pp. 1, 3, NE translation)

Finnish press

Apathetic refugee children also a problem in Finland

Apathetic refugee children, which is a widespread and much debated problem in Sweden, has now also been discovered in neighboring Finland. "In the beginning, we were perplexed regarding what it could be", says Göran Bondegård from the Karolinska university hospital who is now visiting organizations and authorities in Finland in order to brief them on their findings. A survey has been conducted in Finland after the phenomenon became known in Sweden. "We have discovered six cases of apathetic and deeply depressed

children in five different families”, says Taina Martiskainen from the Central Union for Child Welfare. One of the families have been granted asylum, one family has appealed a rejection claim, one has got a deportation order, and two families have been sent back to Sweden where they first lodged their applications. A reason why the problem is more widespread in Sweden could be because the country has more asylum-seekers to start with. Unfortunately, the problem could grow bigger in Finland because most of the ill children come from families where the parents have lost the capability to shoulder the parental role. “Victims of torture are clearly mentally absent and not capable of carrying the parental role”, says Asko Rauta who works with rehabilitation of torture victims at the Helsinki Diaconess Institute.

(Hufvudstadsbladet, 25 May 2005, p. 3)

Roma from Kosovo are staying in Finland

According to newspaper Hufvudstadsbladet, Germany is in the process of sending back some 50,000 refugees to Kosovo, of which the majority is of Roma origin. Furthermore, the German authorities claim that the refugees are all dependent of social benefits. In an updated report of the situation in Kosovo, UNHCR states that the security situation in Kosovo is still unstable and minorities are still being harassed. However, there is no plan to return refugees to Kosovo from Finland. “Those who have a permit of stay are allowed to stay”, says Tarja-Ritta Nissinen, Head of Information at the Directorate of Immigration. Refugee statistics show that 1,500 persons from Serbia and Montenegro have been registered in Finland since 1998. Since then, 54 people have voluntarily repatriated to Kosovo. According to the International Organization for Migration’s office in Helsinki, an estimate is that only five persons will repatriate this year.

(Hufvudstadsbladet, 24 May 2005, p. 16)

Norwegian press

Immigrants lead population growth

Norway as a whole had a modest 0.6 per cent growth in population last year, but the immigrant segment increased by fully 4.9 per cent according to new figures from Statistics Norway (SSB). According to the SSB, Norway’s immigrant population grew by 17,000 in 2004. There are 301,000 first generation immigrants in Norway, from 200 different nations. A total of 72 per cent of the immigrant population comes from non-Western nations. Non-Western immigrants more often marry someone from their own country while Western newcomers more frequently find a Norwegian mate. A total of 64,000 children were born to foreign parents in Norway in 2004, with 38,000 of these being born to Asian parents. Most children were born to couples where both parents were from Pakistan and Pakistanis are the largest immigrant group in Norway. Immigrants with a Western background often return to their land of origin after having children. There are a roughly equal number of immigrant men and women, but gender representation varies greatly from country to country. There are far more

women among Thai and Filipino immigrants (85 and 76 per cent respectively), while Afghanistan, Great Britain and Iraq have the highest percentile of male immigrants, about 60 per cent in all three cases.

(Aftenposten, 26 May 2004)

Court cracks down on forced marriage

A court in the city of Drammen has issued its first ruling against forced marriages. It handed down prison terms for the father and brother of a 17-year-old Norwegian girl after they threatened her into marrying a man from Northern Iraq. The city court in Drammen sentenced the girl's father to 10 months in jail after he threatened her life and physically abused her. Her brother was sentenced to eight months in prison for similar threats. The court ruling was hailed by some portions of Norway's immigrant community that stem from countries where arranged marriages are traditional, but has shocked others.

(Aftenposten, 23 May 2004)

Immigrant unemployment down

Immigrant unemployment numbers have declined in the first quarter of 2005 but remain far higher than the national level. Registered unemployment among immigrants went down by 0.3 of a percent point to 10 per cent for the same time last year according to figures from Statistics Norway (SSB). SSB defines 'immigrant' in their statistics as a person born abroad or of foreign-born parents. In the Norwegian population as a whole unemployment fell from 4.1 per cent to 3.8 per cent. Most immigrant groups, both western and non-western, registered a small decrease in unemployment in the past year. The biggest drop was among immigrants from Eastern Europe, who saw a fall of 0.7 of a percent point. Southern and Central American immigrants were the exception to the trend, with unchanged jobless levels. For details see www.ssb.no/innvarbl_en/main.html.

(Aftenposten, 20 May 2005)

Swedish press

UN Committee stops deportation

The UN Committee against Torture has ruled that Sweden's deportation of a 33-year-old man from Azerbaijan should be stopped since the man risks torture if returned to his homeland. The Aliens Appeals Board ruled on April 12 that the man and his family should be deported but the man's legal representative managed to convince the authorities not to carry out the deportation until the Committee had reached a decision on the case. A decision to stop the deportation was faxed to the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs earlier this week. The Committee against Torture has scrutinized 58 Swedish cases since Sweden signed the UN Convention against Torture in 1987. So far, the UN has condemned Sweden for making 11 incorrect deportation decisions, most of which have been made since 2000.

(Dagens Nyheter, 26 May 2005, p. 10, SPR Translation)

Amnesty criticizes Sweden

In its annual report human rights organization Amnesty International criticizes Sweden over the deportation of the two Egyptians in 2001. The diplomatic assurances that the two would not be tortured were inadequate and the Swedish government should have realized this, says Amnesty. The organization also directs criticism at the Swedish courts which sentence mentally retarded individuals to prison. It is estimated that Swedish courts sentence up to 500 mentally retarded persons each year. Further, Amnesty criticizes Sweden for discriminating against ethnic minorities and foreign citizens and for its overcrowded prisons. Amnesty also refers to a UN report which reveals that Sweden's statistics on the ethnic composition of the population are shoddy, on reports that few hate crimes are tried and that applicable legislation is not applied.

(Dagens Nyheter, 26 May 2005, p. 9 & Svenska Dagbladet, 26 May 2005, p. 24, SPR Translation)

Government delays closure of Aliens Appeals Board

The government is to delay the closure of the Aliens Appeals Board by three months. Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy, Barbro Holmberg, said to TT on Wednesday that the Board would close on 31 March 2006 instead of 31 December 2005, as was planned. With the closure of the Aliens Appeals Board, the law courts are set to rule on asylum cases, but in the meantime some 500 lawyers need to be recruited. Just two weeks ago the Law Council criticized the government over its draft for a new Aliens Act, suggesting that too hasty a reorganization could affect the legal rights of individuals.

(Dagens Nyheter, 26 May 2005, p. 11, SPR Translation)

Appeals Board refutes claims

A group of seven Swedish paediatricians who works with refugee children yesterday met representatives from the Aliens Appeals Board to discuss the way in which the Board deals with the applications of child asylum-seekers. The group of doctors says that the authority does not consider the "best interests of the children" as laid down in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and in the Aliens Act. The doctors claim that they see in their daily work how the Board's criteria have become more stringent when ruling on asylum cases and how this results in breaches of the UN Convention and the Aliens Act. Håkan Sandesjö, Director General of the Appeals Board, refutes these claims however, saying, "We act in accordance with current laws. We have stringent legislation and the concept 'humanitarian reasons' is more limited in legislation than people in general believe. Individual cases affect me just as much as anyone else. It's tough making such decisions and we at the authority have regular discussions about the rules versus our own opinions". The paediatricians, on the other hand, consider that Swedish legislation is perfectly adequate provided it is applied and that the real problem lies in the tighter criteria.

(Dagens Nyheter, 26 May 2005, p. 11, SRP Translation)

Lindh agreed Egypt deportations

Appearing before the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Constitution (KU) on Tuesday, Jan Danielsson, the former chief of the Swedish Security Service (SÄPO), said that late foreign minister Anna Lindh gave her consent to the deportation of two Egyptian terror suspects in December 2001. Also appearing before the Committee, Inspector Arne Andersson, who was responsible for the deportations of Ahmed Agiza and Mohammed Al Zery, said that Anna Lindh was informed at a meeting on 17 December 2001 that the CIA had offered to fly the two to Egypt. According to Andersson, Lindh stepped aside with some of her colleagues for half a minute and then said "Let's do it or do it". Recollections of the meeting vary however. Sven-Olof Petersson, then political head at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and present at the meeting, told the Committee that: "The Americans were never mentioned and I am convinced that the foreign minister would have reacted, had they been named." Justice Minister Thomas Bodström also denied that he was aware of US involvement beforehand. "When the government agreed to the deportations on 18 December, we did not discuss how they would be carried out, only that they should be carried out immediately." Bodström told the Committee that Jan Danielsson first informed him of CIA involvement on 7 January 2002.

(Dagens Nyheter, 25 May 2005, p. 13 & Svenska Dagbladet, 25 May 2005, p. 15, SPR translation)

Portuguese appointed new High Commissioner for Refugees

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has selected former Portuguese Prime Minister António Guterres as the next High Commissioner for Refugees. Swedish State Secretary Hans Dahlgren, nominated by the Swedish government, was not among the final five candidates for the post.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 25 May 2005, p. 20)

Social Democratic women want review of asylum policy

The policy on asylum and immigration needs to be reviewed. This was agreed upon by the National Federation of Social Democratic Women in Sweden at their conference this week. The women's group consider Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy, Barbro Holmberg's approach to be too restrictive. "Now we must push our Party in order to open a debate on how to create a more humane policy in the future", says Anna Ludvigsson, Vice Chairperson of the Social Democratic Women's group.

(Dagen, 24 Maj 2005, p. 3)

Increased tolerance towards immigrants but a majority wants less refugees

Swedes have become more unwilling to accept refugees, but the tolerance towards immigrants that already live in Sweden has increased, according to a recent survey by the SOM-institute at Göteborg University. "Young people have become more tolerant, while those over 60 have become less tolerant", says Maria Demker, professor in political science and head of the survey. But the survey also shows that religious tolerance has not increased during the last years

and that only four in ten agrees that “immigrants in Sweden should be able to fully practice their religion here”. Moreover, the resistance towards accepting refugees has not been this strong since 1997. A majority, 52 per cent, thinks it is a good idea if Sweden accepted fewer refugees. Amongst the political parties, supporters of the Moderate Party have the most negative attitude, followed by the Center Party and the Social Democratic Party. Supporters of the Liberal Party, who for many years have been among the most refugee-friendly, have now changed and 46 per cent want Sweden to accept less refugees. Regarding Sweden’s policy on integration, eight in ten agrees that the policy should be aimed at helping refugees and immigrants in order to adapt to Swedish culture, or what Maria Demker refers to as a ‘Swedification’.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 22 May 2005, p. 6)

UN torture committee criticizes Sweden

The UN Committee against Torture says that the Swedish government broke the UN convention against torture when it sent terrorist suspects Ahmed Agiza and Mohammed Al-Zery back to Egypt in December 2001. The committee considers that the assurances that the Egyptian government gave to the Swedish government that the two Egyptians would not be tortured were not sufficient. The condemnation came in a written decision to the MFA’s director general for legal affairs Carl Henrik Ehrencrona on Friday. “The criticism was expected, but the committee raised more points than we thought they would,” commented Ehrencrona. Minister for Migration Barbro Holmberg comments to TT, “It’s serious criticism, we will be examining this carefully to see what guidance it can offer us for the future”. The committee also writes that the ambassador should have visited the men sooner and points out that Sweden did not send in all the information required by the committee from the start. According to TV4’s Kalla Fakta the ambassador’s report on the condition of the men, which revealed evidence of abuse, was marked as classified. Holmberg explains that this was because the information was unconfirmed and that when it was later leaked out the government released all the information.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 21 May 2005, p. 11 & Dagens Nyheter, p. 11, SPR translation)

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Danish press

DF will stop immigrants' right to vote in local elections

The Danish People's Party (DF) intends to stop at least 200,000 immigrants from voting in the local government elections in November by demanding that all voters must be Danish citizens. As the electoral laws stand today, all foreigners can vote in local municipal elections after just three year's residency in Denmark. 167,000 non-citizen immigrants voted at the last municipal elections in 2001 and according to Statistics Denmark the figure could be as high as 200,000 this year. By denying immigrants their ballot-box rights DF is hoping to siphon off votes from the Social Liberals who had great success in the February general election in inner city constituencies. "Let's be honest," says DF leader Pia Kjærsgaard. "The Social Liberals aren't just café-latte folk from the creative class. The party attracts many immigrants and I fear for the outcome of the municipal elections in larger cities where immigrants are concentrated, a group that the Social Liberals pander to."

(Jyllandsposten, 31 May 2005, front page, p. 2, NE translation)

Waiting time for asylum seekers tripled

Asylum seekers at Red Cross refugee centres throughout the country have each now spent an average of 900 days in detention, three times as long as pre-2001 figures. At one of the largest refugee centres, Avnstrup in Central Zeeland, there are currently 526 asylum-seekers from 20 different countries, including around 56 per cent from Iraq. The majority of asylum seekers at Avnstrup have had their applications for asylum rejected but are refusing to leave the country voluntarily.

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

More corruption at immigration agency

Another highly placed official at the Immigration Agency has been charged with receiving money and gifts in return for issuing false residency permits to twelve Chinese nationals. The 33 year-old-woman has also been charged with forging other documents. According to Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Immigration Rikke Hvilshøj there is now a definite possibility of organised fraud within the immigration agency.

(Berlingske, 30 May 2005, front page & Jyllandsposten online, NE translation)

Norwegian press

Norway discriminates asylum-seeking children

The Norwegian Bar Association claims the government breaches the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child when it comes to their treatment of asylum-

seeking children. A new report from the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights urges Norway to strengthen measures taken to ensure adequate health and psychiatric services for asylum-seeking children. "Our experience is that there are no improvements... (when it come to these children's situation), says lawyer Mette Y. Larsen of the Bar Association. The Association believes that the child care institutions must take over the responsibility for unaccompanied minor asylum seekers when they come to Norway. Had it been a Norwegian child receiving the same poor assistance as an asylum-seeking child, the child care would have interfered, the Bar Association claims. (Aftenposten, 28 May 2005, p. 6)

Swedish press

Journalist from Uzbekistan applies for asylum in Sweden

BBC-journalist Alisher Sidikov was the only representative from Uzbekistan attending the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council Security Forum in Åre. After the conference, he applied for asylum in Sweden. For almost five years, Sidikov has worked for BBC in Tashkent, where he has reported about torture and human rights violations. With BBC as an employer he has felt relatively safe but not anymore. Due to cuts and restructuring, Sidikov has been told that his BBC-contract will not be renewed, and he is certain that he will be arrested at the airport if he returns. "I have seen it happen with my own eyes several times", he says.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 31 May 2005, p. 13)

Moderates want to get rid of Holmberg

The Moderate Party is preparing to call for a vote of no confidence in the Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy Barbro Holmberg, provided that they can gain the backing of the government's alliance parties – the Left Party and the Greens. "Your parties have on a number of occasions taken ... initiatives regarding refugee policies. Meanwhile, Holmberg remains at her post since you tolerate her and, ultimately, her policies," writes Moderate MP, Mikael Odenberg, to the Left Party and the Greens. Green MP Mikael Johansson finds the Moderate ploy to be somewhat 'strange' given that it is normally the Moderates who back the government in refugee issues. Lars Bäckström of the Left Party does not want to comment until he has spoken with his colleagues on the matter. Newspaper Dagens Nyheter reports that the Moderate Party also considers asylum seekers who have had their applications rejected should be liable for the court costs. Tobias Billström, spokesperson for the Moderate Party on integration policy, says, "It might not be realistic to believe that they can pay [the costs] but it is morally right." Both the Left Party and the Greens shun such a proposal and Left Party MP, Ulla Hoffman, described it as "populistic".

(Svenska Dagbladet, 31 May 2005, p. 6 & Dagens Nyheter, 31 May 2005, p. 13, SPR translation)

Father threatens to kill son

Sunday morning, a man from Azerbaijan took his 15-year-old apathetic son hostage at Blekinge Hospital in Karlskrona, and threatened to set them both on fire. On the 21 of November in 2004, the man, his wife, a 19-year-old daughter, a 17-year-old son and the 15-year-old son were informed that they would be deported. The Aliens Appeals Board agreed a deportation date, on the 16 of May, and on Friday last week the Migration Board informed the family that they were to be deported on that day. The man is demanding that his family's case is reviewed and has asked for a legal representative. The police were still negotiating with the man as the papers went to print, but according to Christer Munter at the Migration Board, the deportation has been cancelled and the family have been given the opportunity to submit a new asylum application.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 30 May 2005, p. 12 & Dagens Nyheter, 30 May, p. 13, SPR translation)

60 asylum seeking children disappeared

The international division of the Swedish Public Prosecutors' office in Stockholm, has launched an investigation into how just over 60 Chinese asylum seeking children can have disappeared from Sweden. Six of them were discovered recently in Holland, where police arrested a gang involved in human trafficking. District Prosecutor, Hans Ihrman, is unsure why it is particularly Chinese children that are coming to Sweden. "Several other countries in Europe have seen the same problem. Now we're trying to establish what is happening", he says. In April this year, 18 people were arrested at Schiphol airport in Amsterdam suspected for human trafficking of Chinese children. The majority of the suspects are Dutch citizens of Chinese descent and two of them worked at the airport. According to Keleta Kibreab, coordinator at the Swedish Migration Board's unit for children and young people, six of the children had been reported missing in Sweden. The Dutch newspaper Telegraaf reported that the children would have been sold for between 90,000 and 140,000 kronor to brothels, restaurants and low wage companies. Svenska Dagbladet reports that since the arrests there have been significantly fewer Chinese children coming to Sweden. Three came in April only to disappear after 11 days, and two are currently in Sweden. "I've spoken to the children twice about Chinese children disappearing. They say that they plan to stay in Sweden. But you can see that they are anxious," says Keleta Kibreab.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 27 May 2005, p. 6, SPR translation)

Cooperation will prevent impunity of war criminals

People that have fled from torture to Sweden risk meeting their perpetrators here. The Migration Board is obliged to report to the police if they suspect that an asylum seeker have conducted war crimes or crimes against humanity in their home country. So far, it has not worked very well and Hans Ölvebro estimates that between 200 and 1,000 war criminals from other countries live in freedom in Sweden today. "We have received reports from the Migration Board and a few investigations have begun. But...these cases are extremely difficult to

investigate”, says Ölvbro, who is the only one at the State Criminal Department working with issues related to war crimes. Hans Ölvbro, now pleads for the creation of a special unit to find war criminals.

(Dagen, 27 May 2005, p. 6)