

Nordic Headlines 2 September 2004

Danish press

Haarder says he will fight 'Øresund'-marriages

No more false addresses in Sweden on the other side of the Øresund straits to avoid the super-strict and controversial Danish 24-year rule on citizenship for spouses from a non-EU country. Minister of Refugees, Immigration and Integration Bertel Haarder says a Danish-Swedish working group has worked out guidelines to fight the attempts to avoid Danish legislation. "From now on Swedish authorities in Malmø will check whether people requesting Swedish residency actually live there. Because I don't think that Sweden should be made the home for forced marriages," he says. The Danish law is designed to combat the immigration of spouses under family-reunification rules. Swedish regulations are far more lenient.

(Berlingske Tidende, 1 September 2004, p. 6, NE translation)

PM rejects Swedish criticism

Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen has rejected Swedish Minister of Justice Thomas Bodström's accusation that Danish immigration legislation is discriminating. "The Danish rules are in complete accordance with international conventions. There is not a shadow of discrimination," said the PM yesterday. He added, however, that he found it 'problematic' that a growing number of Danish citizens are using pro-forma addresses in Southern Sweden to circumvent the contentious 24-years-of age limit requirement for a Danish citizen wanting to marry a spouse from a non-EU country. According to Swedish tax authority figures, the number of Danes moving to Southern Sweden has risen from 500 in 2000, to 3,000 last year. The Swedish authorities suspect that many of these are still residing in Denmark but utilising 'mail' addresses in Sweden. According to Berlingske Tidende, the Danish and Swedish national registration offices will in future work closely together to reveal any Danish citizens using false addresses in Sweden.

(Jyllands Posten, 1 September 2004, p. 4, NE translation)

Denmark-Sweden immigration dispute

Sweden's Minister of Justice Thomas Bodström has sparked off a war of words with the Danish government by calling Danish immigration legislation 'discriminatory' and refusing point blank to change Sweden's more accommodating rules for family reunification. "We are critical of Danish legislation because we believe it is up to people themselves to decide when they get married and who they marry. It's not the duty of the state to get involved," says Bodström. According to the Swedish authorities, between 60 and 80 Danish citizens, of whom 80 per cent are immigrants, are currently relocating to Sweden every month so they can marry a citizen from a country outside the EU. In accordance with EU legislation, the couple can then move back to Denmark after two years of marriage. Minister for Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel

Haarder, who has previously asked Sweden to tighten its immigration legislation and be more aware that Sweden has become 'an oasis' for family reunification efforts, said yesterday that Sweden should not get involved in Danish immigration policy.

(Jyllands Posten, 31 August 2004, front page, NE translation)

Focus on immigration loophole

The Swedish government will now be forced to investigate how many Danish citizens have been forced to relocate to Sweden so they can carry out an arranged, or forced marriage, with a foreign spouse. The Danish Peoples Party's sitting member of the Nordic Council, Jette Jespersen, will today send a list of questions to Sweden's Minister of Integration Mona Sahlin about the loophole that enables couples to circumvent the Danish 24-years-of age requirement for foreigners seeking residency by family reunification. An estimated 1,000 Danish citizens have moved to the Malmø area, become legally married, and then returned to Denmark armed with EU identification papers. "As member of the Nordic Council I am within my rights to question ministers in other Scandinavian countries. I want the Swedish government to answer whether arranged marriages are legal in Sweden, and why the Swedish authorities refused to intervene when they discovered that a young female immigrant had been forced to move to Sweden to take part in an arranged marriage," said Jespersen.

(Politiken, 30 August 2004, front page, NE translation)

Centre for asylum-seekers accused of cheating

The Danish Immigration Service will investigate if the Danish Emergency Service has received money for asylum-seekers who do not live at the Emergency Service's asylum centre. One of the employees at the asylum-seeker's centre in Middelfart conducted a survey of how many of them actually stayed at the centre one night. It turned out that 46 out of 218 asylum-seekers did not stay at the centre overnight. When the employee told the police about his survey, he got sacked by the Emergency Service for being disloyal to his workplace. Each year, the Immigration Service pays DKK 100,000 for each asylum-seeker to have a place to sleep at the centres. The Minister for Refugees, Immigrants and Integration, Bertel Haarder, has asked the Danish Immigration Service for an investigation about whether the Emergency Service has received money for asylum-seekers that do not stay at the centre.

(Politiken, 27 August 2004, p. 8)

Finnish press

Processing of asylum applications in Finland now fastest in Europe

The drastic cure applied by the Aliens Board has been so effective that today the processing time for asylum applications is the shortest in Europe. The processing now takes about four months, when before it could take several years. This new efficiency has saved the responsible ministry some 3,8 million Euros. The

programme to make the processing more effective started in February this year. Apart from the focus on resolving the backlog of old cases and implementing steps to make the processing faster, the programme has been facilitated by a decentralising of the Aliens Board. New processing centres were established in Kuhmo in northern Finland and in Lappeenranta in the Southeast. In spite of this success, Interior Minister Kari Rajamäki feels there is still scope for improvement: "We still have too many applicants who are awaiting a decision on their appeals or waiting for the police to pick them up and be deported. Every applicant is costing the state 40 Euros a day." The next issue to be tackled will be applications for citizenship. There are around 6,000 unresolved cases and the waiting time is two to three years. "From the beginning of next year we will cut the waiting time for citizenship applications to one and a half years, and we intend to make that process even faster," says Rajamäki. (Helsingin Sanomat, 26 August 2004, p. A7)

Norwegian press

Krekar sues state

Mullah Krekar instituted legal proceedings against the Norwegian State in order to have the decision to expel him from the country rendered invalid, newspaper VG reports. Krekar's lawyer Brynjar Meling said Norwegian authorities have uncritically used false information from Krekar's enemies in Iraq as the basis for the expulsion order. "Two years of international investigation have disproved my client's connection to terrorism. In the writ we document that the Norwegian Police Security Service (PST) does not accept the information used by the Directorate of Immigration (UDI)," Meling said. Krekar has summoned a series of top Norwegian politicians, diplomats and high-ranking bureaucrats in his suit and has also warned that he may demand testimony from the USA's Secretary of State Colin Powell. Krekar is the former leader of the guerrilla group Ansar al-Islam in Kurdish northern Iraq. His expulsion was based on the suspicion that he constituted a national security risk and the USA has long suspected Krekar or Ansar al-Islam of links to al-Qaida. "It is a paradox that the UDI decision is based on testimony that the Norwegian police have rejected. How the authorities can maintain that my client is a danger to national security after all prosecution against him has been dropped is a mystery to me," Meling said. (Aftenposten, 2 September 2004)

Norwegian appointed Special Adviser to UNHCR

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has appointed Gry Tina Tinde as Special Adviser on Gender Issues. The position, which has been established with Norwegian support, is intended to strengthen UNHCR's engagement in gender issues, both in relation to refugees and within the organization. Gry Tina Tinde (40) is currently senior adviser in the Secretariat of the Council of the Baltic Sea States in Stockholm. She has previously worked

with women and gender issues in the Ministry of Defence, the UN and the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs.

(UD press release/The Norway Post, 2 September 2004))

Sent home against their will

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) claims Norway, Sweden and Denmark put economic pressure on Iraqi asylum seekers to return to their home country before it is safe. The critique from the UNHCR office in Stockholm is directed towards the asylum authorities in Norway, Sweden and Denmark. The type of pressure is a bit different in the three countries but in all of them the asylum-seekers get their allowances reduced. In Norway the daily food allowances are withdrawn for those who refuse to cooperate with the authorities. This is against the guidelines the UNHCR has sent out. According to the guidelines, Iraqis are not to be lured or pressed to return back until the situation allows it. Reports from Iraq show that the situation in the country is far from safe. On the contrary the situation can be described as a continued state of emergency, where bomb attacks and kidnappings of foreigners are part of the daily life. It is characteristic for the situation that not even the UN has found the situation safe enough to deploy any personnel. They were evacuated a year ago after the bombing of the UN house in Baghdad. Iraq is still in a war like situation, which the uproar in Najaf the last couple of weeks also shows. In a situation like this, the general rules concerning reduction of allowances and any offer of economic help to returnees seem harmless. Norwegian immigrant authorities hide behind rules the politicians have decided. When these rules are opposing UN recommendations, and are contrary to any human thinking, Minister Erna Solberg has to point out, loud and clear, that Norway do not send back refugees to a war zone. She can then leave it up to others to be the toughest in the class regarding asylum politics.

(Dagbladet.no, 1 September 2004, Editorial)

Norwegian government responding to UNHCR criticism

Norway is not violating UNHCR guidelines on Iraqi asylum-seekers. Norway's treatment of Iraqis has not changed lately, and is in principle the same as in other similar countries. Iraqi rejected cases are not forced to return. At the same time they, like other rejected cases, will be deprived of their right to free food and accommodation. UNHCR's latest guidelines on how to deal with Iraqi rejected asylum-seekers were issued in March this year. These guidelines ask asylum countries not to implement forced repatriation, not even of rejected asylum-seekers. Norway has not executed any such forced returns. "To take away the right to free food and accommodation is not the same as to forcibly return people," says Minister for Local Government and Regional Development Erna Solberg, commenting on today's radio news that Norway has been criticised by UNHCR's Regional Office in Stockholm. The Minister sees no reason to change Norwegian practice, since this is in line with the practices in other countries. UNHCR has acknowledged that it is possible for Iraqis to return and is facilitating such returns from other countries. Consequently, Norway is also giving support

to Iraqi refugees who wish to return. In addition to this, Iraqi rejected cases will get assistance from IOM so they can return home. There has been no reports that any such returnees have faced any problems in Iraq. Most Iraqi asylum-seekers in Norway are from northern Iraq. There, the situation has been calm. Norway is practising a differentiated approach to Iraqi asylum cases, depending on which region in Iraq they are originating from.

(Press release by the Norwegian Ministry for Local Government and Regional Development, 31 August 2004)

UN criticizes Norwegian asylum policies

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) claims Norway, Sweden and Denmark press Iraqi asylum seekers to return to their home country before it is safe. The UN organization reacts strongly to the fact that Iraqis who get their asylum applications rejected will get reduced allowance and may get their food allowance cancelled. UNHCR views this as an unreasonable economic pressure on asylum seekers. "This is against the guidelines the UNHCR has sent to the Nordic governments," said Måns Nyberg, head of information at UNHCR's office in Nordic Region, located in Stockholm, to the Norwegian television channel NRK. According to the guidelines, Iraqis are not going to be lured or pressed to return back until the situation allows it. "The reason is the difficult security situation in Iraq," Nyberg said, and stressed that UNHCR has not yet deployed any personnel to Iraq. "There are no international UN personnel in Iraq at the time being," Nyberg said. "We were evacuated a year ago after the bombing of the UN house in Baghdad."

(Nettavisen/NRK, 31 August 2004)

Hagen equipped with security alarm

Norwegian police have issued a mobile security alarm to Progress Party leader Carl I. Hagen. They worry that he is a target for terrorists unhappy with some anti-Islamic remarks he made this summer. Hagen is carrying the alarm with him at all times, according to magazine *Se og Hør*. Police are also reportedly sending patrol cars by his home in Tønsberg, south of Oslo, at least six times a day. The stepped-up security around Hagen stems from a speech he made at a summer gathering of the Christian organization 'Levende Ord' (Living Word) in July. In the remarks, Hagen joked about the Prophet Mohammed and warned his audience that Muslims were making too many inroads into Europe. Ambassadors from several Muslim nations later complained about Hagen's remarks, and claimed he had offended 1.2 billion Muslims.

(Aftenposten, 31 August 2004, p. 3)

Cities ordered to offer language and job training for immigrants

All Norwegian townships must provide both language and job training to new immigrants. Programs will take effect from 1 September, in an effort to speed integration. Minister for Local Government and Regional Development, Erna Solberg, visited one adult education centre in the Oslo suburb of Bærum on Monday. She said both Bærum and Sola townships have long made a

determined effort to integrate what many politicians call Norway's "new countrymen". "But not all townships are like them," Solberg said. "There are wide variations, but now everyone must offer an obligatory introduction course to refugees who are granted asylum on humanitarian grounds." Solberg said she was impressed by the progress of some immigrant women in Bærum, who were following a daily, two-year program aimed at helping ease them into Norwegian society.

(Aftenposten, 30 August 2004)

19-year-old denied marriage

He has a driving license and the right to vote, but the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) claims the 19-year-old from Drammen is too immature to get married. Aleksander Thonander says he feels discriminated against because the UDI claims he is too immature to get married. His 20-year-old wife is denied entry to Norway because the authorities claim the two of them have a pro forma marriage. "I feel that Norwegian authorities do not accept the choice I have made," Thonander says. The 19-year-old has been married to Anmol, an Indian national, for a year and a half. The two of them got married December 17, 2002, in her village in India, but the visa applications were denied, and Anmol was forced to remain in India. When Thonander a month ago returned to India in order to try to get his wife to Norway, he received a letter from UDI at the Norwegian embassy in New Dehli. The document states clearly that he is too immature to enter into a legal marriage. Karl Erik Sjøholt, department director in UDI, agreed that it might not have been a problem if Thonander had married a Norwegian girl. He confirms that the rejection from UDI contains a section that states that Thonander is too immature to enter into a marriage. But Sjøholt stresses that UDI follows regulations that give the authority the right to use such reasons to deny family reunion.

(Nettavisen, 30 August 2004)

Government accepts more quota refugees

The Norwegian Government has decided to increase the number of quota refugees as from 2005. During next year it will be decided whether a further increase will take place. "The number has to be increased step by step. The Government wishes to reply to UNHCR that they will accept 1,000 refugees for resettlement next year, which is 250 more than this year. The Government's goal is that the quota will be expanded to 1,500 persons, says Minister for Local Government and Regional Development, Erna Solberg. The expansions need to be done over a period of time so we don't create problems for those already waiting at the reception centres, says Solberg.

(Aftenposten, 27 August 2004, p. 2 & UD Press Release, 26 August)

Pentecostalists attract Muslim asylum-seekers

The Pentecostal Church has created a controversial revival movement among Muslim asylum-seekers in the greater Oslo area. In the past six years 16,000 refugees have visited the white wooden church in Sandvika, a suburb in Bærum

just west of the capital. Some asylum centre leaders say the church is tricking their visitors. Coffee, cakes, Iranian pop music, a little proselytizing and a special bus - these are the ingredients behind the church's popular meetings with asylum-seekers. Since 1998 over 16,000 asylum-seekers have attended the church's Thursday meetings. About 70 per cent of these visitors have been Muslims. The revivalist campaign has also resulted in 80 former Muslims letting themselves be baptized. The congregation drives their own bus around and often enters the centres to meet the refugees. This has led to tighter security, and the Hvalstad centre for underage asylum-seekers banned the Pentecostals earlier this year. The Hvalstad centre found the recruiting unpleasant, and felt the youngsters were being lured with refreshments and day out without being warned in advance that they would be attending a Christian meeting, an aspect that can lead to various complications. The Directorate of Immigration (UDI) said that how the arrangement and approach of the Pentecostals is handled is up to the respective centres to decide. The Norwegian Organization for Asylum Seekers (NOAS), tries to inform and advise refugees, and often feels that the revivalists are putting problematic pressure on the newcomers. The church said that they would abide by the rules of the centres and were just trying to spread the light. "We are not so naive that we baptize someone who has hopes that this could help their asylum application. We could have taken in many more, but we are restrictive," said Robert Leine, who leads the church's meetings. "Anything is better than being bored at the centre!" says a Muslim guest, one of a group about 50 visitors made up of 20 nationalities at last Thursday night's meeting. A group of Iranian asylum-seekers say that boredom is the main reason that any form of entertainment appeals. Earlier, some Iranians tried baptism as a route into Norway, but claim that the UDI now know about this. A 26-year-old Iranian said a switch to Christianity would mean liquidation if he eventually returned to Iran, and none of the group said that they felt the church tried to convert them. "Your God or our God, it is the same thing. We have come here to relax a little, eat cake and air our thoughts," he said.

(Aftenposten, 27 August 2004)

Fewer immigrants and asylum-seekers

As reported earlier, the number of immigrants coming to Norway has not been this low since 2001 and the number of asylum-seekers has decreased with 50 per cent since 2002. A little more than 4,000 immigrants have arrived in Norway during 2004 of which most are from Somalia and Liberia. While the mass of immigrants from Somalia is a continuance from last year, the number of people from Liberia is increasing. "The reason for the increase from Liberia is among other things that this group come as refugees from the civil war," said Lars Østby, researcher at Statistics Norway (SSB). The greatest decrease is the number of immigrants from Russia and Iraq. Compared to previous years, fewer have come from Iraq to Norway this year. According to SSB, this is due to the fact that it has become much more difficult to be granted family reunion. In addition to the decrease in immigration, the number of asylum-seekers has decreased. The number is now equal to the average number from the decade before 1999. Even

if fewer people got residency in Norway, there is an increase of people who got work permits. It is particularly workers from the new EU countries in the east that have been awarded work permits.

(Nettavisen, 27 August 2004)

Spelling mistakes revealed human smuggler

An Asian man living in northern Norway has been charged with human smuggling. The man was revealed due to spelling mistakes. The man allegedly forged a Norwegian policewoman's signature and sold tons of fake work permits. According to the police, the documents are professionally made. The work permits appear to be issued by Troms police district or the Norwegian embassy in Islamabad. The documents are signed with the name of the female caseworker at the Tromsø police. But because the man can not spell in Norwegian, he wrote "genrell arbeidstill" (general working style) in stead of "generell arbeidstillatelse" (general work permit), and revealed that the documents were fake. Another person is charged with accessory to human smuggling. He is suspected for heading a Norwegian branch of an international organization with base in Dubai. "We have been informed that private individuals have paid close to NOK 100,000 (USD 14,500) in order to get help to get to a Schengen country," said Einar Sparboe Lysnes, police inspector at Troms police district. According to the police, the man in his thirties has aided in smuggling several Pakistanis to the Schengen area.

(Nettavisen, 26 August 2004)

Swedish press

New Co-ordinator for asylum-seeking children

Today, the Government is introducing a Co-ordinator responsible for asylum-seeking children in Sweden. The new post is established in order to prevent that children in the asylum process are put in situations that might lead to psychological apathy.

(Dagens Nyheter, 2 September 2004, p. 4)

Migration Board criticised by Ombudsman

The Swedish Migration Board is being criticised by the Parliamentary Ombudsman for the decision to deport a stateless Palestinian on the grounds that the health care he needs is also available in his former home country. The decision states that "health care is almost free in Syria but a bribe can shorten the waiting period". The Parliamentary Ombudsman argues that the sentence should not have been included in the decision. Director-General of the Board, Janna Valik, agrees that the formulation is unfortunate.

(Dagens Nyheter, 31 August 2004, p. 5)

Course to prepare immigrants to become police

The police have introduced a course to prepare unemployed immigrants for the National Police Academy tests. The course includes both Swedish language and physical training. Many immigrants have problems with the Swedish test and many also have trouble passing the physic test.

(Dagens Nyheter, 31 August 2004, p.5)

Not clear who is responsible for persons with temporary resident permits

Between 2000 and 2003 many Somalis received temporary resident permits. These asylum-seekers had no family in Sweden and were perceived to not have enough reasons to stay in Sweden. However, it was not possible to send them back to Somalia either. Many of them now leases flats and some even have jobs but they might lose everything when their temporary permits run out. Neither is it clear who is responsible for this group of Somalis. Can they stay in the municipality or do they have to move to a reception centre while their cases are being tested again? A directive from the Migration Board indicates that they should move to a reception centre while their case is being tested. However, regional offices let the Somalis stay in the municipalities as long as possible because they have right to various forms of support there. The praxis has now changed and Somalis who now seek asylum are neither given temporary nor permanent residence permits.

(Dagens Nyheter, 30 August 2004, p. 8)

Foreign Minister to visit Sudan

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Laila Freivalds, is to visit Darfur in Sudan. "I want to meet representatives of the Sudanese Government to be able to form my own opinion on the Government's ambitions to follow the demands made by the United Nations," says the Minister. She continues by saying that the Swedish Government believes that the pressure on the Sudanese Government has to increase, but that it depends on what they have done to reach an end to the situation in Darfur.

(Dagen Nyheter, 30 August 2004, p. 15)

Reception centres to decrease its capacity

Fewer asylum-seekers and a faster asylum process means that reception centres have to decrease their capacity. The Migration Board will mainly reduce space in reception centres in the north of Sweden where some 1000 accommodation spaces will be removed.

(Dagens Nyheter, 28 August 2004, p. 9)

Kurdish-Swede sent back to Sweden

The Kurdish-Swede who had been imprisoned in Estonia since 15 June has been sent back to Sweden. The Estonian Minister of Justice did not agree to Turkey's demands to deport the man to Turkey.

(Dagens Nyheter, 27 August 2004, p. 6)

UNHCR criticises the Swedish Migration Board

The UNHCR is criticising the Swedish Migration Board for reducing the financial support to Iraqi asylum seekers who are not returning to Iraq voluntarily after their asylum application has been denied. "To reduce the financial support is against our recommendations," says Måns Nyberg from the Public Information section at the UNHCR office in Stockholm.

(Stockholm City, 27 August 2004, p. 7)

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Danish press

Classroom limits

According to a new opinion poll, 64 per cent of all people in Copenhagen believe it is 'OK' to limit the number of children from ethnic minorities in the city's schools and introduce quotas which would force parents to send their children to schools in other areas than where they reside. A spokesman for the parents' organisation 'School and Society' said the poll reflects that people do not want the city split down ethnic lines. "We have to look for a more optimal distribution of children from ethnic minorities throughout the whole Copenhagen area," he said. In certain school districts, such as central Nørrebro, 90 per cent of all children are immigrants or descendants of immigrants, whilst in other areas the figure is as low as two per cent. According to the new poll, 40 per cent believe that classrooms should not have more than 25 per cent from ethnic minorities – however, it is an impossible target as 30 per cent of all schoolchildren in Copenhagen today are from minorities.

(Jyllands Posten Cop., 8 September 2004, front page, NE translation)

Asylum-seekers' ill-health

Sickness amongst asylum seekers at the country's refugee and asylum centres has reached record heights. New figures from the immigration authorities reveal that expenditure on specialist treatment for asylum seekers suffering from depression, stress, psychosis and other ailments that cannot be treated by the asylum centres' own personnel, has risen from DKK 30 million to DKK 40 million over the past four years. Over the same period the processing time for each individual application for residency has risen from 310 days to 700 days. The head of the Danish Red Cross's asylum wing, Jørgen Chemnitz, says he is in 'no doubt' that there is a direct correlation between the amount of sickness and the reduced chance of gaining a residency permit. Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder said that whilst he accepted that there has been a marked increase in ill health amongst asylum-seekers, there are also many who exaggerate their sicknesses in an attempt to gain residency. One contributing factor to the long processing time may be that due to the decreased number of asylum-seekers the Danish Immigration Service has fired handling officers, which overloads the work burden for those who are left. Haarder believes that the change in the law from last year eventually will shorten the processing time. The new law implies that both reasons for asylum as well as humanitarian residence permit will be treated at the same time and not as separate processes. The Social Democrats believes that cases that refer to sickness shall be processed at a special office at the Immigration Service so they not take time from other cases. The Christian Democrats wants to make the process time easier for the asylum-seekers by encourage them to work while they are waiting and thereby

give them skills which is both useful for future integration in Denmark or in their home country.

(Politiken, 6 September 2004, front page & p. 4, NE translation)

Iranian gets compensation for being tortured after deportation

An Iranian who was deported from Denmark to Iran in 1997 where he was put in jail for three months will according to the High Court get DKK 200,000. The money is a compensation for being unlawful expelled to Iran where he was tortured in jail.

(Politiken, 8 September 2004, p. 8)

Sweden says it is not co-operating with Haarder

The Swedish Immigration Board says that it is not co-operating with its Danish counterparts in preventing the use of Danish pro-forma addresses in Southern Sweden. Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder has claimed that there is Danish-Swedish co-operation on the issue to prevent the circumvention of a controversial Danish 24-years-of-age requirement for non-EU spouse entry. Now, Head of Information at the southern region of the immigration authority Per Axel Stenström says that this is not so. "It is a Danish and not a Swedish problem. We cannot see any reason for setting up a working group or entering into any closer co-operation with Denmark on the issue," he says.

(Jyllands Posten, 3 September 2004, p. 5, NE translation)

Immigrants involved in more serious crime

Figures from Copenhagen magistrates show that youths of immigrant background have been involved in more serious crime this year, than at any time for the last five years. Out of 63 youths under the age of 18 brought before a magistrate for serious crime, 53 of them were of immigrant background, while only ten were ethnic Danes. Chief inspector Per Larsen intends to get tough. "We have here some second-generation immigrants that are creating more insecurity than ethnic Danes are. We are forced to get heavy handed against the hard core, who are dragging the others down. They shall be removed from their circle of friends," he says.

(Politiken, 3 September 2004, front page, NE translation)

Finnish press

New head of Immigration Board wants a more open process

The future Director General of the Immigration Board Jorma Vuorio, wants to create more openness and transparency in asylum decisions. Vuorio will take up his post as Director General on 1 October. "This is a very challenging job. The Immigration Board is working in a constantly changing environment. For example, wars cause people to flee, and we feel the consequences of these movements also here in Finland," says Vuorio. Some years ago, Finland established an accelerated procedure for dealing with asylum applications.

Jorma Vuorio wants to emphasize that this procedure is not the same as quick deportation. "In some EU countries, asylum-seekers will be turned back at the border. In Finland, everyone will be given at least eight days". The future Director General has been thinking a lot about how to increase openness and transparency. "Asylum issues must not be described in detail in public, this in order to protect the asylum-seeker, not the Immigration Board. However, one could consider for example to give information in general terms about the reasons behind our decisions. That could be done for example on our website," says Vuorio. As an example, Vuorio mentions one group of asylum-seekers whose applications were rejected. The police implemented the deportation, but the issue remained a mystery to Vuorio himself. "As a private citizen I would have liked to know more about the grounds for the decision and why international conventions were not followed in this particular case. A greater openness would promote the combat against racism as well," says the future Director General of the Finnish Immigration Board.

(HBL, 8 September 2004, p. 8)

Norwegian press

Immigrants should meet higher standards

Professor Berthold Grünfeld brands existing Norwegian immigration policy and attitudes as naive and calls for tougher demands where incoming foreigners would be required to meet certain standards of acculturation. "There should be a concrete demand that you must master 600 words and learn about the new (Norwegian) culture, values, norms and mentality. Get an education, be as independent as possible and take care of your native culture," Grünfeld said. Grünfeld, a forensic psychiatrist, has treated several thousand refugees and criticized the prevalent Norwegian 'do-gooder mentality', and said the country must face up to the fact that not all immigrants are nice, kind, social or adaptable. "I call it mass immigration and we are in the middle of it. We have not understood it and it is very difficult, and we are learning as we go," Grünfeld said. Professor of social anthropology Thomas Hylland-Eriksen agrees that researchers must be able to say that immigration has posed Norway unforeseen problems and that new policies are necessary. "It is not necessarily the case that the most progressive and anti-racist thing is to let in a maximal number of people that really don't want to be here," Eriksen said. Both professors agree that Norway should consider opening asylum centres in Africa. "We should not exclude the possibility that it would be better for very many Somali refugees to have an option that gave them safety nearer to home and where one would avoid discrimination," Eriksen said. "It is very possible that this would be a simpler solution for everyone concerned," Grünfeld said.

(Aftenposten, 9 September 2004)

Deportation of 11 year-old boy against UN rules

The Immigration Appeals Board has decided to send back to Turkey an 11 year-old boy, who is seriously ill, to reunite with his mother. However, the mother's

present address is unknown, and the traumatised boy risks being returned to his home village, where there are no guarantees that he will not be mistreated by his father who has severely abused him in the past. Save the Children (Norway) states that this Board decision is violating five of the nine UN rules on the repatriation of children. These rules have been established by UNHCR in close co-operation with Save the Children. "We think that these rules have not been followed in this case. Moreover, this is only one of many examples of a decision taken before the Board has actually studied the case in detail. The Norwegian authorities have to get their act together. We are supposed to be a model country in this area," says Marianne Borgen, Head of the legal unit of Save the Children Norway. The Immigration Appeals Board is an autonomous body established in 2001. It does not take instructions from the Parliament, nor from the Government or the relevant ministry. This means that the responsible minister Erna Solberg is not allowed to intervene or comment on the case of the 11 year-old boy. (Aftenposten, 8 September 2004, p. 4)

Free legal aid to immigrant youth cut

Young immigrants on the run from forced marriages and death threats from their own family will no longer get free legal aid. Young immigrants on the run from their families were previously offered free legal aid to change their identity, find a new place to live, and ensure that security measures were put in place. But now the Ministry of Justice has pulled the plug. The reason is that their need for legal aid is allegedly provided by public institutions like national register office. "This is shocking," said Gerd Fleischer, leader of the organization 'Self-help for immigrants and refugees' (SEIF). "These young people must break free of a forced situation in order to survive. Some of them have experienced aggravated violence and their entire family is after them, brothers or uncles are armed. They need to get good enough help to ensure that they can live in safety." According to Fleischer, the organization is dependent on aid from lawyers to ensure that the people who have been exposed to horrible things can live in safety. "If not, information may be leaked and put these people's lives in danger," Fleischer said. The organization has asked to meet with Minister of Justice Odd Einar Dørum. Lawyer Hanne Guttulsrød Bredal, who has been working with cases like these since 1999, said that this cutback is irresponsible. Representatives for the Social Democratic Party, the Socialist Left Party and the Progress Party also state that the cutback is unacceptable.

(Aftenposten, 6 & 7 August 2004, pp. 3, 2)

Police may extradite Serbian suspect

A man charged with war crimes in Croatia has been living in Norway for the past five years. Now Norwegian police appear willing to extradite him, but his defense attorney is fighting the move. The man already has been convicted of war crimes, even though he was not present at his own trial. His defence attorney, Tor Erling Staff, told that he fears for the man's safety if he is sent back to Croatia. Norwegian officials, however, contend the justice system in Croatia has improved, and that he is been promised a new trial if he returns to the country.

Croatia has demanded his extradition. It would mark the first time Norway has extradited anyone accused of war crimes.
(Aftenposten, 6 august 2004)

Norway praised for asylum procedures

A research project supported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has looked into how the asylum adjudication system within Germany, Austria, Sweden and Norway maps its international legal obligations under the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees onto its domestic decisions. When it comes to Norway, the report "Seeking Asylum Alone" has studied the procedures involving unaccompanied minor asylum-seekers. In the report, Norway is praised for often giving unaccompanied children resident permits on humanitarian grounds. However, Norway is also criticised in the report, especially for not spending more time trying to localise parents or relatives abroad. Norway and Sweden also accept far more girls than boys, despite the fact that most applications come from boys. The report also criticises all four countries for not taking into consideration that many asylum-seekers might be victims of torture. "This report shows that the critique against Norwegian authorities is not justified. We do take care of children's needs during the procedures", said Minister for Local Government and Regional Development Erna Solberg. Solberg believes that many of the problems involving minor asylum-seekers evolve in the municipalities following the lack of a proper follow-up, but not within the asylum process as such.

(Aftenposten, 5 September 2004, p. 6)

Refugees owe money to the Directorate of Immigration

Around 3,100 persons have re-immigrated to Norway since 1985. The majority of them have not paid back the financial support they had received when they travelled to their country of origin. The Directorate of Immigration (UDI) expects only to get back a small part of the NOK 10 million. Because of low income and high unemployment, most of the refugees can not pay back the amount they received to start a new life in their own country. Since 1991, some 9,500 refugees have received financial assistance to return to their country of origin. Since 1996, the support has been NOK 15,000 per person.

(Aftenposten, 4 September 2004, p. 6)

Solberg insists on deportation

The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) asked Minister of Local Government and Regional Development Erna Solberg to not deport the 2,000 Iraqi Kurds who came to Norway 4 to 6 years ago since they are well integrated in society. Solberg refuses. Five years in Norway does not give these persons enough attachment to Norway to grant them permission to stay, concludes Solberg. UDI asked in April if the case could be closed by giving the group permanent residency in Norway. UDI has argued that there are "strong human considerations" to take into account, 'ambiguous signals' from the authorities and that they have 'certain connections to the country'. However, the Immigration

Appeals Board claimed that they should be sent home. Solberg has decided that the Iraqi Kurds will be deported, reported the Norwegian paper Stavanger Aftenblad. Morten Tjessem of Norwegian Organization for Asylum Seekers (NOAS), said that these are people who are integrated into Norwegian society. "They speak Norwegian, most of them have jobs". "They will not continue be a burden on society, but now the authorities are taking their work permits, their housing, and food in Norway in order to force them to home", Tjessem said. The 2,000 Iraqi Kurds asylum-seekers who came to Norway in the end of the 1990s, and they got temporary refuge without the right for family reunions, but because of the situation in their home country, they have been in Norway for a long time. According to Tjessem, the society in Iraq is still so unstable that forced deportation of refugees is not likely right now. (Nettavisen, 3 August 2004)

Swedish Press

No "social tourism" from new EU countries

Since the EU enlargement 1 May, the Migration Board has received 2,574 requests for residence permit. This is 780 requests more than last year. Half of the requests are from Poland, which is the largest of the new EU countries. (Svenska Dagbladet, 8 September 2000, p. 8)

Few companies live up to law against discrimination

Margareta Wadstein, Ombudsman against ethnical discrimination, has over the past years researched 400 companies. Only 7 were found to respect the law against discrimination. Currently, the authority is looking for more examples and is doing research of companies that have committed to the UN-proposed Code of Conduct regarding human rights and sustainable development. 22 Swedish companies are part of Global Compact, but the Ombudsman has until now only approved of one company, the building company Skanska. (Dagens Nyheter, 8 September 2004, p. 6-7)

Terrorism does not change asylum practice

The terror attack in Beslan does not change the practice with regard to residence permits for people from the South Russian republic North Ossetia. A sudden terror attack does not influence the practice that is in force. We have to consider the long-term trends in a country, says Marie Andersson, spokesperson for the Migration Board. Terrorism can happen in all countries, even those considered safe like Spain.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 8 September 2004, p. 8)

6-year-old boy deported to Beslan

A 6-year-old boy and his family were rejected asylum in Sweden and subsequently deported to Southern Russia, where he – on his first day in school – ended up as a hostage. The boy was one of the survivors of the terrorist attack that took a few hundred lives. The family was forced to leave Sweden as the

situation in Southern Russia was considered to be safe. Last year, only 6 per cent (88 persons) of Russian asylum seekers were granted asylum. (Svenska Dagbladet, 7 September 2004, pp. 1, 6)

Swedish-sounding name improves employment opportunities

Employers and employment agencies encourage immigrants to change their name to hide their origin and in this way to increase their possibility to get employment. During the last six months, 102 families have changed their names to a more Swedish sounding name. A quarter of these families has mentioned discrimination as a reason for the name-change. The Minister for Integration, Mona Sahlin would like to see a practical test (the "Wallraff-method") to investigate which jobs are not accessible for immigrants. A research by Dagens Nyheter shows that 20 per cent of the jobs are not accessible by immigrants. (Dagens Nyheter, 7 September 2004, pp. 1, 5-7)

Refugees exploited

Some 6,000 people without residence permit are forced to work for low incomes. These people are mainly those who have come to Sweden to seek asylum, are refused and then decide to go underground. Being threatened by deportation, they are forced to work hard for a few crowns per hour. Although there is a law to avoid exploitation, the police are of the opinion that it will be difficult to charge any of the employers. The Minister of Justice, Thomas Bodström, says that the exploited people should be treated as victims of crime. (Svenska Dagbladet, 6 September 2004, p.1, & 7 September, p. 8)

Fewer people flee

Last year, the number of refugees in the world decreased with 18 per cent to 17 million people. The High Commissioner for Refugees Ruud Lubbers, calls these figures very encouraging. According to UNHCR's spokesperson, Ron Redmond, the decrease has several causes. "The refugees that wanted to return to their countries of origin received more assistance. UNHCR concentrates more on transport, integration, reconstruction etc, in order to help returnees to get work and accommodation. Several countries from where people fled during the 1980's and 1990's are now relatively safe (for example Afghanistan, Angola, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Bosnia and Albania). And we have not seen huge refugee catastrophes since Bosnia and the crises in the Great Lakes District in Central Africa. UNHCR is also counting on the return of another two million persons from nine African countries where peace processes guarantee the stability that is needed for repatriation. There is however still a lot to do. Two million Afghanis live in 74 countries of asylum; the crisis in Darfur with over one million refugees; continued unrest in the Democratic Republic of Congo, says Ron Redmond. "The fact that more people return is a positive trend, but it is important that the rest of the world does not decrease their assistance, so this trend does not turn around." (Svenska Dagbladet, 6 September 2004, p. 14)

The Foreign Minister encourages more EU countries to contribute to Sudan

More EU countries will have to contribute to Western Sudan says Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs Laila Freivalds together with a few of her EU colleagues. A threat with sanctions can continue to be of use, says Freivalds, who also states that the threat had already eased the situation in refugee camps. (Dagens Nyheter, 5 September 2004, p. 6)

Nigerian asylum-seeker fears to get stoned to death

The Alien Appeals Board agreed with the Migration Board and decided that there are not enough humanitarian reasons for asylum-seeker Aminatu Bello to remain in Sweden. Nigerian Aminatu Bello fled to Sweden last year and explained in her request for asylum that she had been forced to marry a 60-year old man. A few months after the marriage, Aminatu Bello got pregnant with her boyfriend's baby. When her husband found out, he maltreated her. In her asylum request, she also explained that the committee in the village had decided that she should be stoned to death. She had enclosed an article of the Nigerian Observer to proof that she had been pregnant with her lover's child and was sought by the Muslim clerics. The Alien Appeals Board state that the timing in the article does not coincide with the information she had given and that her identity is unclear. MP Matilda Ernkrans of the Social Democratic Party is of the opinion that the burden of proof is too heavy.

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

Swedish pension system disbenefits immigrants

Immigrants with low incomes risk getting lower pensions than Swedish citizens with the same salary. Especially at risk are those who came to Sweden late in their lives, do not have refugee status, and come from countries with which Sweden has no agreement regarding pensions. Everyone, who has lived in Sweden for more than 40 years, has the right to a guaranteed pension of SEK 6,976 (gross) per month. Immigrants who have refugee status and have not lived in Sweden for 40 years when they turn 65 do have right to the guaranteed pension. Others, however, only get the guaranteed pension in relation to the number of years they lived in Sweden. For example, if they lived in Sweden for 20 years, they will have right to half the guaranteed pension. There are currently around 700,000 persons between 25 and 64 living in Sweden, but who were born somewhere else. Their average income is around SEK 15,000 per month with which it is difficult to earn a decent pension if one only works for 20 or 30 years.

(Dagens Nyheter, 5 September 2004, Economy – pp. 4-5)

Honour killing

A 24-year-old woman has been murdered with 39 knife stabs. According to the police was the reason that she did not want to get divorced from her husband. The police initially treated the case as a family tragedy, but sees the killing now more as an honour-related crime. The couple has their origin in Iraqi Kurdistan. The woman's relatives are threatening with blood revenge. The man has been charged with murder.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 5 September, p. 6)

Segregation in Stockholm

More and more immigrant families move to the Stockholm's region Järvafältet, at the same time as Swedish families move out to other areas. It would be good that more Swedish families would move to the region for the sake of integration and language, says the Area Director. He blames for a large part the Islamic Schools, which he claims have no good connection with the Swedish society and where students have difficulties learning the Swedish language.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 5 September 2004, pp. 16-17)

Swedish EU MPs criticise new Commissioner

Swedish EU Parliamentarians Lena Ek (Centre Party) and Cecilia Malmström (Liberal Party) have threatened to stop EU-commissioner Rocco Buttiglione. The Italian, who will be responsible for refugee issues in the new committee, has already proposed to send asylum-seekers to camps in North Africa. This would be against the Geneva Convention and Buttiglione's opinions may risk the support of the whole EU Committee. The EU Parliament will have to agree to the new committee before they can be installed on 1 November.

(Dagens Nyheter, 4 September 2004, p. 10)

Nordic Headlines 16 September 2004

Danish press

Large fines for failing Danish language test

Foreigners in the country under family-reunification regulations may in the future face a fine of up to DKK 30,000 if they cannot speak Danish. This is if the latest proposal for legislation from Minister of Refugees, Immigration and Integration Bertel Haarder is passed. "We are thinking of those who – to the detriment of themselves and their job opportunities – never get to learn the language. We are in particular thinking about the many housewives who never get a job. They must be motivated. We are also hoping that their husbands will understand the Danish language rule a little better if a fee turns up because the wife for no reason fails her language test," he says.

(Jyllands Posten, 16 September 2004, front page, NE translation)

Immigrant children should be removed

The ruling Liberal Party's spokesperson on integration, Irene Simonsen, says that many children from ethnic minorities should be forcibly separated from their families because their parents encourage them to be enemies of Danish society. According to Simonsen, the children should be forcibly relocated to Danish foster parents who can teach them more democratic values. "Forcibly removing children from their parents is an extremely difficult decision but we are forced to think of the child's best interests – and that just is not happening when we can see that children are raised to be enemies of Danish society," she says. "There is currently a hard core of families who give the impression that they hate Denmark. These children are not being physically abused, but they are not being brought up to be a part of society." The Danish People's Party (DF) has quickly declared themselves to be enthusiastic supporters of Simonsen's proposal. DF's deputy leader Peter Skaarup says that society often has a fear of directly addressing the problem. "I cannot see anything wrong in using more forcible methods. It's completely neglectful for a family to send their child to a Koran school in Pakistan with strict indoctrination methods," says Skaarup.

(Jyllands Posten, 15 September 2004, p. 3, NE translation)

Declaration of love

Social Liberal leader Marianne Jelved has proposed that the controversial 24-years-of-age stipulation for immigrants seeking residency through marriage should be replaced with a new rule that would require all those under 25 who want to marry a foreign spouse to officially declare that it is love, and not force, that has brought them together. "We believe that a 25 age 'love' ruling would prevent arranged and forced marriages and benefit those who genuinely want to get married," says Jelved.

(Berlingske Tidende, 15 September 2004, p. 3, NE translation)

DKK 50,000 for a visa?

Non-EU foreigners resident in this country could in the future be required to produce a DKK 50,000 bank guarantee to ensure that a friend or relative

visiting them departs the country again. The Ministry of Integration, in conjunction with the Immigration Agency, is preparing a new set of rules intended to ease the application process for visas to this country, but which at the same time includes more restrictions for applicants from certain countries. (Berlingske Tidende, 14 September 2004, p. 4, NE translation)

Asylum-seekers to be deported – and quickly

In the future, asylum seekers should be required to attend their local police station to receive the result of their application for asylum – and if the answer is no they should be immediately taken into custody and deported as soon as possible. That's the latest proposal from the Danish People's Party in an effort to reduce the number of illegal immigrants presently in this country, estimated to be around 4,000, the majority of whom are rejected asylum seekers. (Danish Radio, 14 September 2004, www.dr.dk, NE translation)

Unequal distribution leads to ghettos

The uneven distribution of immigrants throughout the country has led to the formation of ghettos, especially in the greater Copenhagen area. New figures from Statistics Denmark reveal that whilst local communities close to the capital, such as Vallensbæk and Rødovre experienced rises of 76 and 52 per cent in the number of immigrant residents between 1997 and 2004, in other areas farther afield the figure is as low as 13 per cent. Copenhagen Town Hall Councillor Manu Sareen said he had not realised the extent of the problem. "We knew that the percentage of immigrants in some local communities was low, but it's incredible to see such disparity. When we see that an immigrant-dominated area such as Mjølnerparken in Copenhagen has an unemployment rate of 89 per cent, then we are facing a massive problem," he said. 93,000 Copenhagen residents have an immigrant background. (Jyllands Posten, 14 September 2004, front page, NE translation)

Romas put pressure on the asylum-system

A Roma from Kosovo is granted asylum in Denmark, a rare decision because the Danish Refugee Board usually rejects asylum-seekers from this ethnic group. Some 50-100 Romas are placed on the so-called 'Lunchbox Scheme' with the aim to force the Romas to return to their country of origin. Lawyer Anne Land representing three Romas has taken the Refugee Board to court. Due to the ethnical disturbances in Kosovo last year, UNHCR and UNMIK find the situation too insecure for Romas to return to. Niels-Erik Hansen from the Advisory and Documentation Centre for Racial Discrimination (DRC), says that the decision of the Board shows a clear shift with regards to political asylum for Romas. This means that the general risk for persecution, rather than the personal risk, is being considered when it comes to Romas. According to Hansen, this shift of direction gives hope for those Roma asylum-seekers from Kosovo who have been rejected. They might now reopen their cases. Furthermore, he believes that the policy-shift is the result of the critique the Refugee Board received from the EU Commissioner for Human Rights Alvaro Gil-Robles earlier this summer. (Politiken, 12 September 2004, front page)

Islam on High School curriculum

When the new High School (Gymnasium) reform comes in to effect next year, students will be required to read texts from the Koran and Islam will become a part of the curriculum. According to Minister of Education Ulla Tørnæs it is a "natural development" that Islam becomes an obligatory subject. It's a religion that students, who often have immigrants as classmates, will constantly be confronted with. It's important that they become acquainted with religions of the world," she said. The Danish People's Party's Louise Frevert called it an attempt to bring in multi-ethnicity via the back door and she would be lodging a complaint with the minister. "It's natural that young people should be provided with a background of Islam, alongside other religions, but I can't accept that Islam is given such an integral position. One just can't equate Christianity with Islam", Frevert said.

(Jyllands Posten, 11 September 2004, front page, NE translation)

Human smugglers to be deported

A Danish local court has convicted two Indian citizens to one and a half, and two and a half years in prison for human smuggling. The two men will also face deportation after serving their sentences. The Indian men smuggled mainly Pakistani and Russian workers, who each had to pay DKK 45,000 for fake identification papers. The workers were forced by the two men to work illegally as newspaper deliverers. Both the convicted men are waiting to get their asylum application proceeded by the Danish authorities.

(Politiken, 11 September 2004, p. 12)

Vanunu applies for asylum in Denmark

Israeli Mordechai Vanunu who revealed the secret surrounding Israel's nuclear program is now applying for asylum in Denmark following his recent release after 18 years in prison. Vanunu is still considered a security risk in Israel and he is therefore prevented from leaving the country. Danish authorities have not yet proceeded his application.

(Politiken, 10 September 2004, p. 2)

Lykketoft criticised harsh government immigration policy

Immigration and the integration of foreigners will be a major theme at a coming election. This was clear after Social Democrat chairman Mogens Lykketoft surprisingly underlined the differences between his party and the government at his speech at the Social Democrat party congress yesterday. "Some say that we have taken on the attitudes of the right wing in the immigration and integration areas. This is completely wrong. We find it repulsive, when the Danish People's Party and the Liberal Party fuel their politics on prejudice and fear," he said.

(Jyllands Posten, 10 September 2004, p. 4, NE translation)

Flow of rejected asylum applicants to Norway

Asylum applicants have found a hole in the European asylum wall. Rejected applicants in Denmark have in the last year been able to travel to Norway and have their case retried. This is because of Denmark's opt-out of legal co-operation and non-participation in the so-called Dublin statute. The Norwegian authorities call on the Danish Minister of Refugee, Immigrants and Integration

Bertel Haarder to solve the problem. "Now I would not like to express myself undiplomatic here. But we would very much like Denmark to take part in the Dublin-co-operation with the other European countries," says Erling Hansen, Head of the Information Department at the Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development (KRD). In April, KRD Minister Erna Solberg estimated that some 600 asylum applicants from Denmark had attempted to have their case retried in Norway. (Information, 10 September 2004, front page, NE translation)

Finnish press

Increase of asylum-seekers in Finland only

A higher than usual number of asylum-seekers has arrived to Finland this year, while according to UNHCR's statistics during the same period the number decreased sharply in Sweden, Norway, Denmark and other industrialized countries. The number of asylum-seekers in industrialized countries was in the period January-June 22 per cent lower than during the same period last year and at the same time the lowest in 17 years. In Finland however, the number increased 20 per cent, while in Norway the number of asylum-seekers decreased 45 per cent, in Denmark 30 per cent and in Sweden 20 per cent. The Immigration Board has no answer to why the number is increasing in Finland but decreasing in the other Nordic countries. The Director of the Refugee and Asylum unit Jorma Peitsalo however points out that Denmark two years ago tightened its aliens law. When still in 2001 the number of asylum-seekers arriving in Denmark was many times higher than in Finland, this year fewer people have sought asylum in Denmark than in Finland. Referring to media reports, Peitsalo thinks it could be possible that asylum-seekers believe that also Sweden has tightened its asylum rules. He has no clue to why the number has decreased in Norway. Peitsalo does not want to make too much of an issue of these statistics. He does not think this year's increase in Finland is that impressive: "The number of asylum-seekers arriving in Finland is anyway so numerically small that an increase of a few hundred cases looks enormous percentage-wise". He adds that the processing of asylum applications has been speeded up this year: "So we think that in the future we will not anymore get that many cases who themselves know that their chances to get permission to stay are slim". (Helsingin Sanomat, 14 September 2004, p. A6)

Norwegian press

Number of asylum seekers halved

The number of applicants for asylum in Norway has declined by nearly half so far this year. Up to September, 5,238 people had applied for asylum, 47 per cent less than the year before, according to figures from the Police Immigration Unit (PIU). "The decline in the number of asylum seekers is not unique to Norway. It is a tendency we see over nearly all of Europe. That is why it is difficult to point out concrete measures that can explain the decline", said information consultant Roar Hanssen at the PIU. The largest group of

refugees are the 824 (1,988 at this time last year) that claim to be from Afghanistan, who make up 16 per cent of the total. Somalians are the next largest group, with 594 (1,584 at the same time last year) applicants so far in 2004, and make up 11.3 per cent of asylum seekers. In third place comes Serbia and Montenegro, which includes Kosovo Albanians, followed by asylum-seekers from Chechnya, Russia, Iraq and Iran. The PIU says that the pattern of the refugee stream is also changing. Fewer underage asylum seekers are coming to Norway. "After we began testing the age of asylum-seekers claiming to be under 18 fewer have come in this group. The reason is likely that the tests show that many of them who claimed to be minors turned out to be older than 18. Then the rules for gaining residency in Norway are different," said Paula Tolonen, Division Director at the Directorate of Immigration (UDI). One thing that has not changed is the lack of passports held by asylum seekers. This remains around 94 per cent, though some of these do carry some other type of identification papers. The Norwegian Organisation for Asylum Seekers (NOAS) believes Norway's tougher policies are having an effect. "It seems as if Norway has got a worse reputation among asylum seekers due to its stricter asylum policy the last two years. Also there has been an end to the great catastrophes we have had earlier, like the conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and in the Balkans," said Morten Tjessem, Secretary General of NOAS.
(Aftenposten, 16 September 2004)

Security measure may deny foreigners jobs

Airport jobs can be harder to come by for non-Norwegians in Norway. New regulations will require five years of documented character references in order for someone with a foreign background to gain the security clearance needed to work at an airport. Per-Arne Skogstad of the state Civil Aviation Authority said the new rules are a reaction to changing times. "There is no legal way (now) to deny them security clearance. If you can't find anything (in their past) either because you don't have access to information or because no one has any comment, it is interpreted as if there is nothing negative about the applicant," Skogstad said. "Today there are an increasing number with a foreign background working at Norwegian airports. Soon we will have a regulation that allows us to deny security clearance if the applicant does not have character references for the previous five years," Skogstad said.
(Aftenposten, 16 September 2004)

NOK 12 million collected for Darfur refugees

A nation-wide fund-raising campaign has been organized by the Norwegian Church Aid and the Norwegian Red Cross. NOK 12 million has been collected over the past two weeks for the refugees in the Southern Sudan region of Darfur. The Norwegian Church Aid (KN) runs three refugee camps in neighbouring Chad, and is also carrying out basic humanitarian aid in Darfur itself. However, we also try to assist in general reconstruction, and encourage people to return to farming, following the devastation by the attacking guerillas", a KN spokesperson says.
(The Norway Post/Vaart Land, 16 September 2004)

More difficult to integrate

Norway's largest immigrant group is not included in the country's main integration project. While certain sectors call for new arrivals to be required to learn the language and customs of their new homeland, more immigrant groups may find it increasingly difficult to learn Norwegian as funding is cut. The Parliament is now considering proposed legislation that will halt the right of immigrants with Norwegian citizenship to learn the language without charge. The same law proposes that immigrants arriving to work or reunite with families will no longer have the right to free Norwegian courses from 2005. While Norway's major integration project 'Introduksjonsprogrammet' (The Introduction Program), which requires refugees and asylum seekers to take part in education schemes, became effective from 1 September, Norway's biggest immigrant group is ignored. According to the Directorate of Immigration (UDI), those married to Norwegian citizens make up the country's largest immigrant group, not refugees. These people are not only not required to take part, they do not have the right to do so. The Labour Market Administration (Aetat), has an introduction program for immigrants in Oslo and the agency is worried about recent developments. "Now there are more proposals under submission that would limit the right to free Norwegian language lessons. We believe this is a step in the wrong direction. There are all too many language handicapped in unemployment lines as it is," Steinar Danielsen, manager of Aetat Intro, said. (Aftenposten, 10 September 2004)

Norwegians know little about Islam

A survey conducted by TNS Gallup on behalf of the Norwegian radio channel 'Kanal 24', reveals that Norwegians knowledge of Islam is limited. One in three Norwegians does not know that the Muslim god is called Allah. The population of Oslo is the most knowledgeable of Islam, while the people living in the north rank at the bottom. In the capital, 70 per cent of the population knew the name of the Muslims' god, while only 50 per cent of the population north of the county of Trøndelag knew the god's name. (Nettavisen, 10 September 2004)

NRC warns about atrocities committed towards refugees

The terrorist attacks in Russia lately, followed by President Putin's declarations to "get the terrorists wherever they may be", have increased fear among the roughly 2,600 Chechen refugees who since 1999 have sought refuge in the Pankisi Gorge region in Georgia. According to the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) the situation was tense already before the latest terrorist attacks in Russia. "Georgian police has on several occasions arrested, ill treated and threatened to send Chechen refugees home. At the same time there are reports of Russia putting increasingly more pressure on Georgia to get the authorities to send the refugees back to Chechnya. We now fear that the refugees in the Pankisi Gorge will be exposed to further assaults", says Secretary General, Raymond Johansen, who visited the region in July this year. He warns that the refugees' rights are sacrificed in the battle against terror, and that Chechen's in the Pankisi Gorge are used in a political game between Georgia and Russia. Georgia's new government has officially declared that it will recapture the two autonomous republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which disengaged from Georgia after the fall of

the Soviet Union. "To do this they need help from Russia. If Russia supports the Georgian demands on territorial integrity, it is plausible to think that Georgia will pay up with equal support regarding Russia's interests in Chechnya, Johansen warns. He believes that the situation is worsened additionally by the USA, which is also heavily involved in Georgia, both commercially and geo-politically, speaking out on several occasions about al-Qaida members and other terrorists hiding in the Pankisi Gorge region. "The international community has to ensure that both Russian and Georgian authorities respect the rights of the refugees. The Norwegian government has a particular responsibility in this matter", Johansen points out, and reminds that Norway now has the chairmanship in the European Council. (www.nrc.no, 9 September 2004)

Swedish press

Asylum-seekers lose financial support

The Minister for Migration Issues, Barbro Holmberg, will propose to abolish the housing allowance for asylum-seekers that live in their own accommodation. The money that is saved this way – SEK 65 million – can instead be used for healthcare to asylum-seekers. The contribution was introduced 10 years ago when there was a lack of asylum centres. Holmberg said that the system where people can choose their own accommodation has caused negative consequences like extreme overpopulation and isolation. (Dagens Nyheter, 16 September 2004, p. 11 & Svenska Dagbladet, p. 8)

Xenophobic groups plan demonstrations

The family of the murdered boy in Sollentuna plan to write a letter to the press and general public to take distance from all forms of xenophobia. The mother of the boy said, "it is terrible that these groups try to exploit my son's name in their advantage". It is expected that several groups will demonstrate during the weekend (18-19 September), although the police have not received any requests for permissions. The right wing group National Democrats has called for a manifestation to be held Saturday 18 September at the same place where the boy was killed. Sollentuna has contacted the municipality of Salem in the hope to learn from their experiences. Salem has similar experience of neo-nazi manifestations in memory of the murder of a young skinhead. (Dagens Nyheter, 15, 16 September 2004, pp. 6,10)

Forced unemployment for the Iraqis

Iraqi Yadgar Mohamad Fathi has been declined asylum in Sweden and is consequently faced with a peculiar situation: he cannot stay in Sweden and nor can the authorities force him back to Iraq; since he cannot stay in Sweden, he has also lost his permission to work. Given that he has lost his job he is entitled to allowance, i.e. if he 'co-operates' and returns to Iraq. There has been no mistake in Yadgar's case. The Migration Board has decided not to force anyone to return to Iraq but that all returns should be made 'voluntary', which does not imply that Iraqis can stay, on the contrary. The situation in Iraq is not dangerous enough to give Iraqis asylum in

Sweden, nor is it safe enough to force them back, at least if one is to consider the recommendations of the UNHCR, whereupon the Migration Board has made its decision. For Yadgar Mohamad Fathi, the redrawn of his work permission means that he will lose years of paid taxes, fees to the union, pensions and unemployment benefit society funds. Since Yadgar do not dare to return to Iraq, and tries to avoid the detention centre where he will be kept and feed like an animal, he now wonders what all the forced unemployed Iraqis should do every day in order to make their living?

(Svenska Dagbladet, 14 September 2004, Editorial – p. 4)

Police tones down racism claims

After a 14-year-old was murdered with a knife in Sollentuna, accusations of racism were made. Initially, the police spoke of a gang-related crime, but they now see the crime as a fight between two individuals. The day after the murder, around 200 persons came together at the scene of the crime. Many had shaved heads and were dressed in black. It was unclear how many had connections to the extreme-right demonstrations which take place in the city of Salem every year. A 16-year-old has been arrested after the knife incident.

(Dagens Nyheter, 13 September 2004, pp. 1, 5)

Nordic Headlines 21 September 2004

Danish press

Hard line on immigration could spread

The Council of Europe's Human Rights Commissioner Alvaro Gil-Robles has expressed fears that other countries could copy Denmark's family reunification legislation, which he calls the harshest in Europe. As he prepares to receive the Danish government's rebuttal of his criticism of Danish immigration legislation later this week, Gil-Robles says in an interview with Jyllands-Posten that he is concerned that EU countries seem intent on setting up a 'Fortress Europe.' "The tendency seems to be that countries keep tightening the immigration screw, just as in Denmark. They need workers but do not want them socially. It is unfair, because it is denying people their rights – especially the right to live as a family," he says. Gil-Robles claims that although many of the Danish rules for family reunification are in direct contravention of human rights conventions, he has no legal jurisdiction to force Denmark to change its policies – only to recommend that Danish politicians instigate change. Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder said he has no intention to change the controversial 24 years of age stipulation for family reunification because it does not contravene any EU law.

(Jyllands Posten, 19 September 2004, p. 4, NE translation)

Danish People's Party demands more immigration restrictions

To massive applause from party members at the party's congress in Odense, Danish People's Party (DF) leader Pia Kjaersgaard demanded even tougher immigration restrictions and linked the fight against terror to a harder line against 'Islamism' in Denmark. Kjaersgaard compared Islam to Nazism and Marxism and sounded the alarm against 'revolutionary movements who fight for 'Sharia' in all countries. "There are a number of fanatical, Islamic movements currently operating in Copenhagen. The government knows this but does not do anything about it," she said, claiming in addition that there are 5,000 children of immigrants in Denmark who are sent to Koran schools – or, as she characterised those, 'Koran jails.' "These parents have made us fully aware that they hate Denmark and do not want to be a part of our free civilisation. Our answer to them is – you are not welcome here," she said. Kjaersgaard warned the government that one of DF's conditions for supporting the new budget is that more refugees must be deported.

(Jyllands Posten, 19 September 2004, p. 7, NE translation)

Every eighth foreigner is absent from Danish courses

The Minister of Refugee, Immigration and Integration affairs, Bertel Haarder, proposes a law stating that it should cost foreigners DKK 5,000 for each time they fail one of the six modules in the obligatory language course. Haarder welcomes the proposal from the Social Liberals that persons with a permanent residence permit through family reunification should not automatically enjoy

social benefits, but should earn these by attending Danish language courses and work. However, he believes that the government's own proposal is easier to administer. Haarder visualises that DKK 30,000 of the DKK 50,000 bank-guarantee for family reunification could be used as a deposit. The guarantor can keep the amount if the family member attends and passes his/her courses. Alternatively, the money can be used to pay off fees of DKK 5,000 for failing language tests. Behind the proposal are the findings from a survey which found that one out of eight immigrants fails to attend the obliged language courses and that more than every fifth person dropped out of the courses because of sickness, absence, child-birth or problems with childcare. (Politiken, 17 September 2004, p. 6)

Radicals wants to strain immigration rules

The Social Liberals believe that immigrants should deserve their social benefits and propose therefore a point-based system where immigrants receive points for attending courses in Danish, education, or by having a job. Only after receiving a certain amount of points, immigrants and in particular those who came as part of a family reunification, would be able to enjoy social benefits, such as residence permits. According to the Social Liberals' chairwoman for immigration issues, Elsebeth Gerner, the proposal tightens up the existing rules where those reunited with their family instantly receive permanent residence permits while other immigrants must wait seven years. By a point-based system, it might take even longer time to receive a permanent residence permit and some might never receive one. It depends on how many points one has achieved. Another consequence is that the government will care less about whom one wants to marry. The proposal from the Social Liberals can be read as a response to a popular opinion that it is too easy for immigrants to receive social benefits, which puts strains on the welfare system. (Politiken, 16 September 2004, p. 4)

Norwegian press

Local uproar over asylum policy

Norway's largest municipalities have begun to protest asylum policies that are creating a homeless population. Refugees that are refused asylum but either cannot or will not return home are turned out on the street, without rights. Local governments decry the policy as inhumane. According to the new policy, asylum-seekers lose the right to board and lodging at a reception centre when their application is rejected. The government then defines them as being in the country illegally, and the refugees are only entitled to nominal emergency aid. 25 August Oslo's city councillor Margaret Eckbo wrote to ministers Dagfinn Høybråten, Erna Solberg and Laila Dævøy, who oversee social, local government and family affairs. She asked for a meeting in order to clarify how the City of Oslo should handle people ejected from state asylum centres, but has yet to receive a reply. "When they do not go home we cannot let them live on the street. No one

can live on the street. I want to cover their expenses until they can travel home. Otherwise the state must keep them in dormitories,” Eckbo told. “The policy is excellent if these people just went back home but we also have some that are not returnable. The state says we should just give them emergency aid, which is NOK 60 (USD 8.67) a day, but that is untenable,” Eckbo said. In Trondheim, Bergen, Stavanger, Kristiansand and Tromsø local governments have voiced despair and disbelief at the government's apparent disinterest in dealing with the consequences of the asylum policy. “I am astonished that the tragic consequences of what can happen have not been considered. When they are thrown out on the street without the means to live, the path to committing crimes to survive is short,” said deputy mayor Pia Svensgaard in Tromsø. “We cannot have people being thrown out on the street without anything to live on or a place to go. If this happens here, we must help. The government must sort this out,” said Bjarne Ugland, deputy mayor in Kristiansand. (Aftenposten, 20 September 2004)

Tougher citizenship rules

The government will introduce a compulsory two years residency in Norway for Norwegians who grow up abroad. Those who do not fulfill the required time in their home country will lose their citizenship the day they turn 22. “We have many Norwegian citizens who have never been to Norway. This is a problem,” Minister of Local Government and Regional Development Erna Solberg told a press seminar on the government's integration policy in Oslo on Monday. Solberg revealed some of the suggestions in a proposal for new citizenship laws that will be delivered this autumn. Solberg also wants stricter rules for references for person who are normally automatically entitled to Norwegian citizenship between the age of 21 and 23, on the condition that they have lived at least ten years in Norway and at least five of these before the age of 16. In the past ten years about 10,000 persons per year have been granted Norwegian citizenship. The government will also propose to introduce a more formal ceremony associated with the transition to Norwegian citizenship. Solberg used the occasion to defend her tough new policy on those failing to achieve asylum in Norway, and said she did not regret telling Trondheim that offering to care for rejected refugees would turn Trondheim into “Somalia's largest city”. Solberg said that those criticizing the new policy had no desire to confront the problem of what to do with refugees that failed to achieve asylum but refused to leave the country. (Aftenposten, 20 September 2004)

Rampant tax dodging in immigrant shops

Tax authorities have uncovered about NOK 70 million (USD 10.1 million) in unpaid taxes in a major action against the city's immigrant shopkeepers. Fully 47 of 51 grocery stores checked were found to be selling undeclared fruit and vegetables. “We are talking about large sums. In average it works out to around NOK 1.5 million per business. The worst cases have hidden over NOK 5 million from taxation,” said Oslo Tax Office director Jan-Egil Kristiansen. The tax authorities targeted businesses that had clear signs of suspicious practices - low

income, large inventory and low official sales. "These are companies where one sees that something must be wrong. Shops buy fruit and vegetables without receipts so the wares are bought under the table and can be sold the same way," Kristiansen said. "These shops have a completely different purchasing pattern than typical Norwegian businesses. They import goods, travel to Sweden to buy goods and do not declare them and buy in quantity during sales from other Norwegian shops. This makes it difficult for authorities to follow the accounting trail," the director said. Of the 47 businesses caught 17 have been reported to the police. Most of these have been checked twice and not corrected their practices. Tax authorities hope that the owners have now gotten a shock. Once the tax authorities have cleaned up the markets, shops will have a hard time finding ways to keep sales off the books, and produce prices should rise in the capital. "There is little doubt that the tax evasion is part of the reason these stores can have cheaper prices. That is why we want to stop it - otherwise it ruins the competitive situation for other shops," Kristiansen said.

(Aftenposten, 17 September 2004)

Norwegian politician fears Islamic party

Carl I. Hagen, head of the Progress Party, continues his crusade against Islam, stating that it is only a matter of time before an Islamic party is established in Norway. Even if there currently are no concrete plans for an Islamic party in Norway, Hagen said his worse nightmare is Islamic fundamentalists at the parliament, and he continues by stating that the government naïve. "I am convinced that it is just a matter of time before we get a political party based on Islam," Hagen stated in a TV interview. "Of course, I do not know if it will be a moderate or fundamental party, but I am keeping an eye on the international expansion the Islamic fundamentalism is organizing and the co-ordination of Muslims in Europe as well, and I am convinced that it will come to Norway too. It may take five or ten years, but it will come (...) This will be something I will fight as long as I live," Hagen said. Among Muslims, there are many divided opinions regarding forming a political party. Iklaq Ahmad, spokesperson for the Islamic cultural centre in Norway, is positive to a political party, while Khalid Mahmood, who represents the Labour party in the Oslo city council, does not think there is anything to collect from forming a political party. "I do not think Muslims can or want to have a party based on our religion." "There are no concrete plans of creating a party in Norway, but if a party was formed, Hagen has nothing to fear (...) All Muslims are not fundamentalists (...) A Muslim party would be good for the democracy." Ahmad said. Frank Aarebrot, Norwegian election researcher, agreed with Ahmad and said that there is no reason to worry. "The truth is that there are no Islamic parties established on the national level in any European country that originally had a non-Muslim population," Aarehold explained. "In Antwerp a party was created as a reaction when a party that is hostile against foreigners got majority in the city council, so the chance that a Muslim party is created in Norway may increase if the Progress Party would get a majority in the Oslo city council."

(Nettavisen, 17 September 2004)

Swedish press

Less money for refugees

The Minister for Finance, Bosse Ringholm, presented his budget proposal for 2005. The main points are lower taxes and a decrease of unemployment. Less money will be set aside for refugee-politics. The main reasons are that fewer people seek asylum in Sweden and that it is estimated that a lower number of permits of stay will be granted.

(Dagens Nyheter, 21 September 2004, p.8 & Stockholm City, p. 3)

Ombudsman against discrimination passed away

Margareta Wadstein, the National Ombudsman against ethnical discrimination has passed away at the age of 59.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 21 September 2004, p. 11)

More people from new EU countries look for work in Sweden

Requests for work permits from the new EU countries have increased with 74 percent compared with last summer. Most requests have come from Poland (1,217 compared to 578 in 2003) and Lithuania (354 requests compared to 175 last year). The National Social Insurance Board, however, has not seen an increase in requests for child- or accommodation support.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 20 September 2004, pp. 1, 6)

Three escaped from reception centre

Three young men from North Africa have escaped from a centre of the Migration Board. The men will be deported because their asylum claims have not been granted. They were kept in detention, as there was a risk that they would go underground. The centre has been inaugurated last winter and several escapes have taken place during the year.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 20 September 2004, p. 6 & Dagens Nyheter, p. 5)

Demonstrations in Sollentuna

Some 200 persons came together in Sollentuna 18 September, to honour the murdered 16-year-old boy, James Waites. Later during the day, a march was held by the right-extremist Salem Foundation, although the parents of the boy had requested them not to do so.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 19 September 2004, p. 7 & Dagens Nyheter, p. 6)

Citizenship can be revoked

The government wants to research whether it is possible to revoke citizenships that have been issued on wrong grounds. Last year, the District Court in Norrköping sentenced a civil servant of the Migration Board to two years imprisonment, after he had sold 13 Swedish citizenships for SEK 5,000 each. Although the citizenships had been obtained illegally, the state can not withdraw those. The Minister for Integration, Mona Sahlin, also wants to investigate whether it is possible to introduce a new citizenship-test.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 17 September 2004, p. 6 & Dagens Nyheter, p. 5)

Forced to leave family

Elez and Ziza Ljosaj (74 and 69 years old) came to Sweden in 1999, together with their children and grandchildren. When the war was at its worst in Kosovo, the whole family was considered to be in need of protection, as they are ethnic Albanians. They all received a temporary permit of stay in Sweden, where one daughter already had settled. With time, the whole family received permanent permits of stay, except Elez and Ziza. The children wanted to take care of them and the couple went underground. The police found them 8 March 2002 and started the procedure to deport them. Back in Kosovo, they lived in an old factory without heat. Their health deteriorated and their children became more desperate to get their parents back. Last August they were back in Sweden and applied for asylum 10 October 2003. They received two negative decisions and will find out today when they will be deported to Kosovo. Welfare worker Jan Johansson of Linköping sees the family as a good example of the arbitrary way the Aliens Appeals Board works. The board seems to consider the law as something that can be applied in different ways from case to case, he said. According to him, the reasons to deny asylum would never be sufficient in a real court-case, as the complete family situation should have been taken into account.

(Dagens Nyheter, 17 September 2004, p. 19)

Aliens Appeals Board to be discontinued

The criticised Aliens Appeals Board will be discontinued. The future of asylum-seekers will be decided in common court negotiations. The National Courts Administration, however, does not believe the plans of the politicians. From 1 January 2006, the appeals in asylum cases will be dealt with in national courts (District Courts and Administrative Courts of Appeal). The government has put aside SEK 600 million for the reform and a committee will be appointed to investigate how the closing-down will take place. The General Director of the National Courts Administration, Stefan Strömberg, is of the opinion that the cost-calculation and timeline of the government are very unrealistic. There is a risk that the reform is pushed through too fast which will effect the quality, he says.

(Dagens Nyheter, 17 September 2004, p. 19)

Nordic Headlines 30 September 2004

Danish press

Iraqi minister warns refugees not to go home

Iraqi refugees in Denmark should not go back to Iraq voluntarily, according to the Iraqi Minister of Migration Sorya Y. Isho, after a meeting with Danish Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration and Minister of Development Bertel Haarder 'It is natural that Iraqis want to return and help to reconstruct Iraq, which is completely destroyed. But we say: Wait a few months. We would like to receive them in a civilised manner, but we need more time. I will not accept that Iraqis come home as refugees in their own country,' she says. Haarder will present legislation in the course of the coming months that will give a cash subsidy to returning refugees if they go voluntarily, but say that forced repatriations are not out of the question later.

(Jyllands Posten, 30 September 2004, p 2, NE translation)

Iraqi minister resists Haarder pressure

Iraq is not ready to receive Iraqi refugees currently in Denmark. This was the clear message to Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration and Minister of Development Bertel Haarder from Iraqi Minister of Migration Sorya Isho yesterday in Copenhagen. "I ask for patience. Everyone should understand the problems we have. Our failing economy and lack of security means that we are not ready to receive refugees returning home," he said. Haarder is under pressure from the rightist Danish People's Party to repatriate the refugees as a condition for the party's support for the government's 2005 budget proposal. Haarder has worked hard to get the Iraqi government to accept Iraqi refugees that returns voluntary. The Iraqi resistance is shared by the UNHCR that argues that the conditions are too bad in Iraq. "It is not just a question of bad security, the infrastructure is in many cities too devastated and it is not liveable enough" says UNHCR's spokeswoman Marie Helene Verney.

(Politiken, 29 September 2004, front page & p 4, NE translation)

Exile Iraqis: rejected asylum-seeker killed

Danish exile Iraqis says that a rejected asylum-seeker was killed when he returned to Iraq. According to the Group for Iraqi Asylum-Seekers in Denmark (GIA DK), Meri Ibrahim Kreci was killed by an unknown perpetrator 12 of August in Alsaniya south of Baghdad. Søren Søndergaard chairman of the Danish Red-Green Alliance foreign affairs group, asks the Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration, Bertel Haarder for an explication. He continues that if it turns out to be true, then it also questions the policy that the government has carried out, against the recommendations from the UNHCR. The security is non-existing in Iraq and the authorities cannot protect people adds Søren Søndergaard.

(Politiken 29 September 2004, p. 4)

Haarder to offer cash to Iraqis to go home

Officials at the Ministry of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration are putting their final touches to a plan that will offer Iraqi refugees cash to return to their country. Their local municipality will also receive a development aid benefit for receiving them. Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder will not comment as yet, but is to discuss the details of a cash-for-refugees scheme with Iraqi Minister for Migration Sorya Isho who is visiting Denmark today. At present, 607 asylum-rejected Iraqi refugees are in the country, 501 of whom refuse to leave voluntarily. A previous Iraqi refugee scheme included a DKK 18,000 cash benefit. The Danish People's Party has announced recently that it would not vote for the government's budget proposal unless the government moves forward with the repatriations of Iraqi refugees.

(Politiken, 28 September 2004, p 7, NE translation)

Haarder wants shops for ghetto areas

The government is discussing with the EU Commission the idea of having private firms, such as shops, hair dresses, and dentists, to establish themselves in public cooperative housing societies as a way to avoid ghettos. Since the cooperative housing societies are tax-free, the proposal could go against the EU prohibition against state subsidy which contributes to unequal competition between private companies. However, Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder believes that the Commission will consider the social benefits and accept the proposal. Two new law proposals to be presented by the government next year suggest that municipalities with ghettos should have the possibility to skip the waiting list when they assign to establish themselves in run-down areas. Instead the companies would create job opportunities for people in the area making them less dependent on the welfare system.

(Politiken, 27 September 2004, p. 7)

Danish People's Party now wants to integrate immigrants

The rightist anti-immigration Danish People's Party will now accept the use of taxpayers' money to integrate immigrants into Danish society. Previously, the party has rejected all integration policies, saying that money was better spent keeping immigrants out instead. The change of policy is a result of the stream of asylums and family reunifications being reduced to a trickle. "Now we have a bit of a breather, and it is possible to use our surplus energy on integrating. That is why we can discuss this now," says party deputy chairman Peter Skaarup.

(Jyllands Posten, 26 September 2004, p 4, NE translation)

UNICEF sceptical of Danish support for Kenya camps

Danish plans to support the operation of refugee camps for Somali refugees in neighbouring Kenya, instead of in Denmark, is met with scepticism by head of the UN children's fund UNICEF in Somalia Jesper Mørch. "The idea is to buy off the refugees. But the logical consequence is that you are actually selling the unrest to the others. In this case Kenya, which is unsafe and fragile," he says.

(Politiken, 26 September 2004, p 4, NE translation)

Danish companies losing orders due to visa policies

Danish exporters criticise the Danish Immigration Agency for slow and bureaucratic procedures, and often rejections of visas for business contacts, ultimately costing Danish companies orders from abroad. "It should not be the Immigration Agency's decision on whether we get an order or not," says CEO of Sciteq-Hammel, Peter Sejer Nielsen, who almost lost an order due to Immigration Agency reluctance to give a visa to a Pakistani business contact. (Jyllands Posten, 25 September 2004, front page, NE translation)

Social Liberals angered by government rejection of Council of Europe

Social Liberal leader Marianne Jelved is angered by the government response to Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner Alvaro Gil Robles. This is after reading the government report that rejects the Commissioner's contention that Danish immigration laws are in conflict with conventions on human rights. "The government account is arrogant and superficial, and the points of criticism that are raised by the Commissioner are just brushed aside," she says. At the same time, the Social Liberal leader opens up a possibility for compromise with the other main opposition party the Social Democrats over the controversial so-called 24-year rule. The rule, which is supported by both the government and the Social Democrats, states that family reunification cannot take place if marriages are entered under the age of 24. Now Jelved says that it is not the rule as such that is the contentious issue. "The problem is that the rule hits much harder and a much wider group of people, and that that is unfair," she says. (Information, 24 September 2004, p 3 & Berlingske Tidende, front page, NE translation)

Expensive attempts to buy off Somali refugees

The repatriation of 11 asylum applicants to Somaliland in Africa has cost the Danish taxpayer DKK 168 million or DKK 15 million per refugee. Local politicians had demanded development aid if they were to accept rejected asylum applicants in 1997. (Politiken, 24 September 2004, p 5, NE translation)

Iranian refugee to take state to court

An Iranian refugee has been granted legal aid to demand compensation from the Refugee Board that in 1999 rejected his application and repatriated him to Iran. The 23-year old man was arrested by the Iranian regime and put through two years of systematic torture. (Berlingske Tidende, 24 September, p 9, NE translation)

Government rejects criticism of immigration law

Danish regulations on family reunification do not violate human rights. This is the conclusion of a report released yesterday, which has been worked out by lawyers in three ministries. It concludes that the criticism by Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Alvaro Gil-Robles is unfounded. 'We have used the opportunity to examine all the legislation closely, and we are convinced that it

is not in conflict with international conventions. In fact we are strengthened in our conviction after we have made the examination,' says Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder. The report is a response from the government to criticism of Danish legislation from the Council of Europe that was released in the early summer. The Council of Europe criticism instigated a split between the opposition parties the Social Democrats and the Social Liberals: The Social Liberals said they would only join a government with the Social Democrats if the controversial 24-year old age rule for family reunification was retracted.

(Jyllands Posten, 23 September 2004, front page & Berlingske Tidende, front page, NE translation)

Kenya doubts Danish plans

The government of Kenya welcomes Denmark's support for Somali refugees in Kenya but says it does not imply that Denmark can send their rejected Somali asylum-seekers to Kenya. "We would really like to participate in making the circumstances better for the Somali refugees, so that many more get the possibility to return to Somalia. That is why we are looking forward to meet with the Danish delegation," says a representative for the Kenyan government. However, sources in the Kenyan governments say that the negotiations could be jeopardised if it turns out that Denmark wants to use Kenya as a waste site for their problems with rejected Somali refugees. Mohamed Gelle from the Somali network in Denmark is positive towards the help that Denmark wants to give Kenya but fears that this is only another step in direction towards a 'Fortress Europe'. Furthermore, Gelle believes that help to neighbouring countries should not be used for keeping refugees out of Denmark. One should also consider whether Kenya is a safe place for Somali refugees to stay, considering reports on assaults of Somali refugees in Kenya.

(Politiken, 23 September 2004, p 7)

Help for Kenya

Minister of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Bertel Haarder will offer Kenya financial and political assistance to help deal with the estimated 155,000 Somalian refugees currently living under miserable conditions in camps throughout the country. As part of the government's plan to keep refugees in the vicinity of where they are fleeing from and stop them heading for Denmark, a team of top officials from the ministry will head for Kenya at the beginning of next month to assess the situation.

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

Finnish press

Finland not enthusiastic about refugee camps outside EU

The German Minister of the Interior, Otto Schily is expected to raise a specified proposal regarding transit camps for asylum-seekers at an informal meeting for Ministers of the Interior and Ministers of Justice of the EU member states, which

take place in Haag at the end of the week. Germany has been preparing the proposal in cooperation with the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR). Schily has stated in several interviews that he wants to prevent human tragedies, such as migrants drowning when trying to cross the Mediterranean to Europe in over-crowded boats. The new proposal suggests that people who try to come to Europe this way are to be stopped and returned to camps outside the EU area. However, the camps would be financed by the EU, and UNHCR would examine the need for asylum. Libya, Tunisia, Egypt and Ukraine have been mentioned as possible locations for such camps. Schily's suggestion is being supported by the incoming Commissioner for Justice, Freedom and Security, Rocco Buttiglione. "Finland is reluctant to the idea. It is not clear what country's law the processing of asylum applications should apply to, says Pekka Järviö of the Finnish Ministry of Interior. According to Järviö, Finland will reconsider the matter if a new model approved by UNHCR is found.

(Helsingin Sanomat, 29 August 2004, p. A21)

Norwegian press

Iraqi minister asks Norway to grant asylum

The Iraqi minister for displacement and migration, Pascale Warda, asks Norway to postpone the return of Iraqi asylum seekers. Warda, who delivered the same plea to Sweden on Monday, arrived in Norway Wednesday night. Warda will meet Minister of Local Government and Regional Development Erna Solberg on Thursday to discuss the issue. "I am eager to hear what kind of tempo the Iraqi authorities see for the repatriation of exiled Iraqis. But let me make it clear that we have not considered any policy change on the grounds of this meeting," Solberg said. Solberg said that Norway's policy was to send Iraqis back as quickly as possible. The autonomous Iraqi government has stated that it will first concentrate on aiding the roughly 800,000 internal refugees in the country, plus taking in returnees from neighboring nations before opening the way back for Iraqis in affluent Europe. Over 1,000 Iraqis that have had their application for asylum rejected continue to live in Norway. Most of these are Kurds.

(Aftenposten, 30 September 2004)

Illegal deported after 14 year in Norway

After hiding in various apartments and even in the mountains for more than a year, Phu Hung Tran caught and deported in May this year. Tran from Vietnam as a boat refugee at the age of 12 and has been living for 14 years in Norway. He is now back in Vietnam but friends tell he is depressed and merely surviving on money being sent from friends in Norway. Tran was initially expelled after being sentenced to jail for violence in the mid-1990s, including a fight between Vietnamese and Thai gangs in Oslo, where a young Thai was killed. A Norwegian court has come to the conclusion that the expulsion was a disproportional intervention, and therefore the six year old expulsion order is invalid. Even though Tran has won the case he can not travel back Norway

straight away. As long as the deadline for appeal has not been passed, the judgement is not legally binding. Tran's formal status is still that he expelled from Norway for life.

(Aftenposten, 30 September 2004)

Axe attack sparks wide debate

The rejected asylum/seeker who boarded a commuter plane with an axe and carpet knife and attacked the pilots has predictably led to a roaring debate about topical issues from immigration to air safety. A variety of emergency measures have been proposed. Minister of Local Government and Regional Development Erna Solberg will now consider jailing asylum-seekers that refuse to identify themselves. Refugees with psychological problems will not lose their spots at reception centers, and a new program in cooperation with the Department of Health is underway to give this issue more attention. Solberg noted that a legal basis exists for remanding in custody those who refuse to provide an identity. At the moment this requires a court order per case, but she wants to find ways to pressure people who delay deportation by refusing to cooperate. Although Norwegian media published reports giving the man's age and nationality, this is only based on the sparse information supplied by the asylum-seeker himself, and nothing definite about him is verifiably known. Progress Party leader Carl I. Hagen called for all asylum-seekers whose applications are rejected to be transferred to a closed center, but Solberg believes this is in conflict with the European Convention of Human Rights.

(Aftenposten, 30 September 2004)

Asylum-seeker attacked pilots with axe

Two pilots were injured when a passenger went amok with an axe on a flight from Narvik to Bodø in the north of Norway. A passenger was also injured in the attack. The assailant, an asylum-seeker from Algeria, was arrested at Bodø airport Wednesday afternoon. "The man has been living in recent weeks at an asylum centre in northern Norway," Police operation leader Arve Westgaard said, and added that terrorism was not an aspect of the attack. When police searched the man they found a carpet knife in his inside pocket and a hunting knife was found in his baggage. Police originally believed he had used the plane's emergency axe to attack the pilots, but a small hunting axe was used. The three injured have been taken to hospital but are not said to have life-threatening injuries. The 30-year-old Algerian had recently had his application for asylum in Norway rejected and had been living in a reception center longer than legally allowed. According to the police, the man is now receiving medical treatment.

(Aftenposten, 29 September 2004)

Racist e-mail angers drivers

One out of three bus drivers at 'Norgesbuss Romerike' has an immigrant background, yet one of the managers sent around an e-mail with racist content. Unsurprisingly, many of the staff are offended and have complained to union officials. Many drivers have now sent a letter expressing their dismay, and stating

that such episodes erode confidence in management. The e-mail was a "math test for Pakistanis". The recipient is asked to fill in their name and which gang they are a member of, before being asked to solve problems about 'Jamal', 'Muhammed', 'Abdullah', 'Ibrahim' and others who sell drugs, pimp, shoot and murder. Erik Holmeide, head manager at 'Norgesbuss' deeply regretted the incident. 'Norgesbuss Romerike' has about 130 drivers, with around 40 of immigrant background. Holmeide understands the reaction to the e-mail but does not believe the message was an expression of the sender's racism. (Aftenposten, 29 September 2004)

Organisations threaten to withdraw from the Immigration Board

The Norwegian Immigration Appeals Board (UNE) is being heavily criticised by 13 member organisations which now also threaten to withdraw from the Board. The organisations, consisting of Amnesty, Norwegian Organisations for Asylum Seekers (NOAS), Norwegian People's Aid, Norwegian Refugee Council and Save the Children, among others, have sent a letter to the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development (KRD) explaining their dissatisfaction with the situation. The organisations accuse the Board of weakening the rule of law for asylum-seekers. Morten Tjessem of NOAS, who acts as a spokesperson for the organisations, says flaws and faults about have been pointed out but nothing has been done in order to improve the situation. Lay people do not have the opportunity to obtain knowledge and insight in individual cases in due time. Documents are not handed out in time and the organisations feel they do not have full access to country reports. This leads to difficulties in presenting arguments which differs when a case is being processed. The organisations feel like being held hostage by UNE in this situation, but Tjessem says they still want to await KRD's response before taking any further steps. (Aftenposten, 29 September 2004)

Muslim leader defends suicide bombing

Basim Ghozlan, Director of the Islamic Association in Norway has defended suicide bombing under certain circumstances in a question and answer page at the web site islam.no. Progress Party leader Carl I. Hagen said in a press release that the comment did not surprise him, and renewed his offensive against sectors of the Muslim community. "If the war is legal, seen from an Islamic viewpoint, and if one does not have the possibility to harm the enemy with other means than offering one's own life, then this is legal," Ghozlan said in reply to a young boy's question about suicide bombing, radio station Kanal 24 reports. Ghozlan also emphasized that such actions could not harm the innocent. "The necessity of not harming innocents must not be forgotten. Unfortunately we see many places where suicide bombers hurt far more innocents than those they wish to harm. In Iraq innocent people are killed nearly every day by such blind bombs. This is not jihad. The prophet would never encourage such a thing," Ghozlan wrote. Petter Eide in Amnesty International said the statement was unacceptable and encouraged Muslims to distance themselves from it. Hagen

stated his agreement with Eide and called the statement an eye-opener for what the Islamic fundamentalist community in Norway represents.
(Aftenposten, 28 September 2004, p. 2)

Sudan summit in Oslo

Representatives from the government in Sudan, several rebellion groups, and representatives from more than 30 countries met for a conference about Sudan and Darfur in Oslo Monday. "This is the first time so many of the parties in the conflict meet," said Karsten Klepsvik, press officer at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to TV 2 Nettavisen. A total of 100 participants from 30 countries are meeting in Oslo Monday and Tuesday. During the conference donor countries, international organizations, and parties in Sudan are going to discuss the humanitarian situation in Darfur and prepare a plan for international aid to Sudan after a final peace agreement has been signed. The meeting is a part of a Norwegian organized international conference for donor nations which will take place when a peace agreement is signed in Sudan. The authorities in Sudan are represented together with the rebellion organization Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLM) and two of the rebellion organizations in Darfur, Sudan Liberation Army (SLM) and Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). Norway and Italy are leading the international support group for Sudan, IGAD Partner Forum, and are hosts for the meeting. It is the first time the three rebellion movements and the government in Sudan, together with the international society, participate in a collected work through of the aid needed in Darfur and Sudan. It is also a part of the development in an international conference for donor countries which Norway has offered to invite to when a peace agreement for Sudan is signed.
(Nettavisen, 28 September 2004)

Muslim Uighur detainee wins Rafto

Rebiya Kadeer, a leading Muslim Uighur political activist jailed by China, won a Norwegian human rights award on Thursday. Former winners of the Rafto prize have sometimes gone on to win the Nobel Peace Prize. Norway's Rafto Foundation said it was giving its annual award to 58-year-old businesswoman Rebiya Kadeer. Kadeer has been jailed since 2000 in a case criticized by the United States and others. It urged her unconditional release and said the prize was a "strong appeal to the Chinese government to respect and protect the civil, economic and cultural rights of the Uighurs as well as other minorities in China". Many of the Turkic-speaking Uighurs, who make up a majority of Xinjiang's 19 million people, favor greater autonomy for the northwestern region. The Rafto prize, set up in 1986, is worth NOK 50,000 crowns (USD 7,381) and named after the late human rights activist Thorolf Rafto.
(Aftenposten, 23 September 2004)

Labor Party suggests age limit for marriage

A Labor Party committee has proposed an age limit of 21 years for reuniting families. In practice this would mean an age limit for marriages between Norwegians and foreigners, or an inability to live together in Norway. One of the

suggestions from the party's immigration and integration policy group was to implement an age limit akin to Denmark's recent and controversial model. The group also suggested examining the effects of a higher limit, 24 years, which is currently in use in Denmark. The suggestion has sparked internal debate. The reasoning behind the legislation is to hinder arranged or forced marriages in minority communities but the law would apply to all. Denmark's policy has resulted in many Danes being forced to relocate with their foreign spouses, often to Sweden where they are called 'love refugees'. Two years ago the populist Progress Party made a similar proposal and the Labor Party opposed it. The Labor Party refused to discuss the proposal until it was ready for presentation to the party's national board. Labor politician Knut Storberget took part in the policy committee and would not comment on it now, though he made his reasoning clear. "I agree with the Swedish government and the Swedish Minister of Justice who have argued against such a proposal on the grounds that it is a violation of human rights, inappropriate and in addition seems discriminatory," Storberget said.

(Aftenposten, 23 September 2004)

More immigrant labour wanted

Minister of Local Government and Regional Development Erna Solberg says Norway needs more qualified immigrant labour. Job search visa quotas for specialist professions are not being filled and Norway's population levels also need help with an infusion from abroad. "Without immigration Norway's population will decline after 2015, even though we have Europe's highest birth rate," Solberg told a press seminar on integration and immigration. Solberg said that there is no reason to fear immigration, but she made no bones about wanting to attract qualified professionals that can do a job in Norway. Currently there are 5,000 visas open for immigrant job seekers, and only 2,000 of these are filled. Solberg said that immigration could only be part of a population solution for Norway, and said an ideal situation would be what happens in Canada, where incoming workers have a higher average education than Canadians. New regulations will give employers greater freedom to specify their own needs for qualified labor and the government will have less of a say in the definition. "In addition to the new employer defined needs for hiring that are coming we have already expanded the seasonal labor period and increased the possibility of special employment in the fishing industry. And we will also arrange for untrained labor to enter from the European Economic Area (EEA)," Solberg said. Solberg also said that the coming budget will allocate three times as much funding to teaching immigrants Norwegian.

(Aftenposten, 21 September 2004, p. 5)

Swedish press

Lawyers Against Discrimination

A new organisation is being formed in Stockholm, "Lawyers against discrimination". The goal of the organisation is to show that there are lawyers

who are worried about discrimination in society, and to build a fund with support of the EU in order to handle discrimination cases in Sweden and Europe.
(Dagens Nyheter, 30 September 2004, p. 10)

Deportations may be moved to courts

The Minister of Justice, Thomas Bodström, wants to move decisions on detention and deportation of suspected terrorists from the government to the courts. The law on special control of foreigners allows that foreigners, suspected of being terrorists, can be kept in detention while waiting for deportation. Based on this law, the government decided last Tuesday that an Iranian, suspected for terrorism, should be kept in detention another two weeks before deportation. The government has decided to move decisions on asylum from the Aliens Board to the courts this autumn. Therefore, he believes that the law on special control of foreigners should be decided by the courts.
(Svenska Dagbladet, 30 September 2004, p. 15)

No asylum camps outside the European Union

There will be no sending of asylum-seekers to distant refugee centres outside the EU. This promise was given to the Swedish Migration Minister Barbro Holmberg by the coming EU Commissioner Rocco Buttiglione when they met in Rome on Tuesday. Migration Minister Barbro Holmberg stated: "He told me very clearly that there will be no question of sending people to reception camps. I do believe that he gave me assurances that he will not pursue that issue." Barbro Holmberg added that she made it clear that Sweden is completely against sending refugees from Europe to reception camps in for example North Africa. Barbro Holmberg also explained that Rocco Buttiglione put the emphasis on other issues, such as increasing the capacity to care for refugees in the countries they reside in, as well as creating more possibilities for people from outside the EU to arrive here legally. The idea of reception centres outside the EU borders will be a hot potato at the ministerial council later in the week.
(Dagens Nyheter, 29 September 2004, p. 10)

Mass migration does not occur

This year, the net-immigration from the new EU countries will be 1,775 according to a prognosis by Jonas Eriksson of the Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies. At the same time, there seems to be an increase in the number of temporary employed staff members, according to the Swedish Trade Union Confederation. The most common motive to move is the possibility to increase income. As the difference in income is still big between the "old" and the "new" EU countries, there is still an economical incentive to migrate to Sweden. However, the economy of the new EU countries gets better and approaches the rest of the EU, which will not lead to increased immigration. Also, fertility is low in the new countries, which will lead to a shortage of employees. It will therefore be easier to get a job. Thord Petterson of the Swedish Trade Union Confederation says that "many who are here and work temporarily have bad terms and conditions, and there are signs that the number of temporarily employed people from the new EU countries increases".

(Svenska Dagbladet, 24 September 2004, Näringsliv p.6)

Six companies charged with discrimination

Dagens Nyheter's research regarding discrimination of immigrants at the employment market has resulted in the fact that 6 companies have been reported to the Ombudsman against ethnic discrimination. The companies have been reported by the Network of Anti-discrimination Offices in Sweden.

(Dagens Nyheter, 22 September 2004, p.13)

Many Bosnian refugees have returned to their homes

One million Bosnians, around 45 per cent of those who fled the war between 1992 and 1995, have now returned to their homes, according to UNHCR. "It appears that many people in Bosnia and Herzegovina have decided to end this devastating episode in their lives" declared the High Commissioner for Refugees Ruud Lubbers. Around 2.2 million refugees were forced to flee in the heaviest conflict in Europe since the Second World War, many of those were Muslims who were victim of the ethnical cleansing by Serbs. Of the 1.2 million that are still registered as refugees, it is believed that more than half have acquired new houses, either in Bosnia or abroad, said Udo Janz, UNHCR's Representative in Bosnia. He suggested with this, that it is not likely that they will return to their old homes.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 22 September 2004, p. 21)