

The Schleswig Party (SP)

and

Bund Deutscher Nordschleswiger (BDN)

The German minority in Denmark lives in the southern part of Jutland, in the region of North-Schleswig, in Danish also referred to as "Sønderjylland", north of the German-Danish border. There are about 15.000 members in the German minority today.

The "Bund Deutscher Nordschleswiger" (BDN) was founded in November 1945 and is still the main organization of the German minority. With its membership ranging slightly below 3000 it is divided into 4 municipality and 19 local subdivisions.

The representative party of the BDN is the Schleswig Party (SP), which has 8 members in the 4 municipality councils. The party politically promotes and protects the cultural and social activities of the German minority in North-Schleswig. The SP also takes an active role in projects across the border between Germany and Denmark and is the only regional party in North-Schleswig. All members of the head organization are simultaneously members of the Schleswig Party, since there is no division between the cultural and the political organization. The Schleswig Party is an organizational part of the BDN.

The main aims of the 'Bund Deutscher Nordschleswiger'

- to maintain and support the intellectual and cultural connections with the people of Germany and at the same time being aware of commitments to Denmark

- co-operation with the Danish State where the general community is concerned

- to reduce the general significance of the border, and more specifically to reduce border-related barriers in various fields of life - keeping the aim of European integration in mind

The head office of the BDN is the Deutsche Generalsekretariat in Apenrade/Aabenraa, where also the office of the SP is based.

To secure the contact to the Parliament, a Contact Committee at the Danish Parliament was established in 1965, one year after the minority had lost its seat. In the Copenhagen Contact Committee the minister of the interior is chairman, and all parties in parliament are represented. The committee can discuss all questions that concern the German minority directly. Ten years later (1975) a parallel Contact Committee at the state parliament in Kiel in Schleswig-Holstein (Germany) was established.

Since 1983 the Copenhagen Secretariat of the German minority has represented the interests of the German minority in dealing with the Danish Parliament and Government. This Secretariat is financed by the Danish state. It is the objective of the Secretariat to follow the legislation process in Parliament and to secure the cultural and social rights of the German minority. To keep in daily contact with the administrative and political life in the Danish capital is very important for all minority organizations.

The head of the Secretariat also cooperates with the Government and administration in international affairs. He has often been a member of the official Danish delegation at CSCE meetings, when minority questions were on the agenda.

Denmark has ratified the Council of Europe's Framework Convention and the Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. The Framework Convention took effect 1999, the Charter in 2001.

The Development and the organization of the Schleswig Party

Since 1920 the minority has been represented on local and regional councils, while from 1920 to 1943 and from 1953 to 1964 it was represented in the national Parliament, the Folketing, in Copenhagen by one member.

Since 1964 the party does no longer run for the Danish Parliament, since the voting system does not allow for any clause in favor of minorities. In 1973, 1975, and 1977, however, the German minority regained a seat in the Folketing by negotiating the nomination of a German candidate on the polling list of the Centre-Democrats, a Danish political party of liberal creed.

Having lost its seat in the Danish Parliament in 1979, the SP concentrated on canvassing for county council and local council elections until 2007. After the structural reform of 2007 the Schleswig Party only took part in the elections on municipality level in North-Schleswig. There are now four municipalities (Tondern/Tønder, Sonderburg/Sønderborg, Apenrade/Aabenraa, Hadersleben/Haderslev). The municipality-elections are held every four years.

The latest election on municipality-level took place in the year 2013. The SP stood for all four municipality councils in North-Schleswig and achieved 8 620 votes. This gave the SP access to 8 councilors in all four municipalities in North-Schleswig.*

The SP has focused on regional policies for the benefit of the minority and the regional population in general. After an internal BDN reform in 1986 the political work of the SP became more intense, especially for the newly established committees.

The core institutions of the SP are the Council, the executive board and the annual general assembly. Members of the 4 sub-committees, the candidates for local government seats and the party's political representatives, 150 over all, constitute the basis of the party together with 4 local municipality-organizations and the youth organization "Junge SPitzen". The 4 sub-committees and one special task group for culture are the think tanks for regional and local issues.

The policy of the Schleswig Party

The structural reform of 2007 placed more functions on the local level. The latter leaves the municipality councils with the decision making in almost all aspects of daily life within a community, including those concerning the German minority. The elected representatives of the German minority party have taken it on themselves to work towards resolving such problems that may remain - making sure that the German minority receives its dues in terms of general recognition, financial security and staffing of German institutions according to general administrative procedures.

As one of the main aims of the SP the cultural diversity of the region must be preserved. In this respect, The SP puts special emphasis on the interests of the German minority, including its institutions and

associations, but also the interests of all those with a non-Danish background. The cultural diversity brings an added value to a society, which needs to be better appreciated.

One of the problems brought through the decentralization of public functions is the fact that the local communities are not legally obliged to pay for most of the cultural and social services. Instead, most subsidies on municipality level are voluntary, and this is the reason why payments for the services differ significantly between municipalities. On the other hand, the liberal Danish laws, concerning for example schools, can be advantageous for the German minority. The fact that the German minority is rarely specifically mentioned in Danish legislation allows it many liberties, but brings also the risk of being overlooked in important decisions, due to its size compared to the majority. Thus to maintain the standards set by the Danish society, the SP would at times call for positive discrimination in order to ensure that the European principle of diversity is upheld.

The region North-Schleswig

with the four municipalities Tondern, Hadersleben, Apenrade, Sonderburg

The Schleswig Party is the only regional party in the region of North-Schleswig. The party's focus lies fully on North-Schleswig, its languages, its culture, and the development of the region. The SP is an independent and pragmatic centrist party, free of any superordinate ties and ideologies. In the local councils the representatives of the German minority take their share of responsibility for all political matters - maintaining the high level of cultural diversity, social welfare and technological efficiency of the region. At the same time, the SP is pursuing a policy of moderation with regard to finances and budgets. This is by no means an easy task, as the local councils are in charge of more than 70 percent of all public spending. The SP aims at striking a balance in terms of finance and promoting moderate growth.

Most evidently, the European integration in the border region is of vital importance for the Schleswig Party. The SP promotes cross-border collaboration and advocates open borders. The German-Danish border region has the potential of being an archetype for a unified Europe.

The SP, being the political party of the German minority and the regional political party of North-Schleswig, has set its focus firmly on the German minority, regional and local policy, and cross-border and international cooperation.

Some examples may show the range of the Schleswig Party:

- equal subsidies for German kindergartens, youth clubs and leisure time centers
- flexibility in recognizing needs and activities of German institutions
- equal financing of German cultural activities
- supporting and strengthening local government
- maintaining and encouraging small schools and institutions
- development of rural areas
- reducing refuse and household waste
- developing all forms of public transport
- decentralized and collective production of electricity

***Special rules for the German minority in the election legislation for the municipality and regional councils**

The four municipality councils in the southern part of Jutland (the region, where the German minority predominantly is based) are not allowed to have less than 31 members. That is prescribed in the legislation for the elections for the municipality and regional councils. In other regions of Denmark many municipalities have fewer members (for example 27, 28, or even 21). The fixed number of 31 members in the region of North-Schleswig is there to ensure, that the German minority has a realistic chance of achieving a seat, considering the share of the population in the region that identifies as part of the German minority.

In the case that the SP does not achieve a regular mandate, there is an alternative option for the German minority: If the obtained amount of votes is at least as much, as 25 % of what would have been necessary for the "cheapest" mandate in the municipality council, the SP can delegate a representative to the council, however without voting power.

If the SP does neither reach a sufficient amount of votes for a regular mandate, nor for a representative without a vote, the German Minority still has the right to install a contact committee at the municipality council, where matters of the minority's interest are discussed. This contact committee solution is also the way in which the interest of the German minority is currently represented and promoted on the national level.

The model is generally seen as a potential role model for other regions with national minorities.