

A decorative graphic consisting of a grid of dots in various shades of gray and red, arranged in a pattern that suggests a map of Germany.

Ready for Change?

The Party Reforms Planned by the Social Democratic Party of Germany

DANIEL TOTZ
December 2011

- Over the past twenty years the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in Germany has lost half its members. Besides social changes, demographic development and errors of policymaking and getting the message across, decrepit party structures are another cause of dwindling membership. In order to adapt to changed circumstances and, at the same time, to come up with new incentives for people to get on board, party reform is indispensable.
- At the SPD Party Conference in December 2011 a lead motion on party reform will be voted on. This includes extending the participation options available to members, the gradual opening up of the party externally, improved membership recruitment and retention and reform and restructuring of local associations. The reform process itself is to include all levels of the party.
- Critics point to earlier party reforms that by and large had little effect on the party's everyday functioning. This time, too, it remains to be seen what real changes can be achieved. However, the chances of successful party reform have never been greater than they are today: after the disastrous defeat in the Bundestag elections in 2009 there is broad agreement in the party that change is needed.



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Introduction

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the SPD has conducted four – bigger or smaller – reform debates. They have each given rise to good and innovative final reports, full of proposals which, in large part, never found their way into the party's everyday functioning. Many of these proposals have resurfaced in the current party reform process. However, the party is hopeful that this time everything will be different. The beyond catastrophic circumstances mean that party reform is today more urgent than ever. Since the 1990s the SPD has lost almost half its members. At the end of 2010 the party, which once had a base of more than a million members, was only just over the magic threshold of 500,000 party members. In the meantime, membership has fallen even further. Although things have been looking up for the SPD politically over the past two years, the 23 per cent to which its vote slumped at the parliamentary elections in autumn 2009 will not go away and was the main reason party leader Sigmar Gabriel announced the latest party reform in November of the same year.

The main focus of reform is party organisation. The party leadership has laid down a number of goals in this respect. On the one hand, against a background of falling membership the SPD wishes to open itself up more, enabling large sectors of society to participate even without becoming a member, although recruiting new members is also an aim of the reform. Another aim is internal party democratisation, which is to be accompanied by the extension and restructuring of participation options for members.

The present text analyses the substance and feasibility of the reform against the background of the approach taken and earlier experiences. Particular attention is paid to the party executive's lead motion, which will be presented at the party conference in December 2011.

Substance and Outcomes of Party Reform – Lead Motion at the Party Conference 2011

The issue of party reform has been under discussion within the SPD for around two years now. The outcome is the Party executive's lead motion for the party conference in December 2011. It gathers together the proposals worked out in the various workshop discussions, the organisational policy commission and various other rounds of talks. In what follows the main points will be presented, one by one. We will both look at how the individual points have changed over the past 18 months and evaluate the measures.

Recruiting New Members

The lead motion presents various approaches and measures aimed at fostering a vibrant party organisation. The aim is to include members more in party activities – in other words, to get them to be more active. At the same time, the measures are intended to speak to those taking an interest for the first time and smooth their involvement in the party. For this reason the lead motion contains a specific section devoted to member recruitment. It says: »Our most important task [is] to retain members over the long term and to inspire newcomers to join us« (Party Executive Lead Motion: 5). A first measure is to be the installation of member representatives in local association executives. This position, which so far has existed only in a few local associations, is to be a permanent one alongside the local association chair and the treasurer. The member representative is to be responsible for members' interests, especially their retention, inclusion in day-to-day political activities and, if need be, winning them back, if they should leave the party. In order to ensure a certain professionalism and, at the same time, to lay down standards member representatives are to receive regular training and will be able to exchange views at conferences. In the interest of reliable data and to ensure that the respective local association executives are aware of them in future there will be an annual member development report which the level responsible for membership administration will have to submit with the statement of accounts. There is also to be a nationwide hotline for members seeking assistance.

However, the SPD not only has problems recruiting new members, but also in retaining them. Around 10 per cent

of all new members bid farewell to the party in the first two years, while up to 20 per cent leave the party within the first four years. Presumably, this can be attributed to a lack of opportunities to make a difference or new members' misconceptions, but also to the party's failure to integrate them properly. One of the things mentioned in the course of talks held over the past two years on the subject of member care is the extensive introduction of seminars for new members and the nation-wide provision of mentors. Especially in the first year members should receive extensive care and be made more aware of the participation options within the SPD. Furthermore, it is vital to approach new members as soon as possible after they join the party. Caring for new members in this way could go a long way towards reducing the obstacles to membership to which potential new members are exposed. By introducing new members into party structures and providing them with care and support via established members, the individual effort needed to join the party is diminished. However, measures of this kind are subject to problems of implementation. First, extensive, regular seminars for new members and the training of mentors are very expensive. Second, local officials must be ready to cooperate.¹ One thing is certain: if new members do not get the feeling that they are welcome or are even directly excluded, joining the party will be distinctly unattractive. The SPD must by all means rid itself of its image as a closed-shop, in other words, an organisation that at local level looks askance at every new member and makes their involvement difficult at best. It can never be guaranteed, however, that every new member will find an open local association – individual local officials don't like being told what to do by the centre.

An emotional tie to the SPD is particularly important for members who join – or wish to join – the party for personal or values-related reasons.² Intensive and open discussions within the party, a vibrant associational culture, shared experiences and the establishment of permanent party positions can help to create a long-term identification between members and the SPD. Nonetheless, it is difficult at this point to pave the way for concrete govern-

1. In small local organisations it could of course be difficult to find members for such a position. In large local associations several representatives would be needed for new members since here there would presumably be more of them.

2. On this see an interesting overview with theoretical remarks on the issue of party identification: Falter et al. (2000), as well as, more generally, (2009).

ance from above. Here long-term and specific strategies are needed in order to produce a sense of community.

More Member Participation

In general, a range of motives can be distinguished for joining the party or remaining with it. The Berlin political scientist Oskar Niedermayer differentiates between incentives for and obstacles to joining. All in all, there are five kinds of incentive:

- Affective incentives (joining the party is associated with the satisfaction of normative needs).
- Normative incentives (traditional affiliation of the social milieu/family to the party).
- Values-related incentives (the individual wants to assert his or her ideals by joining the party).
- Political incentives (support for certain political opinions).
- Material incentives (career in the party or the hope of financial benefits from party membership).

Obstacles include the costs of joining, remaining and participation. The costs are higher the more personal initiative is expected of the member and lower the more work the party does on his or her behalf. On top of that comes the monthly membership contribution. Empirical investigations show that political and values-related incentives for joining or remaining in a party clearly dominate (see, for example, TNS-Infratest 2010). Accordingly, members wish first and foremost to shape and actively influence policy.

In order to strengthen these incentives for joining the party the lead motion envisages a massive expansion of party participation. This takes account, among other things, of the desire for more participation expressed in the local association survey. Two fundamental directions can be distinguished with regard to the extension of participation opportunities: the participation of members in the selection of personnel and participation concerning substantive issues. In future, all members shall be involved in putting up candidates for public or internal party offices and in the election of a chair. How this is

done – whether by postal vote, a members general meeting, primaries and so on – is down to the committee at the relevant level. From now on, if a total of 10 per cent of the members of that level request participation, this has to be granted.³ The primary for candidates for the chancellorship widely discussed in the media is generally possible, as long as there is more than one contender.

Members should also participate at the level of decision-making. It should henceforth be easier for members themselves to initiate this. For example, the quorum for holding a party referendum – previously 10 per cent of the total membership – is to be reduced. Furthermore, postal voting should be possible for any party referendum and one-fifth of all members (proportionate to total membership) must support a proposition in order for it to pass. A simple majority will suffice for a binding decision.

Expanding members' opportunities for participation harbours both opportunities and risks for the SPD. The local association survey made it clear that many members want to be more involved in the party in the form of member surveys, party referendums and local association surveys. More recent research confirms the desire of members for closer involvement. For example, the representative party member study of 2009 (see Spier et al. 2011) demonstrates that the desire for direct participation runs deep among the members. Around 62 per cent of those asked think it is a good idea to vote on the party leader; only 21.4 per cent reject it, while 14 per cent are undecided. Voting on parliamentary candidates at a general meeting (64.9 per cent) and member-based votes on central issues (59.7 per cent) were also welcomed by a majority.

It is true that many of these options are already available, even before the adoption of the lead motion. Direct candidates, for example, can be elected by general meetings of the membership. For party referendums, although there are formal hurdles that have to be surmounted and substantive restrictions,⁴ the option of holding them is nevertheless available, even though to date there has been no binding party referendum at the national level.

3. The lead motion unfortunately provides no specific guidelines on how the abovementioned 10 per cent of members can come together or in accordance with what criteria and during what period members have to organise.

4. See §§ 13 and 14 of the organisational statutes, as of 14 November 2009 (accessed November 2011: <http://www.spd.de/linkableblob/1852/data/Organisationsstatut.pdf>)

The attempt by some representatives on the left of the SPD to prevent Gerhard Schröder's Agenda 2010 by means of a party referendum came to nothing.⁵ There have already been binding party referendums in some *Land* associations, however. The obstacles to such participation at the national level must therefore be lowered. It is precisely this that the lead motion is aimed at.

The wishes of party members are therefore clearly in the direction of more participation. But are there any objections to expanding participation options? It is said that party members would, for example, limit the mandate of representatives of public bodies. Moreover, in the case of party referendums there would be no compromise and often votes would be restricted to a »yes« or a »no« – substantive debates would not take place. Finally, such decision-making is undemocratic since parties that are supposed to represent the interests of the whole country would be relying on the opinions of a small number of people – namely, the members – who by no means represent a cross-section of the population.⁶ They would also cramp the strategic capabilities of the party leadership (see Schmid/Zolleis 2009: 282) and possibly even weaken the party.

Nevertheless, the SPD urgently requires attractive participation opportunities if it wishes to recruit new members and to bind existing members closer to the party. Not every member has the time to be able to engage in »normal« political activities. Party members should also participate in decision-making on issues and personnel via regular votes. One not inconsiderable reason for the SPD's poor performance in the 2009 parliamentary elections is the party's unattractiveness as a result of its lack of grassroots-oriented forms of consensus-building (see Niedermayer 2011). Finally, every empirical study of SPD members shows that party members positively crave opportunities for participation in the form of surveys and party referendums. It remains to be seen to what extent these demands are financially realistic. It is certain, however, that the participation of a large proportion of party members would be expensive. The problems that grassroots forms of decision-making can entail, as already mentioned, cannot be neglected, either. Nevertheless, the high level of support among members for such

5. See www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,253038,00.html (accessed October 2011).

6. For a representative critical voice see Dittberner (2004), pp. 255–263.

forms of participation shows that their systematic implementation would considerably boost the attractiveness of party membership. This would definitely bring the party new members. Party referendums could also increase the transparency of political decision-making and ultimately boost the legitimacy of and trust in politics.

Opening Up the SPD

Another core aspect of reform is opening up the party externally in order to give non-members the chance to participate as well. »Many are reluctant to join our party although they share our views and pursue the same goals. Even people who do not want to be members nevertheless may want to declare their support for us or join forces with us to achieve a specific goal – even only short-term. The broader our base in the population the more successful we can be« (Party Executive Lead Motion: 7). In order to achieve this structures should be put in place that make it possible for non-members to vote on particular issues. According to the lead motion there is no obligation attached to this, however. So-called »supporter membership« has been developed to this end which means that in future those interested can become supporters of a certain working group or topical forum. Within their own topical area non-members can thus be involved in decision-making to some extent on their own terms.

To begin with, significantly more decision-making powers were considered for non-members. SPD leader Sigmar Gabriel even wanted US-style primaries open to every voter. After criticisms from some quarters, some of it harsh, and a mixed response in the media, however, the party leadership backpedalled and did not include this passage in the lead motion. The fears of members that enhanced involvement of non-members – also in primaries – could devalue proper party membership were also taken into account.

Generally speaking, of course, it makes sense to involve non-members in party discussions. The opening up of topical forums and working groups – for temporary co-operation – is a sensible way of making the party more porous. The new supporter membership discussed in the lead motion is a valuable step that could bring those who are wavering closer to the party, without imposing on them right away. Why an annual contribution – 30 eu-

ros is currently being mooted – is to be demanded from supporters is not immediately apparent. »Membership« of this kind – which is not membership in the proper sense – should be temporary in principle and non-contributory in order to reduce the obstacles to becoming a member. By insisting on an annual contribution of 30 euros – which is what many full members pay – the party is undermining the status of supporter before it has even been introduced.

Strengthening Local Associations

According to Germany's Law on Political Parties political consensus-building must take place directly on the ground, in so-called local associations. Since the residence principle no longer corresponds to the realities of most people's lives, however, the SPD is seeking an amendment to the law with a view to relaxing this principle (Party Executive Lead Motion: 13).

Local associations certainly give rise to many problems and causes for discussion. However, the lead motion declares that the party »is committed to making the local association as vibrant as possible as the nucleus of our party. Members should be happy to spend part of their free time there« (Party Executive Lead Motion: 9). Local associations are so important, according to the party executive, because members can influence policy directly there. Schools, training places, infrastructure – all these things are visible at local level and thus make politics tangible for the individual. Small local associations are increasingly being provided with support to relieve their administrative burden. For local associations that prove unable to cope with their tasks over the long term there will be more mergers in order to restore the viability of the level dealing with membership administration. Furthermore, supra-regional forums will be organised, for example, so that local associations are able to discuss relevant (national) political issues comprehensively.

Compared to the discussion topics of the workshop seminars the passage on the local associations is at first glance something of a disappointment. If one reads between the lines, however, it becomes clear that although there will be no encroachment on the core of local associations, nevertheless, as an organisational unit it must be subject to close examination or even reform. As a result of its membership losses the SPD's organisational struc-

ture has been significantly cut back in recent years. As early as 2006 the party already had only around 9,300 local associations nationwide, although the official figure was still 12,000. At that time, more than half of all local associations had fewer than 50 members and only 427 had more than 200 members (see Mielke 2009: 63f).⁷ Over the past three to four years the situation has deteriorated considerably in this respect. At the end of 2010 the SPD nationwide had fewer than 9,000 local associations, the majority of which had fewer than 50 active members. (The number of local associations with over 200 paying members has also diminished since 2006.) The need for reform is therefore evident. The policy of merging inactive local associations is clearly correct. A gradual phasing out of local associations, as discussed in earlier rounds of talks, was finally rejected, however.

Furthermore, whether there might be distinct alternatives to local associations is no longer under discussion. To some extent the SPD is here hiding behind the issue of amending the law on political parties which cannot take place without the support of other parliamentary parties. This is a pity because one might have expected reform measures, especially after the many criticisms raised within the party and based on the organisational model described here. The very concept of the local association, with its sclerotic structure and out-dated rituals, is simply no longer in tune with the realities of life of many people, especially the young, mobile generation.

Cooperation with Party-Affiliated Organisations

It is vitally important that political parties become involved in different social spheres in order to ensure that party policies receive majority support and to make voters aware of party policy. The SPD executive recognises this and has therefore invited various organisations that are sympathetic to the SPD's values – freedom, equality and solidarity – to cooperate with it. Particular emphasis is put on cooperation with the trade unions since this relationship, which formerly was so strong, took such a battering when the SPD was in power between 1998 and 2005. However, social initiatives and churches and religious communities are also expressly mentioned in the

7. This is particularly worrying because research assumes that only around 10–25 per cent of party members are actively involved in the party.

lead motion. All these sympathetic organisations should in future be afforded even the right to speak and make proposals at SPD party conferences.

The results of the local association survey show that cooperation between local associations and party-affiliated organisations is positively catastrophic. Consequently, the approach discussed here of expanding cooperation by conducting joint events or organising open discussions is clearly the right one: good contacts with party-affiliated organisations can lead to more party members. However, it is also the case here that local associations cannot be compelled to step up their cooperation with other organisations. What is needed rather is a system of incentives – for example, financial participation of local districts in running such events – so that local associations can see that it is worth opening up to such party-affiliated organisations. It would be a good thing if the planned innovation funds were to include such events.

Reform of Party Organs

Besides the participation of non-members the reform of party organs has made the most stir in the media. The party executive is to be reduced from its current membership of over 50 to a maximum of 35. The party council will be abolished and replaced by a party convention that will meet at least twice a year in the form of a »mini-party conference« with 200 delegates from the various *Land* associations and districts. Furthermore, the conference of all subdistrict and district chairs which has already been convened twice in the course of party reform shall be made into a permanent institution and meet at least once a year. Last but not least, the national party conference is to be expanded from the current 480 delegates to 600.

Internet

The Social Democrats have also recognised that the internet is playing an increasingly important role, especially among young people. A step has already been taken in this direction with the relaunch of the website www.spd.de. However, the participation opportunities that the internet can offer members must be expanded even further. There is already a possibility to have a say and make proposals at party conferences by organising topical forums online. »Online proposals should increasingly be

made a component of discussions at party conferences« (Party Executive Lead Motion: 13). The amendment of the Law on Political Parties that the SPD is striving for – basically to move away from the place of residence principle – would also contribute to strengthening online communication.

Party Finances

Members' contributions make up a considerable part of the party's budget, but they are progressively diminishing (from just under 54 million euros in 2003 to 46 million euros in 2009). The current contribution schedule provides for a monthly contribution of 5–8 euros for those with a net income of up to 1,000 euros; 8–25 euros for net incomes of up to 1,500 euros and 25–55 euros for incomes of up to 2,000 euros.

In order to remedy this – many people consider this contribution schedule to be too onerous – a new financial regulation is to be adopted at the party conference. The minimum monthly contribution of 5 euros will remain (with a special contribution of 2.5 euros for school children, students, pensioners and the unemployed). The other levels have been streamlined and now, depending on salary, there will be three fixed contribution rates to choose from. Those on a monthly net income of up to 2,000 euros can choose between fixed contributions of 7.5, 15 and 20 euros, while those receiving up to 3,000 euros can choose between 25, 30 and 35 euros. Elected officials are subject to a separate contribution schedule since they are naturally expected to contribute more.

The new, more streamlined contribution schedule may in some instances mean that members pay more a month, or at least that is what the party executive hopes. This hope is clearly justified, however, because ultimately the old contribution schedule, with its high contributions – the highest of any party in the German parliament – tended to put people off. Naturally, voluntary self-classification will remain under the new financial regulation.

Education, the Realities of Life and the Immigrant Quota

There are a number of other things in the lead motion that should not go unmentioned. For example, the role

of the party school is to be a place at which office holders and officials can obtain qualifications. Furthermore, it is emphasised that participation opportunities within the party must take greater account of the realities of people's lives. Key terms here include flexibility of place and reconciliation of political participation, job and family life. In response to the higher proportion of immigrants in society, in future all bodies at the national (federal) level must meet an immigrant quota of 15 per cent. Lower levels will be asked to set their own targets in this connection.

Organisation of Party Reform

Previous party reforms were usually devised within a small circle at the level of the party executive. This time – the fifth party reform of the past 20 years – a completely different approach was taken. For the first time, party members were given the chance from the outset to play an active role in the reform process. This is important because the last party reforms did not provide the impetus necessary to make them part and parcel of everyday party practice because party members were presented with a fait accompli and were not involved in their formulation.

Why is it important to get the whole party involved in reform measures? Parties can transform and reform themselves only to the extent that the party structure in general, the interior of the party and relations between individual actors within the party organisation permit it (see Wiesendahl 2010: 36). There are many options for restructuring the party organisation. For example, opportunities for members to exert influence can be expanded by extending internal participatory measures (in terms of both the contents of the party programme and organisational issues). Similarly, a party can open itself up to the outside and grant non-members or sympathisers more opportunities to participate in internal party processes. Both options – also cited by the SPD as the core issues of the current party reform – harbour potential for conflict and thus can lead to tensions within the party. Since political parties are so-called »voluntary organisations« members cannot be forced or obliged to get involved. This means that when making changes attention must be paid to the party as a whole. This is particularly important when a party organisation is fragmented, as that of the SPD demonstrably is. Social Democrats are

not organised hierarchically, in a top-down manner, but rather in accordance with the principle of »loosely coupled anarchy«.⁸ This means that a strong party leadership cannot be established that is able to pervade the whole party from top to bottom since at the individual levels there are strong elites beneath the party leadership. The *Land* associations and subdistricts constitute an organisational unit in their own right and must therefore be thoroughly involved in reform measures. This is caused not least by the fact that regional elites from time to time fear a loss of their authority if »ordinary« party members are given more power to participate. An approach to decision-making that bids farewell to smoke-filled rooms could be the result. Different interest constellations of actors could also oppose change. Internal power struggles and the limited control of the party leadership also make change more difficult. For this reason it is important that all organisational units are »taken on board« in the course of internal party reform because rational reorganisation from above is difficult for such fragmented structures.⁹ Only by working together can the relevant goals be achieved. At the same time, it must all take place under the aegis of a strong party central office that coordinates reform and sets things in motion.

Assent within the party is therefore very important when implementing reforms. There must be a willingness to actively accept and develop the new »laws«. Those affected – in this case the party members – must themselves recognise the need for change. Often, whether change is accepted depends on whether the time is right (see Endruweit 2004: 264f). Furthermore, organisational measures are more likely to find acceptance if they have a (presumably) positive effect on the group being reorganised (for example, extending party members' participation rights) than reforms that have no or even a negative effect on party members. Acceptance is also important because rules and structures are more difficult to change the longer they are in place.

8. This principle means that individual organisational segments within the SPD have relative autonomy. This applies to both the horizontal level (party executive, *Land* parties, districts and local associations) and the vertical level (individual working groups, such as Jusos or AG 60+). This makes it difficult for the party leadership to steer developments from above. Organisational segments also pursue different goals from time to time. Sometimes they even work directly against one another in order to assert their own standpoint within the party.

9. This applies all the more to the current party reform because all levels of the party will be directly affected by the results. In the case of reform that concentrated only on the professionalisation of the party apparatus or something similar it would be less important to get everyone on board at every level.

How Was Party Reform Carried Out in Detail?

The first step in the party reform process was a survey of all SPD local associations and subdistrict/district associations, carried out between March and May 2010. After that, the various levels of the party were given time (until autumn 2010) to discuss and analyse the results in the local associations and subdistrict/district associations, as well as the various party organs. Based on the results of this survey the party executive developed the topics to be discussed that autumn in so-called »workshop dialogues« with the SPD party executive. Representatives of a wide range of party levels participated in these dialogues and worked out proposals on the various areas and aims of reform. A party advisory committee was also formed which met before and after the workshop dialogues in order to make its own evaluations of the aims and milestones of party reform. This discussion involved mainly academics and experts from other organisations, associations and enterprises. A steering group at the Willy-Brandt-Haus, with a general secretary, the national executive director, the treasurer and full-time officials of the party executive provided the workshop dialogues with continuous support.

After the workshop dialogues were concluded, in April 2011 an organisational-policy committee was formed at the party executive level, with representatives of all SPD *Land* and district associations. Its purpose was to take on board the discussions on party reform that had taken place so far and to formulate proposals based on the results or to firm up proposals already made. Moreover, general secretary Andrea Nahles outlined a basic organisational-policy programme. Also involved were all subdistrict and district associations, which were invited to a second party reform conference in May 2011. The various levels of the party were then given until autumn 2011 to examine, analyse, consult on and discuss the proposals of the organisational-policy committee. To this end, the party leader and the general secretary visited all SPD *Land* associations and districts. The new basic organisational-policy programme, in which organisational guidelines were formulated, is to be presented and approved in December 2011 at the regular party conference.

The current approach to party reform is completely different to previous reform efforts, which were set up at the level of the party executive. Under the motto »The party first, then the committee«, to begin with all lo-

cal associations and subdistrict/district associations were surveyed. The results provided the basis for the subsequent reform process. Although the party executive had already examined a basic concept – such as the holding of workshop dialogues – specific issues were determined only after the survey results had been analysed. »Given the approach that has been taken, the process of party reform is already part of party reform.«¹⁰ Also new is the fact that this time the reform process was not wrapped up at an early stage, as was the case with earlier reforms. Although the adoption of the basic organisational-policy programme was specifically laid down as an interim market in December 2011, »the intention is to set party reform as a permanent goal and that it remains a permanent process.«¹¹ Furthermore, the financial outlay for the reform process is an indication of the seriousness with which the Social Democrats are taking the project: more money has been spent than in all previous party reforms put together.

If party reform is to succeed it must be credible. The party leadership's approach underlines the seriousness with which the reform project is being implemented. By extensively surveying the party base and addressing the wishes concerning organisational change in the discussions of the workshop dialogues, internal party acceptance of reform implementation is likely to have been obtained. The fact that all *Land* associations and districts were involved in working out the proposals shows that the party leadership is willing to genuinely include all organisational levels within the party. One important criterion for successful organisational reform, as research in other European countries confirms, is the continuity of leadership personnel. This is confirmed by party executive staff who indicates that previous party reforms have frequently failed because of changes in the party leadership: the newcomers often wanted to turn to other issues. However, it is not just the organisational approach that is important. Rather it is the specific measures taken that determine whether reform is ultimately successful or not. The leadership must be aware that expectations in the party are high after such an expensive effort.

In what follows we shall first analyse the wishes of the party base, based on the results of the local association

and subdistrict/district survey. We shall then present the discussions and proposals within the framework of the whole process. Answers will be sought to the following questions: What proposals have been included in the lead motion and which have not? What had to be left out?

The Members' Opinions Count: National Survey of Local Associations

Framework

At the outset of the reform process a national survey of local associations and subdistrict/district associations was held, announced in October 2009 by Sigmar Gabriel and Andrea Nahles. As part of this unprecedentedly large survey a questionnaire was sent to over 9,000 local associations and around 400 subdistrict/district associations, involving considerable personnel and financial resources. The party newspapers *Intern* and *Vorwärts* publicised the survey. The survey was intended to be »the basis for the renewal of the SPD«.¹² The survey results serve as the »basis« for the whole reform process, as general manager of the SPD Astrid Klug made clear in the accompanying letter to the questionnaire. The letter ends with the promise that »this will be only the beginning of a permanent dialogue within the SPD«.

The local association survey was sent to the chairs of the local associations. Ideally, the survey was supposed to have been completed together with the members within the framework of a local association meeting. An analysis by the social and market research company *polis+sinus* showed that an average of 9.3 members participated in answering the survey in each local association, while 19.1 per cent of the local association chairs questioned reported that fewer than five members took part and in 11 per cent of the participating local associations more than 15 persons were involved. The response to the local association survey was much higher than had been expected: a total of 44 per cent of all local associations took part. The highest rate was recorded by the Berlin *Land* association, where 69.17 per cent of local associations participated (83 out of 120). The lowest participation by a *Land* association/district came in at 28.79 per cent of all

10. Statement by head of the »Party Life« department of the SPD party executive, Jürgen Hitzges.

11. Ibid.

12. Sigmar Gabriel (party leader) and Andrea Nahles (general secretary) in an information memo to the local associations in March 2010.

local associations. In contrast to the local association survey the subdistrict/district surveys were completed only by the chairs. Surprisingly, the response was not much higher than for the local association survey. »Only« 55.93 per cent took part. The response rates range from a high of 94.4 per cent to a low of 28.57 per cent.

The local association and subdistrict/district surveys were considered a distinct success by the SPD. »We have gone through a constructive and productive first phase of party reform«, said SPD general manager Astrid Klug. And general secretary Andrea Nahles summed up with regard to the positive response rates: »The local association survey shows that our party is very much alive and kicking«.

Four sets of topics were dealt with in the questionnaire: the 2009 election, assessments of substantive issues, the structure and organisation of the various levels of the party and substantive questions about organisational reform. Only the last two are relevant to party reform, however.

Results of the Survey

The party executive is cautious in its evaluation of the results. It says that some local associations may have answered on the basis of how they see themselves rather than how things really are.

Furthermore, the following must be taken into consideration when analysing the answers. »Only« 44 per cent of all local associations participated – in other words, more than half the local associations abstained. Although no official investigation has been undertaken by the SPD presumably the more active local associations took part in the survey rather than local associations that are organisationally scarcely viable. Even if one ignores the local associations that refused to participate¹³ that still leaves around half of all local associations which – for whatever reason – did not take part in the survey.

With regard to the future inclusion of the party base in opinion-forming and decision-making both among the local associations and among the subdistrict/district associations a very uniform picture emerges (in all tables the results of the subdistrict/district association survey are in parentheses).

It is clear from the results that the local associations have a strong desire for inclusion and participation in political activities. The figures for »member survey« and »party referendums« – the classic instrument of internal party participation – stand out particularly. Furthermore, the analysis of the open questions in the questionnaire made it clear that members »wish to have much more of a say in determining party policy than was the case in the past«. ¹⁴ In the case of the subdistrict/district associations there is a strong desire for regional conferences on sub-

13. The party organisation department received around two dozen e-mails expressing a refusal to take part in the survey.

14. Assessment of general manager Astrid Klug. See: SPD Party Executive and Parliamentary Group (2010b), p. 2.

Table 1: Responses of local associations to the SPD questionnaire

Instrument	»Definitely«	»Generally yes«	Cumulated*
Member survey	54.3 % (40.7 %)	36.3 % (47.2 %)	90.9 % (87.9 %)
Member decision-making	38.0 % (17.1 %)	41.0 % (51.4 %)	79.1 % (68.5 %)
Local association surveys	43.9 % (31.9 %)	42.9 % (48.6 %)	86.8 % (80.7 %)
Regional conferences on substantive issues	30.9 % (55.1 %)	49.6 % (37.5 %)	80.5 % (92.6 %)
Proposals on concrete political issues	25.7 % (51.4 %)	54.4 % (41.2 %)	80.1 % (92.6 %)
Opinion-forming by means of Web 2.0 technology	10.9 % (18.5 %)	40.8 % (50.9 %)	51.7 % (69.4 %)
Training/seminar opportunities	25.5 % (44.0 %)	52.5 % (45.4 %)	78.1 % (89.4 %)

Source: Author's calculations based on data from *polis+sinus*.

* Some local associations did not furnish particulars with regard to the questions (although this value is always fewer than 2 per cent), as a result of which the cumulated figure differs from the first two.

stantive issues and proposals on concrete political issues: both points receive approval ratings of over 90 per cent.

For the party executive the enhanced inclusion of non-members is a key component of party reform. The members themselves diverge sharply between non-binding participation and binding decision-making. The question »Should these forms of participation also be opened up to non-members?« was answered by the local associations and the subdistrict/district associations as follows:

Table 2: »Should these forms of participation also be opened up to non-members?«

Form of involvement of non-members	»Yes«	»No«
Surveys on substantive positions	78.8 % (86.1 %)	19.8 % (13.4 %)
Decision-making on substantive positions	12.2 % (9.3 %)	86.2 % (89.8 %)
Selection of candidates for public offices	31.7 % (27.3 %)	66.6 % (70.4 %)

Source: Authors' calculations based on data from *polis+sinus*.

The following extremely clear conclusion can be drawn from the results: yes, surveys of non-members would be welcome, but we wouldn't really like them to be involved in decision-making. The subdistricts are more open-minded with regard to surveys of non-members on substantive positions than the local associations, whereas decision-making on substantive positions is more strongly rejected. Of decisive importance – also for subsequent party reform – is the organisational state of the subdistrict/district associations since they are contacts and providers of support with regard to any questions for the member-led local associations. Furthermore, this level coordinates the administration of joining and leaving the party. Four out of five subdistrict/district associations (81 per cent) have their own administrative office (38 per cent of them with one employee, 37 per cent with two).

Also of particular importance for party reform were the questions on the internal structure of local associations. The answers enable the party executive to assess the real viability of local associations. Since first contact with non-members always occurs via the local associations it is important that viable structures are in place. The results of the survey provide little reason for optimism, however. For example, the number of political events in the local

associations is very low: 8.1 per cent of the local associations surveyed hold no political events in the course of a year, 19.5 per cent hold one event and 25.1 per cent hold two. Only 19.2 per cent of local associations hold political debates at least five times a year. The number of members' general meetings is also very low. More than half of all local associations (50.8 per cent) only have one or two members' general meetings a year.

No less interesting is the question concerning cooperation with other organisations. This makes it clear how poorly integrated local associations and subdistrict/district associations really are in society.

Table 3: Cooperation with other organisations

Cooperation with:	Yes, regularly	Yes, occasionally	No
Social organisations	12.1 % (20.8 %)	36.9 % (62.0 %)	47.0 % (14.4 %)
Sports clubs	12.9 % (7.9 %)	40.9 % (43.5 %)	42.4 % (42.1 %)
Trade unions	8.0 % (38.1 %)	29.2 % (50.9 %)	57.6 % (10.6 %)
Employers	3.0 % (5.1 %)	20.7 % (39.8 %)	70.4 % (47.7 %)
Culture	11.2 % (9.7 %)	38.9 % (48.1 %)	44.6 % (36.6 %)
Churches	7.2 % (6.0 %)	34.5 % (42.3 %)	53.4 % (36.6 %)
Leisure organisations	5.7 % (2.3 %)	24.3 % (25.5 %)	63.2 % (61.6 %)
Youth associations/initiatives	8.2 % (10.6 %)	34.1 % (51.4 %)	51.9 % (31.5 %)
Environmental protection organisations/initiatives	4.7 % (6.0 %)	28.1 % (56.5 %)	60.9 % (30.6 %)
Citizens' initiatives	10.2 % (6.9 %)	38.4 % (62.0 %)	46.0 % (24.1 %)

Source: Author's calculations based on data from *polis+sinus*.

Even when occasional cooperation does take place, in most instances this only takes the form of talks and only rarely joint events.¹⁵ Although the figures for the

15. Walter Ruhland, CEO of *polis+sinus*, pointed out that local associations that may have held only a single discussion in recent years or which have a member linked up with another organisation nevertheless ticked »occasionally«. This makes the figures even more horrifying.

subdistrict/district associations are consistently higher, nevertheless there too there is still »plenty of room for improvement«. ¹⁶ If one considers that the subdistrict/district associations represent an average of 1,250 members these results are catastrophic. The party executive assumes that the actual values are even lower than those given in the surveys. This is evident from the mere fact that half did not respond and those that did presumably evaluate themselves more positively than is really the case.

The immense importance of opening up the party to the outside in order to counter the closed-shop mentality is shown by the question about the implementation of projects with citizens (not party members): 66 per cent of local associations have never held such an event, and only at 14.5 per cent have such projects been implemented. Recruiting new members has not played much of a role at the lowest level of the SPD party organisation thus far: 78.3 per cent of local associations stated in the survey that they did not plan to take any measures to find new members (18.9 per cent answered this question in the affirmative). Communication with members could also be better. For example, although two-thirds of local associations have their own internet presence, ¹⁷ only 13 per cent have an e-mail newsletter and only 6.9 per cent are otherwise active online.

16. General secretary Andrea Nahles during the workshop dialogue »Participation of non-members«.

17. In many instances these are neglected and out of date.

There are various working groups which enable particular groups among the membership to get together. What is the picture at local level in this regard?

Jusos is the working group with far and away the strongest presence. The under-35s are organised in almost every second local association (45.5 per cent) and nearly every subdistrict/district association (95.8 per cent). The working groups for members over 60 years of age (who as of the end of 2010 made up more than 50 per cent of all party members) are strongly represented at least in subdistrict/district associations (84.7 per cent). Looking at the figures, however, it is clear that working groups overall are largely non-existent at the local association level and even at the subdistrict/district level their presence is very much capable of improvement (this applies in particular to AFB, AGS, ASJ and ASG – see Table 4).

Party Reform – What Next?

The party conference will decide whether and in what form the proposals are accepted. The party executive's lead motion is a compromise solution that takes in every level of the party. Since, as already mentioned, tensions arose in one respect or another numerous changes were made to the motion. Even now discussions are still continuing within the party. More than 100 motions on party reform at the party conference testify to this. This does not include proposed amendments to the lead motion that the party may still receive until into November. Nev-

Table 4: Working groups at local level

Working group	Yes		No	
	Subdistrict/district associations	Local associations	Subdistrict/district associations	Local associations
Young Socialists in the SPD (Jusos)	45.4 %	95.8 %	50.9 %	2.3 %
60plus (AG 60+)	41.0 %	84.7 %	55.7 %	13.0 %
Social Democrat Women (ASF)	30.6 %	69.9 %	65.0 %	26.4 %
Working group for workers' issues (AFA)	22.2 %	60.2 %	72.5 %	35.6 %
Working for education (AFB)	10.7 %	29.2 %	82.1 %	64.6 %
Working group for the self-employed (AGS)	10.8 %	27.3 %	82.1 %	66.2 %
Working group for Social Democrat lawyers (ASJ)	7.7 %	19.0 %	85.1 %	73.1 %
Working group for Social Democrats in the health care system (ASG)	5.2 %	12.5 %	87.1 %	80.6 %

ertheless, the party leadership itself is reckoning on a significant majority for the motion.

The final burning question must therefore be: Will the fourth major party reform since 1990 once again fail to meet expectations? Will all the motions written and the discussions held be in vain? If the past is anything to go by, this is at least a possibility. Nevertheless, Social Democrats have reason to hope that this time everything will be different.

The SPD would like to »bring its self-image and the structures of our party right up to date«, according to Sigmar Gabriel and Andrea Nahles in an e-mail¹⁸ to all party members at the end of 2010. At that time the SPD could look back on an intensive and committed year of party reform. The bulk of the reform process that is to achieve its first conclusion with the adoption of the basic programme is now done, at least temporally. The work carried out has dealt intensively with the organisational framework and substantive preparations for party reform. What preliminary conclusions can be drawn with regard to the reform process's contents, problems of implementation and prospects of success?

Party reform is based on the goal of gaining more supporters – whether members or non-members – for the SPD and to make better use of the existing potential. In short, participation in the SPD should be more attractive. In order to understand why the SPD is making such efforts one needs to recognise the importance of the party members. The party depends on them in many areas, whether as voluntary helpers in election campaigns, a source of funding or a link to society. The importance of the members for the party has not diminished. On the contrary, they are vitally important in the areas mentioned.

In order to recruit members for the party and ultimately to be able to depend on their commitment the SPD must create a broad range of incentives for people. At the same time, the obstacles – such as entry and participation costs – must be minimised, so that the positive incentives ultimately outweigh the hindrances and joining the party is an attractive proposition.

18. E-Mail from Sigmar Gabriel and Andrea Nahles on 31 December 2010 to all SPD members.

The following three points of criticism raise doubts about whether the targets the party has set itself – recruiting members, internal party democratisation and opening up the party – can be achieved through this reform:

- *The SPD is reforming in too many places.* As the lead motion for the 2011 party conference clearly shows, the Social Democrats have opted to discuss and consult on a profusion of issues. Instead of concentrating on the restructuring of a few aspects of the party organisation, one gets the impression based on what has been formulated so far that the party executive urgently wants to tackle all organisational problems and make changes everywhere. Perhaps it would have been wiser first to concentrate on a few aspects and wait until something tangible had been achieved before tackling other areas. The profusion of measures facing both committed volunteers and full-time employees is such that the party may not be able to cope with them.

- *The expectations of the party base could overwhelm the party.* The sheer profusion of issues gives rise to the following problem: the expectations of the party base have inevitably been excited by the massive effort made to involve them – as a result, disappointments are virtually preordained. The discussions, formulations and implementations pertaining to the various proposals require a lot of time. Besides that, there is also a substantive problem. The local associations were surveyed about ways and means of involving party members and non-members more closely and about what they wanted from the party executive. On top of that came the declaration by Sigmar Gabriel and Andrea Nahles that the local association survey was to be the start of a tremendous internal party reform process. If nothing much changes as a result of the reforms disappointment could turn into resignation or even anger at the party leadership. In that way the expectations and goals formulated by the SPD leadership itself could become a major problem for the party and its leaders. The unsuccessful party reforms of the past could also play a part in this (Jun 2009: 187).

- *Organisational change is difficult.* Implementing change in an organisation that is as fragmented and multifarious as the SPD is very complex. The current state of affairs demonstrates this: Sigmar Gabriel and Andrea Nahles wanted to enable the participation of non-members – even in important primaries – but the party, under massive pressure, had to backpedal. The set of is-

sues related to non-members, initially presented as at the heart of the reform process, was shrunk down to such an extent that hardly anything of it remains in the lead motion. The resistance of some local associations and districts paid off in this instance. Resistance can also occur among dedicated volunteers if the changes do not appear to be going in the desired direction. The SPD as a voluntary organisation faces the major problem of being unable to impose change from above – it depends on dialogue. For this reason, extensive communication and dialogue with all levels of the party are of enormous importance. The general secretary and the party leader toured the country in late summer and autumn 2011 in order to promote the reform process, although the motion had already been worked out by an organisational-policy committee which, although formally representing all the local associations and districts, sometimes does not reflect the opinions of the party base. If the lowest levels of the party do not feel fully included, however, party reform is doomed to fail. This would also severely tarnish the image of the SPD leadership as a whole.

Although the abovementioned problems concerning the attainment of goals must not be ignored, nevertheless the following weighty arguments speak in favour of successful party reform:

- *The time is right for reform.* Sigmar Gabriel first announced the organisational restructuring of the SPD at the party conference in November 2009. At the time of his speech Gabriel had not yet been elected leader. He thus commenced his period of office with the reform announcement. This point in time was favourable because after the general election defeat it was clear to the party membership that internal party reform was indispensable. Furthermore, the SPD was in opposition, which, for example, makes party referendums easier since they do not have to be implemented directly. Furthermore, the unusually high response from the local associations to such a survey would suggest that the party base is ready for reform. Another important condition of successful reform is the maintenance of continuity with regard to the SPD leadership.
- *The sheer profusion of proposals leaves a lot of scope for creativity.* In its workshop dialogues the SPD discussed all levels of the party organisation – sometimes with brutal honesty as regards organisational shortcomings. Many of the measures discussed could have a posi-

tive effect and help the SPD to achieve the goals it has set for itself. The SPD has identified problems that many must long have been aware of. Many academics have discussed the fact that the activities of the local associations have not kept up with the times and that their structure means that they no longer appeal to the young. The SPD is also aware that it has to draw a line under the »myths« concerning local associations since the latter have been unable to perform all their tasks properly for a long time. The idea of offering the members more participation opportunities sounds promising. The ideas that have been discussed about cooperation with the party for a set period or on particular issues could appeal to younger people and to those with limited time to spare. Also positive are the party's efforts to open itself up to the outside. This harbours dangers, however, for example, if members get the impression that non-members are to be granted too many entitlements. The local associations have made their views clear on this. Including non-members in the debate, however, was regarded very positively. But a »perceived« downgrading of normal membership by involving non-members more closely is to be avoided. In the workshop dialogues it became clear that the party is aware of this problem. It can therefore be assumed that this will be handled carefully.

- The expansion of internal party democracy – an explicit goal of reform – also seems possible. In the workshop dialogues many positive examples were produced from the local associations and lower levels of the party. Approval of forms of direct decision-making is very high among the members. Regular member surveys or decision-making could enhance the party's attractiveness enormously and certainly be a magnet for more activists. The members would feel included in political events. This can have the effect of »activating« in particular those who join the party because of political or value-related incentives.
- The aim of the measures presented is to boost incentives to join or work with the SPD. At the same time, there was discussion of how to remove obstacles. It became clear in the course of the dialogues that improvements in the process of joining the party and changes to the schedule of contributions would help. The extent to which a kind of mentoring programme or the better integration of new members by the local associations could ultimately be steered from the top down remains questionable. By contrast, lowering contributions – which

treasurer Barbara Hendricks also advocates – could easily be done. In the end, it should not be forgotten that the key to success must also lie in the enhanced activation of existing members. People are keen to participate and »the life of large political organisations depends not on the number of members but on their activity or activability« (Machnig 2001: 104). Naturally, not everything outlined here can be implemented. If only some measures became a permanent part of party structures, however, that would be a major success.

- The introduction of thematic forums for supporters is particularly important. For the first time, even non-members would be able to become involved on a particular issue, without having to become a full party member. We shall have to wait and see how people respond to this.

- *Party reform has been tackled in the best way possible.* In contrast to previous reform efforts, in which it was always a committee or working group at the highest level of the party that worked out reform proposals, this time reform has been organised completely differently. From the outset, the party base has played a decisive role in the discussions. The party executive gave all local associations and subdistrict/district associations the opportunity to express their views fully in a survey and to make comments. The surveys also provided the party executive with a concrete organisational picture of the party on the ground. The party base was also involved in all workshop dialogues: local association representatives were always invited to the discussions. Furthermore, the proposals worked out by the party executive on the basis of these dialogues for the basic organisational-policy programme in summer and autumn 2011 were discussed extensively in all local associations. They also had the opportunity, by sending representatives to the organisation-policy committee, to have a real say in the party reform process. With this far-reaching reform process the party is doing just the right thing: it brought the party base on board from the outset. If the pattern of earlier reforms had been followed, and the whole party had not been included, the reforms would have been doomed to failure. With the participation of all, however, many potential conflicts could be identified and weeded out beforehand.

Needless to say, whether party reform ultimately succeeds cannot be determined at this point – the transformation process as a whole has not yet been concluded. The approach based on creating incentives and, at the

same time, clearing away obstacles is definitely the right one. The dialogue with the party base, however, must continue beyond 2011. To be sure, not all the new instruments will be deployed and not everything will become part of political practice. Expectations must therefore not be too high. Nevertheless, the approaches discussed so far definitely point in the right direction and must be pursued consistently.



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Appendix: Resolution of the SPD Party Board on 26th September 2011

Party on the Move

The SPD's organizational policy program Democracy in transition

With the changes in our society, democracy is also changing. More and more citizens want to participate in politics, and have a greater say. This brings new life to our democratic system, while also posing a challenge to the parties. If democracy and society are changing, then the parties too must change.

Citizens have become more self-assured; they no longer wish to simply be »plugged« into an organization. They are demanding opportunities for political participation. Confident members and supporters of political movements want to be sure that their involvement has impact. They not only raise the benchmarks for themselves, but also for the parties. This applies both to the opportunities for active participation and the quality of the incentives. After all it is the citizens who are the drivers of democracy.

Changes are happening also in our working lives. Employment conditions and working hours have become more flexible – in some ways also less predictable. People are changing jobs and moving home much more frequently than ever before. Pressure has increased. Life is constantly changing and it has become a great deal more difficult to make long-term plans.

The role models in our society have also changed, and there is a whole new range of life styles to choose from. Young women and men are exploring new types of partnerships. They want to have equal rights when it comes to professional opportunities, but also for bringing up their children. We need to ensure that political participation is actually still possible under these new conditions. That means that the parties will have to adjust themselves to the exigencies of the modern family and today's partnerships.

Participation in the democratic institutions is no longer as »natural« as it was in the past. Voter turnout is constantly decreasing; more and more citizens are indifferent to politics. Social exclusion and de-coupling from the democratic processes often go hand in hand. Clearly, our democracy will not survive these tendencies forever. And no other party is as much affected as the SPD. Many citi-

zens have little faith and confidence, even though they share our values. This is the reason why we have to win them back, and battle on their behalf. Many feel the need for renewal of our democratic culture within the country and the parties. It is these people that the SPD wants to provide a political home for. A social democracy needs the SPD as its left-of-centre people's party.

Our democracy needs strong parties. Only they are anchored in the political life of civic society and at the same time in the state institutions. That is why our Basic Law assigns them an important role for creating political will.

Thus, the big people's parties carry particular responsibility for our democracy. They consolidate the multifarious interests and build bridges between the many groups that constitute our society. Only they can create a sound concept for the well-being of all. The people's parties look out for the whole of society, not just for individuals.

But although people's parties play an essential role for the survival of our democracy, there is no pledge that this role will be theirs forever. If they want to be successful and retain their legitimacy, they have to make special efforts. Strong people's parties depend on an open culture of participation and need to cultivate their roots in society. They must have their place right in the middle of society.

The SPD is the left-of-centre people's party in Germany. We are a community of shared values. Together, we are committed to the principles of freedom, social justice and solidarity. Our strength is the diversity of our membership and the might of our ideas. For these reasons we have always seen ourselves as a democratic membership party with a program – and this we want to retain, even in a changing society. This is why we are opening ourselves up.

Opening up the SPD

We have started on the path of renewing our party, both in terms of our program and our organizational structure. These two things go together. A modern organizational structure cannot take the place of convincing political content. Yet it is a prerequisite for realizing our political objectives. The better we can organize the development of political will and the greater the participation



and contribution of our membership, the more successful we will be.

We want our party to go new ways

- For the first time in the history of the SPD we questioned all local branches and sub-districts about their working procedures and their expectations vis-à-vis the SPD. In addition, we conducted many workshop discussions at which all party levels were present. We also organized two sub-district conferences.
- Our aim is not to just make a number of specific changes, but to initiate an on-going and permanent change process. Our primary objective is a change of practice, not an amendment to the articles of association. The evolution of our organization at all levels must become a permanent objective and commitment in the same way as the development of our program. The secretary-general will be the driving force for putting the intentions into practice on behalf of the party's executive board. Moreover, the organizational commission will continue its work for at least another two years.
- We are encouraging all branches to venture into new avenues. We want to make a massive effort for widening the opportunities for membership participation. We want to make effective use of our members' energy. The SPD's renewal is a challenge for the whole of the party. It addresses every individual and poses a challenge for all. The overarching aim is to make the SPD as convincing and as powerful as possible.

SPD – a collaborative endeavour

We want an SPD that thrives on collaborative effort. After all, our party lives through its membership. They are the face of the German Social Democratic Party. Each and every one stands for what our party stands for: freedom, justice and solidarity. We are and will always be a membership party.

The more active our members, the more alive our party. But: commitment does not come about spontaneously, all by itself. That's why we want to motivate our members, enable and empower them to become active for our shared objectives. We are offering a culture that wel-

comes members, provides them with support and takes their opinions seriously. This involves them in taking an active role when it comes to deciding about the course of the party and its representatives.

Today's ruling parties seek an open dialogue. A vital membership party that encourages discussion and debate is an enrichment for governance. It provides inspiration and ideas and acts as a grounding force for our political life. Rather than just being engaged in its daily routine, it develops our concepts for the future. This is key to our success.

The party's organization and the full-time employees of the SPD support the active involvement of volunteers. We want our members to spend their time with us in a worthwhile manner; above all we want them to contribute their experience and their ideas. The starting points are the local branches. Participating in our activities ought to be pleasurable.

In addition to our fully committed members, we need a great many helpers. After all, we don't do politics for our own sake. So we can't do it all ourselves. Our chances of reaching our objectives are that much greater if we can rely on a great many supporters and allies.

With this in mind, we are more than ever networking with associations, unions, clubs and initiatives as well as individuals who, like us, are committed to creating a free and solidaric as well as responsible society.

We want to empower people to engage with politics. This includes being open towards those that want to be involved but without necessarily becoming members. We are a springboard for »improvers«, even if these might occasionally be more creative and unconventional than we ourselves dare to be. Rather than patronizing or manipulating them, we listen to what they say. Particularly to those that otherwise all too often go unheard.

The SPD as the people's party is intent on increasing the diversity of its membership. Sheer willpower and rhetoric are not enough: We are creating appealing incentives for political participation. We go where the people are. This also involves using the many opportunities offered by the Internet, to engage in online discussion and to take part in innovative events.

People's expectations towards politics have changed. More and more citizens are reluctant to dedicate themselves to long-term political activities; they simply want to have a say when it comes to instant decisions.

They want to achieve swift solutions to problems that are causing them anxiety. So – instead of trying to catch up with these changes in political attitudes, we lead the way. We are concerned with concrete local issues and try to involve as many citizens as possible. We are making it easier to come on board our party and are establishing ourselves as a magnet for anyone wishing to make a commitment to the social democratic cause. We don't want to remain amongst ourselves, we want to be enriched by others. Plus we want us all together to achieve our goals.

To this effect we are using modern tools, such as the web and social networks. It is not the party that decides how to address and organize people – we leave the people to decide that for themselves. Moreover, we are taking into account the changes in family structures and in professional life, for example by meeting at times and in locations that are convenient for working parents – and by welcoming children, too.

More than anything, we want to encourage people to participate. This requires openness when it comes to opinions and modes of behaviour that are different from ours, and it is not just a matter of tolerating these, but of actually welcoming them. People look different, they lead different lives, they feel and think differently. That is part of life's rich tapestry. And we are a living party which not only respects people of different backgrounds and opinions, but which sees them as adding something special.

Right from its very beginning, the SPD has always promoted discussion and debate in society, as we are convinced that democracy can exist only as an on-going conversation which engages all of society. Any topic can be brought to the table, and everyone can join in. After all, democracy was invented on the market place, and even today it belongs to the market places of our time. Thanks to our experience and our opportunities we want to offer a platform to all those that share our basic beliefs so they can be heard better than ever before. We see it as our duty to encourage and promote diversity in our society,

and in particular to let those speak who until now have been underprivileged.

The interaction of different perspectives within the SPD is characterized by our social democratic values: freedom, justice and solidarity. We maintain a culture of mutual respect when it comes to different opinions and political points of view. This underlying principle ensures fair treatment of everyone, acceptance of the party structures and respect for solidarity within the party. Again and again we make each other aware of the fact that we need one another in order to achieve our common goals.

Winning members

The SPD is not a voter organization, but a membership party. For this reason, one of our most crucial tasks is to ensure the loyalty of existing members and to win new recruits. We welcome new members and empower them to integrate quickly, in line with their particular interests and skills. We don't want new members to be put »on hold«. We have clear criteria for how they should be looked after.

Development of membership, acceptance and appreciation of members are regular topics of conversation at all levels. Of particular importance in this regard are the local branches. They formulate goals and strive to achieve them. At each level of the party a board member is appointed to take responsibility for members, the membership representative. This person is responsible for maintaining the standards for ensuring member loyalty, care and recovery and looks after recruitment of new members. The Board may assign additional members for these tasks.

The membership representatives are given training and are regularly provided with information on the membership development of the branch. At regular intervals, conferences are held for representatives of all levels, to ensure a continuous exchange of experience and ideas.

Once a year, the membership representatives report to their board on the progress. The membership report gives the number of new recruits and leavers and reports on the activities within the branch with regard to gaining new members and supporting them. It also contains an evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures that



were implemented. The membership reports, together with the annual reports, are submitted to the boards, enabling them to formulate concrete aims for recruiting new members as well as proposals for improving membership. The party board (executive committee) decides on the basic premises for the work of the membership representatives.

We are also setting up a nationwide telephone service for members. This will provide a quick and simple way for members and other interested individuals to find out about possibilities for participation and to obtain details of appropriate contacts. The helpline operators will ask questions and will try to find solutions for any problems.

More involvement of members

Each and every member is important. They are the soul of our party. The role of members who are committed to our cause are of inestimable importance for our political work and are the lifeblood of the organization. The more we are, the better we are! But participation does not always just happen by itself. It depends on the conditions which the party offers its members. And this includes the ways in which they can engage with activities and decision-making processes.

We want to empower all members to play a greater role in creating political will and in nominating functionaries and mandate bearers. So, where this is possible and where a majority of the membership favours this, we want to organize general membership meetings rather than delegate assemblies.

Membership participation with candidate selection

When nominating individual candidates for public offices and mandates and when electing the chairperson, the members at the appropriate level need to be involved if there is more than one candidate.

What form this participation will take – e.g. regional membership meeting, pre-elections or postal votes – will be decided by the appropriate board in consultation with a party convention or a party council (if applicable), or by the membership meeting or the party conference. Partici-

pation of all members occurs if it is proposed by at least 10% of the members of the appropriate level.

Proposing candidates for party-internal pre-elections comes under the jurisdiction of boards (executive committees) and membership meetings/party conferences of the branches and the regional groupings in the electoral territory. Another possibility is for 5 per cent of the membership in an electoral territory to submit a candidate proposal. At the meeting too, proposals may be submitted, if the statutes allow.

The final putting forward of individual candidates for public offices and mandates comes under the jurisdiction of member or representative meetings, according to electoral laws. The final election of the chairperson takes place at a member or delegate convention, according to party laws. The existing option specified in the statutes for holding an election by direct vote of the top candidate by all members remains unchanged.

In order to guarantee a uniform and fair procedure, this particular possibility of member participation is stipulated expressly in the organization's statutes. The formal procedure is specified in a procedural guideline providing minimum standards which among other things is a protection against abuse.

Membership participation with practical issues

We are expanding the options which have previously existed on the national level only, for enabling members to take factual decisions, to encompass all structural levels. In future, postal voting will be an option too. Moreover, it is our objective to allow member petitions in the form of an online procedure. We will be creating the necessary legal and technical conditions for this in the medium term.

At the same time we will be introducing simplified procedures for the submission of member petitions and member decisions. In future, when a petition is put forward at national level, all members will be informed via »Vorwärts«, the SPD's publication.

We are reducing the quorum for a successful membership resolution. A resolution becomes effective when the majority of the voters has agreed and when at least one fifth of the people with voting rights has taken part in the

vote. In future, participation in membership decisions can be done by postal vote.

Equal participation for people with disabilities

People with disabilities must be able to participate as equals in any activities in connection with social democratic politics. We fully subscribe to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Life in our party must be organized in such a way that persons with disabilities can participate fully and without restriction. Equal participation requires barrier-free access to localities and information channels as well as the availability of the major means of information and communication. It means the participation in political decision-making processes and elections without any limitation, and above all the active participation in any decisions on questions that directly affect persons with disabilities. The party executive committee offers a range of advisory services supporting branches for facilitating the equal participation of persons with disabilities.

Opening up the party for supporters

Every supporter makes us stronger, including those who initially may not even think of becoming members. One thing is clear: It pays to be a member. Members can be promoted and qualified; only they can hold offices within the party and they have more decision-making powers.

However, there are always people who shy away from becoming party members, even though they are close to us and have the same objectives. Those who do not wish to become members might still wish to commit themselves to us or join us in the pursuit of a concrete goal – even if this is short-term only. The broader our base in the population, the greater the likelihood of success.

We want to benefit from the know-how and the commitment of all those who are ready to lend us a hand. Everyone should be able to involve themselves to the extent that is right for them. This helps us broaden our foundation, increase our competency and reinforce the confidence in our party.

Our aim is to open up our party. This will involve citizens' party conferences where people can participate even though they do not have a party book.

We know: Many citizens are engaged in social causes – and they could be enthusiastic about politics too. But if they get involved they want to have an impact. They are prepared to invest time and effort because they want to bring about improvements in society. This means that we have to properly integrate the opinions of our members and non-members in our decisions and to establish a better culture of debate and discussion. An open party looks for participation during the preparatory phase of the decision-making process. For this reason we want to make it possible for all branches to allow the participation of interested non-members when polling the opinion for certain practical decisions.

This means that interested non-members can become supporters in a working group or a thematic forum. Within those platforms (working groups or thematic SPD forums) supporters are granted full membership rights – just as is the case already with the Young Socialists. In future, they will also be counted when calculating the delegate mandates in the working community. Representatives in committees of the SPD must be party members. We continue the tradition of guest membership.

Just as before, branches can allow non-members to participate when nominating individual candidates for public offices and mandates, provided there are at least two candidates. As a legal safeguard, and to prevent abuse and manipulation, the party's executive committee will issue a procedural directive.

Inviting alliance partners

Many commonplace sayings are true. These include: United we are strong. The Social Democrats in particular have many potential allies. Many organizations share our values of freedom, justice and solidarity and our vision for universal welfare. We make use of this advantage by entering into alliances.

We seek discussion and cooperation with unions, social initiatives, churches, confessional and non-confessional communities. We as the party do not want to dictate, we want to facilitate, participate and to present the relevant

issues to the public and parliament. In doing so, we want to achieve even more.

We see ourselves as a part of the active civic society. Our party promotes a culture of working together. We approach organizations that are close to us in an attempt to join forces. To know and trust one another is the basis for a fruitful cooperation.

We also invite local initiatives and like-minded organizations to help shape our political future. That is why we are intending to let them have more rights to speak and to table motions at our party conventions.

Strengthening local associations

Political will in the SPD is created from the bottom up. The focal points are our local branches. Here, right from people's doorsteps, the fields of political activity are clearly visible, be these schools, vocational training and apprenticeships or the condition of the local streets and roads. The older generation passes on their experience to the young, diverse talents join up, and together they try to improve their environment. Our members see the successes and failures of their own work, they learn how important it is to convince others – and that nothing can work without other people.

We are committed to making the local branch – the vital cell of our party – as lively as possible. Members are invited to spend a part of their leisure time here.

These local branches are perceived as springboards, as carers, as initiators and as a community of like-minded people. It is important that meetings and activities are announced in advance and that the results are reported. Media work is extremely important too.

We go where there are problems to solve, trying to engage in conversation with those that feel neglected by politics. We put efforts into building up the local network, primarily with initiatives and organizations that pursue similar goals and which invite us to their own events and the planning of activities. We make every effort to approach others, trying to find active participants among all sectors of the population. This not only enriches our experience but makes us much more effective. Small local branches are liberated from time-consuming

administrative tasks. We want to create support services, for example in connection with finances and with issuing annual reports.

Politics connected with real life

Successful politics proves itself in real life. It is based in and bound to people's lives. We have our roots in the towns, the districts and the communes – and from these we derive strength and focus. Our local SPD politicians are the nerve endings through which we touch society. They are much in demand at all levels as advisors on social democratic policies. In future we want to make even better use of their experience and their know-how.

For this reason, we strengthen and support the Social Democratic Community for Communal Politics (SGK), which gives a voice to experienced communal politicians, offers support to the many volunteers and promotes and qualifies young people coming into communal politics.

The social democratic practitioners of communal work in cities, communes and districts are to be given more of a voice and more decision-making powers – at all levels of the party. We are giving the SGK the right to speak and to table motions at party conferences of the SPD, and the communal council of the SPD party board will be officially embedded in our statutes.

Sub-districts take on new responsibilities

The sub-districts are the hinges of our party – both in an upward and in a downward direction. From now on we want to increase our support for their commitment to our party. In part, this will be achieved by an annual national conference of all chairpersons of the sub-districts and the districts. Our district branches and the sub-districts carry a heavy responsibility for strengthening the internal party organization. They are important for political debate and for external communication.

In order to increase local political strength, sub-districts and local branches must analyse the organizational political strengths and weaknesses and then develop proposals for improvement. A strong organization needs strong local branches. Local branches can share tasks. »Godparenting« (sponsoring) can also be a solution.

If a local branch cannot do its work in the long term without help, the sub-district may consolidate multiple branches into one larger unit. The sub-districts do not evaluate this purely formally according to the number of members, but depending on how strong the local branches are. When local branches merge this should not lead to a situation where the SPD is no longer present on the local scene or to the disappearance of structures. In such cases the local branches should make more use of the option of setting up regional or local divisions in order to maintain the local connection. By establishing districts or local divisions these are freed from administrative burden and can then concentrate on the political core work.

Where there are no local branches or contacts, or where local branches do not cover the issues that most concern people, the local branches should ask for support of sub-districts and carry out an analysis of their potential. The sub-districts, in cooperation with the Länder (state) associations, should then offer support and alternatives, for example by means of the supraregional thematic forums.

As a general rule, sub-districts and local branches should be consistent with the borders of rural municipalities, counties and communes.

To promote special projects in sub-districts which help modernize the party we are creating an innovation fund which is financed from a very small part of the membership subscriptions. It is meant to enable and support projects and change processes. This support is not prize money, but must flow directly into the particular project.

The support is primarily aimed at sub-districts and projects which:

- Test innovative forms of citizen participation in creating political opinion within the SPD and developing new standards of participation of members and non-members;
- Are committed to the guiding principle of a party that cares for the problems of people and support more political participation, particularly in deprived areas that show a decrease in political participation;
- Create attractive opportunities for participation and successful concepts for addressing new target groups,

particularly for young women, citizens with a migration background and young workers' families;

- Develop SPD projects in conjunction with unions, social initiatives, churches, confessional and non-confessional communities.
- Allocation of financial resources is the responsibility of the organizational committee.

Innovative ideas for a better society

We want innovative ideas for a better society. That's why the SPD has always considered itself as a »party with a program«. The knowledge and the experience of our members are invaluable to us.

People who want to have a say and bring their know-how to the party must be given strong incentives. Working in local branches is not the only option for those who wish to involve themselves with party work. People who have just moved to a new location, or who are constantly on the move, are perhaps less interested in local topics. And of course not every local branch can handle every issue. Many party members wish to engage with other like-minded people on higher-level topics and projects – and perhaps go beyond classical party structures.

The aim of our working groups is to bring together people with similar interests, and make use of their competencies and experiences. We want to encourage their cooperation by providing more support. Each working group gets an advisory delegate at the national party congress, who is elected on the occasion of the national party conference or the national congress of the working group.

In future, this should be supplemented by thematic forums of the party board, which appropriately complement the work of the working groups. In order to guarantee cooperation and transparency and to restrict as far as possible the existence of parallel structures, the working groups should participate in the work of the thematic forums, which provide a meeting place for people with common interests. They are a platform for them to make things happen. As thematic political forums at national level they contribute to the programmatic work of the federal party. Districts and sub-districts may set up their

own thematic forums. At the annual meeting, the registered members of the forums elect a speaker who will coordinate the work.

The thematic forums at party board level are granted the right to speak and to file petitions at the federal party conference. In setting them up we want to create yet another method for everyone who is interested when it comes to forming opinion and decision-making within the SPD. For this reason each thematic forum at party board level is given an advisory delegate at the federal party conference who is elected every 2 years at the annual conference.

The working groups and the thematic forums take on a special responsibility for dialogue in society and the preparatory groundwork of the SPD. Non-members are very welcome, which is why we want to recruit them actively. Within the thematic forums and the working groups supporters are granted the same rights as party members.

Active party adherents who take on roles as representatives of working groups and thematic forums within the committees of the party must be SPD members.

In order to facilitate and encourage the engagement in working groups and thematic forums, we ask all members which working group or thematic forum they would like to participate in. To this end we compile detailed information regarding the tasks of the working groups and the thematic forums. This will strengthen the focus for everyone who is interested and will be of benefit to their work inside and outside the party.

The working groups are entitled to the right to speak at the party conference at the appropriate level. To this effect, each working group at party board level has an advisory delegate at the federal party conference.

Networking people

The Internet is a fantastic opportunity for democracy – and hence also for political work. Communication via the Internet is faster, more direct, and can reach a broader audience. This means that more people than ever can now participate in political processes. The power of ideas and words is increasingly getting more important than the status of those who utter them. Totally unknown

people can have a massive impact. Just think of the impressive example of the Arab spring.

For us, it is quite clear that we must exploit the opportunities that this medium offers. Our innovative website SPD.de is already a platform for a rapid exchange of ideas. Through it, we reach people with whom it would otherwise be difficult to enter into a conversation. This includes young people.

The website provides totally new possibilities for our party's work. Our members can get in touch at any time, independent of their schedules and their place of residence. For many of them, this is the only way they can actively engage in politics. Those who do not wish to get involved with a local branch can simply look for a suitable way to participate via the web, where it is easy and quick to find out with whom they »click«. It is a way for people who do not know each other but who share certain interests to get together. They meet up virtually online in order to set in motion something in the real world. And they might eventually meet in person. For it is clear that the Internet cannot ever replace a face-to-face meeting. But we certainly use the communication facilities of the Internet in order to bring like-minded people together, and to pool their competencies.

We shall be expanding the opportunities for members and anyone else who is interested to participate in the programmatic work of the SPD via the Internet. As an example: We support the development of initiatives and petitions on the Internet and connect these with rights to speak and to file petitions for the initiators at delegate conferences and party conferences. Above all, we create the technical preconditions that enable the relevant levels of the party to create content-rich petitions virtually – and to discuss them. Online petitions should become a bigger part of the consulting aspect during party conferences.

Life style, leisure activities and communication behaviours, especially of younger people both in both urban and rural areas, sometimes come into conflict with the residence principle which is anchored deeply in the party rules. Here, we see a clear necessity for change, which is why we want to bring about an amendment in the rules that will enable more flexible and practical membership terms. The existing structure that is subdivided in regional branches will remain the rule, but exceptions will be al-



lowed. Thanks to the online forums these groups can already take advantage of their right to speak and to file petitions at the party conference at the appropriate level.

Facilitate voluntary work – reinforce support for full-time workers

Professionalism means result-oriented, quality-conscious activities, but not professionalization of the party. Quality standards must apply to everyone – volunteers and full-time workers, spare-time and professional politicians.

Our active members are the heart of our party. Without them we would not be successful. Tens of thousands of members commit themselves to our cause in their spare time, often after long working days and despite having families and other honorary commitments. In future, volunteers should have better access to important, task-relevant information – be these background data or details of important contacts. We are now creating the legal and technical requirements to make this possible.

Our full-time workers are of utmost importance to our party. We are committed to providing them with optimal working conditions and opportunities for further training and education. The full-time workers are party managers with high levels of skill and valuable experience. They are highly motivated and do their best to motivate others. They carry out many very diverse and difficult duties. They can do a great deal – but not everything. These full-timers are also responsible for giving optimal support to the volunteers. Recruiting members and looking after them is a central part of their work.

The financial strength of our party is limited – and this also limits the presence of full-timers in our local SPD offices. Therefore we make every effort to use the available resources efficiently and at a high professional level in order to support the party's work locally.

Developing skills

The social democratic party is not merely a social movement, it was and is also an educational movement. Our ideal has always been the well-educated all-rounder. It is clear to us that the circumstances into which someone is born must not determine his or her destiny. Opportuni-

ties in life must be changeable. This requires good education and training.

This demand that we make for society also applies to our party. Party-internal education is an obligation we take very seriously. This must be an SPD trademark. It includes providing our members with in-depth knowledge about the SPD's history and its program, and giving them the necessary training for politically responsible tasks. This is true in particular for chairpersons of local branches who are among our most important representatives within society and whose further qualification must be a main task of our educational work. This is supported by educational and membership representatives. In addition we would like to set up an online academy for young SPD volunteers, given that political personnel planning, and promotion and advancement of young talent, are key obligations at each level of the party. All party functionaries have a duty to recognize and promote political talent. Full-time employees need, and receive, special qualifications.

The Party School in the Willy-Brandt-Haus (founded in 1906 by August Bebel and Clara Zetkin, brought back to life in 1986 by Willy Brandt and Peter Glotz) offers educational programs for local chairpersons, the »Sozialdemokratische KommunalAkademie«, the »Führungsakademie der sozialen Demokratie«, the nationwide further educational programme for full-time workers (»Innovation, Personalentwicklung und Qualifizierung«) and intercultural offerings, i.e. a broad spectrum of educational opportunities. We shall be evaluating these opportunities over the next two years.

The »Netzwerk Politische Bildung« is an association of educational institutions and foundations that are committed to the values of social democracy. They offer all kinds of appropriate political qualification options for active and committed adherents.

Feminization of the SPD

Women make a positive difference! Organizations with a high ratio of female managers are more successful and perform better. Add to this the fact that the majority of the population wants to see itself personally represented in a people's party. A party that is governed by the rules of an all-males party cannot be a people's party.

The German Basic Law declares: No-one may be discriminated against or privileged on the grounds of gender. That is one of the fundamental clauses in our constitution. Political equality did not come about by itself, it always had to be fought for. The equal treatment of women cannot be left to discretion or to coincidence – not even within the parties. Therefore, the SPD was the first party to introduce a gender quota.

However, after many years of good experiences with the quota we have noticed that this is not sufficient. The SPD must become more feminine! At the next federal elections (Bundestag)

40 per cent of the social democratic direct candidates should be women. We shall be actively supporting new female candidates.

When it comes to changes, we are most effective at the local level. A special responsibility for the election and nomination procedures falls to the chairpersons of the sub-districts. It is up to them to promote women more than ever.

However, we must also create the conditions for women to want to get actively involved with the SPD. This requires an open culture of discussion, interesting methods of participation, less time-wasting and better compatibility of political work and family and work. SPD fem.net is going to be our Internet platform which will provide young women in the SPD with a modern way of networking.

The party for the young generation

The SPD is a party for all generations. We are proud of the fact that we have a large number of older members who possess a wealth of political experience that they can pass on to the younger generation, encouraging them to get involved in political work. For they know very well that young people's ideas and their enthusiasm are a key element of the SPD. This is why we want to ensure that young men and women find opportunities for participation in our party that meet their requirements. Young people are particularly concerned about their education, entering into professional life and starting a family. They worry about being able to fulfil their professional, private and political ambitions. We as a party respect and

support these ambitions. This is why we want to make sure that young people can participate in straightforward ways, providing them with the flexibility to choose their own time, and their own projects.

The young and mobile generation expects to be able to participate in politics regardless of location. This is why we in the SPD will be making every effort to provide extensive participation options via the Internet. By setting up location-independent thematic forums we want to provide the chance for an on-going involvement, even if people move to another place. We will be putting forward a petition for an amendment of party law at the German Bundestag which will allow membership rights to be exercised regardless of location.

The young generation wants to see themselves and their concerns represented within the parties and the parliaments. Thus, young men and women should not only be allowed to work with us, but also to take on active responsibilities on all levels of the SPD committees and the SPD factions in the parliaments. To this end we will be actively supporting them by making available appropriate educational opportunities. In order to meet the changing demands and expectations regarding political education, we are planning to establish an online academy.

Creating diversity

The SPD puts its efforts into creating social justice in an open and solidaric society. This means providing equal opportunities for everyone living in our country, regardless of their origin. This is our historical self-understanding and our brief for the future.

As a party, we set a good example. At a time when more and more people of very different origins, religions and convictions live together in our country we need to become more diverse ourselves if we want to remain a people's party. Therefore we provide better chances than ever for people who are immigrants or the children of immigrants to come into the fold of our party and to advance within it.

The SPD is setting itself the goal to have a membership where 15 per cent of the executive committees of the federal party come from a migrant background. All other



party units should be formulating their own objectives in line with their concrete situation.

The SPD executive board will in future nominate from among its ranks a responsible person for the inter-cultural opening up of the party, who will regularly be reporting to the committees about the progress in this area and will make recommendations for further action in this respect. Locally, the membership representatives will take on special responsibility for the inter-cultural opening up of the party. To provide the necessary support, the Party school will be developing appropriate programs for full-time staff and volunteers. In addition, we will be offering qualifications for migrants and resettlers of German background in order to increase their chances of advancement within the party.

We also wish to further the dialogue with autonomous migrant organizations and other allies and partners in this area.

Building up trust

Social Democracy evolved as a movement intent on giving a voice to those who otherwise remain voiceless. To this day this remains a central task for us as social democrats. We will not put up with democracy-free zones where people abandon the rules of democratic culture. We are present everywhere, listening and giving a helping hand. Our main aim is to spread democratic culture in our country, and secondly we want to provide practical support to citizens who have concerns and issues.

Of course we also want to woo voters and recruit new members. We believe that our best chances for achieving this is by making a real contribution to improve the concrete living conditions and by proving that politics is capable of achieving results. Active party associates – full-time staff or volunteers – who have been specially trained make contact with people and act as social democratic »persons of trust«. This is particularly relevant in cases where our adherents feel like they don't »belong any more«. This requires building up trust over time. We want to create the necessary framework to train these social democratic »persons of trust« in the various urban neighbourhoods. The objective is to take on board the suggestions of local people, to increase voter participa-

tion – and thus to improve active participation in our society.

After a few trials in Länder (state) election campaigns we want to continue in rural areas and urban agglomerations. We will be testing this citizen-centred trust-building work within a concrete project over the next two years, taking into account earlier experiences.

Solid finances

As our party is increasingly inviting people to cooperate and join in, it needs appropriate financial resources.

The main part of our revenues come from the subscriptions of our members and our mandate bearers. Most of the donations too come from our own members.

This shows the particular affinity of our members to the party and is a distinctive feature of the SPD. As a result, our party has a special obligation to our members. We do not want to overstretch them.

Each member makes their own assessment regarding their financial means. That way, we take into account people's differing concrete life situations and financial burdens.

Deputies and members who have achieved their professional position not only by their qualifications but also with the SPD's support, have a particular duty when it comes to their financial contribution.

Vorwärts

»Vorwärts« is the SPD's publishing house in Berlin, a modern media company whose primary task is publishing books and information on behalf of and for SPD members. Over and above this, the vorwärts Verlag and its various publications promote and initiate political debate inside and outside the party. As a journalistic platform and as the central instrument for providing membership information and engendering loyalty the vorwärts Verlag is an essential part of social democratic communication.

Reforming the party committees

The SPD needs committees at all levels – for providing direction, creating political will and for successfully communicating the values and goals of the SPD. Efficient leadership and clear responsibilities strengthen the SPD's public perception.

Managing the party at federal level lies with the party board, which in the future will consist of no more than 35 members who as a rule meet every two weeks. It comprises the party chairperson, the secretary-general, five deputy chair people, the treasurer and the head of the party board for the European Union. In addition there are up to 26 members who are elected at the party conference.

Of great importance for our success is the close coordination of the work between the various political levels. Districts and sub-districts must be firmly integrated with the creation of political will. To this effect we are introducing a party convention which will take the place of the existing party council. In contrast to the latter, the party convention will have proper decision-taking power. It will be able to take decisions on all political and organizational issues and will be the top decision-taking committee of the party between the federal party conferences. Central decisions such as making appointments to party committees remain the privilege of the federal party conference, just as resolutions on the Basic policy program and the electoral programs and all issues concerning the party statutes, and the subscriptions or arbitration rules.

This so called »small party conference« is made up of 200 delegates elected by the party conferences of the districts and Länder (states) and further advisory members. The party convention meets in the years when no federal party conference is held, at least twice a year. In all other years it is held at least once. In addition, once yearly there is a conference of the chairpersons of the sub-district and district chairpersons.

To strengthen the regional branches we will enlarge the size of the federal party conference. Instead of there being 480 delegates in future this number will be 600.

European membership party

As early as 1925 we Social Democrats declared in the »Heidelberger Programm« our aim of creating the United States of Europe. Europe evolved as the response to the experience of our common history. Today, European integration is the appropriate path for securing peace and prosperity for the future.

The European idea lives on the enthusiasm of the Europeans and the public discussion regarding the appropriate path. The European public needs European parties. And a social and democratic Europe needs a European Social Democracy. It is for this reason that we want to make the Social Democratic Party of Europe (SPE) into a genuine European membership party. We want to achieve the sanctioning of individual membership in the SPE.

More than ever Europe needs fresh ideas! We want to bring to the European discussion table our ideas about a modern and socially just Europe. This was what motivated us to take the initiative for creating a basic program for the European Social Democracy.

We shall be actively using the new opportunities of citizen participation in Europe so as to empower the European citizens to make their impact felt. We shall be supporting the SPE so they can extend their campaigning abilities. One step towards this goal is reinforcing the cooperation within the European network of the social democratic secretary-generals.

It is of great importance for us that members in other European countries but also worldwide maintain their ties with the SPD and continue to take part in our discussions. To enable this, we want to offer appropriate conditions for our SPD party groups abroad.

Party on the Move

The SPD is the democracy and freedom movement in our country. We started out in 1863 as a workers' association and a workers' party and have become a big people's party. Government responsibility and life in the underground are both part of our proud history.

We fought for democracy when there was none. When we were in government we dared to introduce more de-



mocracy. The SPD has kept changing in order to always stay up-to-date. But we have always kept our values. That is the social democratic way.

We want to make our political culture even more democratic, and as the democratic people's party we intend to make our contribution. For it is clear that modern, self-confident citizens wish to participate in the political process to make our society a better place to live in. We don't just look on when more and more citizens simply turn away from political dialogue. We invite them, asking them to participate and help us shape the world.

The present Program is not just a proposal for amending the statutes – it demands a change of our culture. And this is why it is not the end, but the starting point for a reform of our party. To be alive means to change.

Let's get on our way! The SPD intends to be the most up-to-date party in Europe.



About the author

Daniel Totz studied political science and history at Leibniz University, Hannover and FU Berlin and is currently working as a consultant on party organisation and finance for the SPD *Land* association in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. The subject of his master's thesis was SPD party reform..

Imprint

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
International Policy Analysis
Hiroshimastraße 28 | 10785 Berlin | Germany

Responsible:
Dr. Gero Maaß, Head, International Policy Analysis

Tel.: ++49-30-269-35-7745 | Fax: ++49-30-269-35-9248
www.fes.de/ipa

To order publications:
info.ipa@fes.de

International Policy Analysis (IPA) is the analysis unit of the International Dialogue department of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. In our publications and studies we address key topics of European and international politics, economics and society. Our aim is the development of policy recommendations and scenarios from a social democratic perspective.

This publication appears within the framework of the working line »International Monitoring of Social Democracy«, editor: Jan Niklas Engels, Jan.Engels@fes.de; editorial assistant: Nora Neye, Nora.Neye@fes.de

The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung or of the organization for which the author works.

This publication is printed on paper from sustainable forestry.



ISBN 978-3-86872-990-0