

The Treaty of Versailles was a peace treaty signed on 28 June 1919. As the most important treaty of World War I, it ended the state of war between Germany and most of the Allied Powers. It was signed in the Palace of Versailles, exactly five years after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, which led to the war. The other Central Powers on the German side signed separate treaties. The United States never ratified the Versailles treaty and made a separate peace treaty with Germany. Although the armistice of 11 November 1918 ended the actual fighting, it took six months of Allied negotiations at the Paris Peace Conference to conclude the peace treaty. Germany was not allowed to participate in the negotiations; it was forced to sign the final treaty. The most critical and controversial provision in the treaty was: "The Allied and Associated Governments affirm and Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies." The other members of the Central Powers signed treaties containing similar articles. This article, Article 231, became known as the War Guilt clause. The treaty required Germany to disarm, make ample territorial concessions, and pay reparations to certain countries which had formed the Entente powers. In 1921 the total cost of these reparations was assessed at 132 billion gold marks (then \$31.4 billion or £6.6 billion, roughly equivalent to US\$442 billion or UK£284 billion in 2024). Prominent economists such as John Maynard Keynes declared the treaty too harsh, styling it as a "Carthaginian peace", and saying the reparations were excessive and counterproductive. On the other hand, prominent Allied figures such as French Marshal Ferdinand Foch criticized the treaty for treating Germany too leniently. This is still the subject of ongoing debate by historians and economists. The result of these competing and sometimes conflicting goals among the victors was a compromise that left no one satisfied. In particular, Germany was neither pacified nor conciliated, nor was it permanently weakened. The problems that arose from the treaty would lead to the Locarno Treaties, which improved relations between Germany and the other European powers. The reparation system was reorganized and payments reduced in the Dawes Plan and the Young Plan. The treaty's terms against Germany resulted in economic collapse and bitter resentment which powered the rise of the Nazi Party, and eventually the outbreak of a second World War. Although it is often referred to as the "Versailles Conference", only the actual signing of the treaty took place at the historic palace. Most of the negotiations were in Paris, with the "Big Four" meetings taking place generally at the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the Quai d'Orsay. The Palace of Versailles, located in the Île-de-France region of France, is a symbol of royal opulence and grandeur. Covering an expansive area of approximately 2,300 acres, including the palace grounds and gardens, it is one of the largest royal palaces in the world. The size of the Palace of Versailles is truly remarkable, comprising over 2,300 rooms, including the lavish Hall of Mirrors, the Royal Chapel, the King's and Queen's Apartments, and numerous galleries adorned with priceless artworks and ornate decorations. Its sheer scale and magnificence reflect the power and influence of the French monarchy during the 17th and 18th centuries. The palace's architectural style is a masterpiece of Baroque design,

characterized by its symmetrical layout, elaborate façades, and exquisite detailing. The expansive gardens, designed by renowned landscape architect André Le Nôtre, feature meticulously manicured lawns, sculpted hedges, fountains, and ornamental lakes, creating a stunning backdrop for the palace. Today, the Palace of Versailles is a UNESCO World Heritage site and a major tourist attraction, drawing millions of visitors each year to marvel at its splendor and learn about France's rich history. It serves as a testament to the grandeur of the French monarchy and remains a symbol of cultural heritage and artistic achievement.

== Background ==

=== First World War ===

War broke out unexpectedly following the July Crisis in 1914. Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, followed quickly by the entry of most European powers into an expanding conflict which became the First World War. Two alliances faced off, the Central Powers (led by Germany) and the Triple Entente (led by Britain, France and Russia). Other countries entered as fighting raged widely across Europe, as well as the Middle East, Africa and Asia. In 1917, the new Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic under Vladimir Lenin in March 1918 signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, amounting to a surrender that was highly favourable to Germany. Sensing victory before the American Expeditionary Forces could be ready, Germany now shifted forces to the Western Front and tried to overwhelm the Allies. It failed. Instead, the Allies won decisively on the battlefield and forced an armistice in November 1918 that resembled a surrender.

== Treaty content and signing ==

In June 1919, the Allies declared that war would resume if the German government did not sign the treaty they had agreed to among themselves. The government headed by Philipp Scheidemann was unable to agree on a common position, and Scheidemann himself resigned rather than agree to sign the treaty. Gustav Bauer, the head of the new government, sent a telegram stating his intention to sign the treaty if certain articles were withdrawn, including Articles 227, 230 and 231. In response, the Allies issued an ultimatum stating that Germany would have to accept the treaty or face an invasion of Allied forces across the Rhine within 24 hours. On 23 June, Bauer capitulated and sent a second telegram with a confirmation that a German delegation would arrive shortly to sign the treaty. On 28 June 1919, the fifth anniversary of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand (the immediate impetus for the war), the peace treaty was signed. The treaty had clauses ranging from war crimes, the prohibition on the merging of the Republic of German Austria with Germany without the consent of the League of Nations, freedom of navigation on major European rivers, to the returning of a Koran to the king of Hedjaz.

=== Territorial changes ===

The treaty stripped Germany of 65,000 km² (25,000 sq mi) of territory and 7 million people. It also required Germany to give up the gains made via the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and grant independence to the protectorates that had been established. In Western Europe, Germany was required to recognize Belgian sovereignty over Moresnet and cede control of the Eupen-Malmedy area. Within six months of the transfer, Belgium was required to conduct a plebiscite on whether the citizens of the region wanted to remain under Belgian sovereignty or return to German control, communicate the results to the League of Nations and abide by the League's decision. The Belgian transitional administration, under High Commissioner General Herman Baltia, was responsible for the organisation and control of this process, held between January and June 1920. The plebiscite itself was held without a secret ballot, and organized as a consultation in which all citizens

who opposed the annexation had to formally register their protest. Ultimately, only 271 of 33,726 voters signed the protest list, of which 202 were German state servants. After the Belgian government reported this result, the League of Nations confirmed the change of status on 20 September 1920, with the line of the German-Belgian border finally fixed by a League of Nations commission in 1922. To compensate for the destruction of French coal mines, Germany was to cede the output of the Saar coalmines to France and control of the Saar to the League of Nations for 15 years; a plebiscite would then be held to decide sovereignty. The treaty restored the provinces of Alsace-Lorraine to France by rescinding the treaties of Versailles and Frankfurt of 1871 as they pertained to this issue. France was able to make the claim that the provinces of Alsace-Lorraine were indeed part of France and not part of Germany by disclosing a letter sent from the Prussian King to the Empress Eugénie that Eugénie provided, in which William I wrote that the territories of Alsace-Lorraine were requested by Germany for the sole purpose of national defense and not to expand the German territory. The sovereignty of Schleswig-Holstein was to be resolved by a plebiscite to be held at a future time (see Schleswig Plebiscites). In Central Europe Germany was to recognize the independence of Czechoslovakia (which had actually been controlled by Austria) and cede parts of the province of Upper Silesia. Germany had to recognize the independence of Poland and renounce "all rights and title over the territory". Portions of Upper Silesia were to be ceded to Poland, with the future of the rest of the province to be decided by plebiscite. The border would be fixed with regard to the vote and to the geographical and economic conditions of each locality. The Province of Posen (now Poznań), which had come under Polish control during the Greater Poland Uprising, was also to be ceded to Poland. Pomerelia (Eastern Pomerania), on historical and ethnic grounds, was transferred to Poland so that the new state could have access to the sea and became known as the Polish Corridor. The sovereignty of part of southern East Prussia was to be decided via plebiscite while the East Prussian Soldau area, which was astride the rail line between Warsaw and Danzig, was transferred to Poland outright without plebiscite. An area of 51,800 square kilometres (20,000 square miles) was granted to Poland at the expense of Germany. Memel was to be ceded to the Allied and Associated powers, for disposal according to their wishes. Germany was to cede the city of Danzig and its hinterland, including the delta of the Vistula River on the Baltic Sea, for the League of Nations to establish the Free City of Danzig.

=== Mandates === Article 119 of the treaty required Germany to renounce sovereignty over former colonies and Article 22 converted the territories into League of Nations mandates under the control of Allied states. Togoland and German Kamerun (Cameroon) were transferred to France, aside from portions given to Britain, British Togoland and British Cameroon. Ruanda and Urundi were allocated to Belgium, whereas German South-West Africa went to South Africa and Britain obtained German East Africa. As compensation for the German invasion of Portuguese Africa, Portugal was granted the Kionga Triangle, a sliver of German East Africa in northern Mozambique. Article 156 of the treaty transferred German concessions in Shandong, China, to Japan, not to China. Japan was granted all German possessions in the Pacific north of the equator and those south of the equator went to Australia, except for German Samoa, which was taken by New Zealand.

=== Reparations === In Article 231 Germany accepted

responsibility for the losses and damages caused by the war "as a consequence of the ... aggression of Germany and her allies." The treaty required Germany to compensate the Allied powers, and it also established an Allied "Reparation Commission" to determine the exact amount which Germany would pay and the form that such payment would take. The commission was required to "give to the German Government a just opportunity to be heard", and to submit its conclusions by 1 May 1921. In the interim, the treaty required Germany to pay an equivalent of 20 billion gold marks (\$5 billion) in gold, commodities, ships, securities or other forms. The money would help to pay for Allied occupation costs and buy food and raw materials for Germany.