

TREATY OF FRANKFURT

TREATY AT A GLANCE

Completed

May 10, 1871, at Frankfurt, Germany

Signatories

Germany and France

Overview

This, the definitive treaty of peace ending the Franco-Prussian War—based on the preliminary treaty, the TREATY OF VERSAILLES (1871)—gave birth to the French Third Republic and a unified Germany, Otto von Bismarck's new German Empire.

Historical Background

In 1866 Prussian premier Otto von Bismarck ignored the objections of his king, Wilhelm I, and provoked a war within the aging German Confederation in order to overcome Austria's dominance of the league and unite the German states under Prussian hegemony. By occupying the duchy of Holstein, then administered by Austria, Bismarck sparked the so-called Seven Weeks' War, which pitted Austria and its allies—Württemberg, Saxony, Hanover, Baden, and a host of smaller German states—against the military-minded Prussians and their ally, Italy. Bismarck won, and in a peace mediated by France's Napoleon III, Austria was excluded from German affairs, Prussia took hold of Schleswig-Holstein, Hanover, Hesse, Nassau, and Frankfurt, and the old confederation was replaced by the new North German Confederation.

Bismarck immediately began to work on bringing the still independent southern German states into the North German Confederation, which, despite Napoleon III's midwifery, was virulently anti-French. When the Prussians tried to put a Hohenzollern prince related to the Prussian kaiser on the Spanish throne in 1870, the Emperor Napoleon felt the pressure of a possible Prussian-Spanish two-front war looming in his future, and he called a summit with Kaiser Wilhelm to discuss the matter, which Bismarck torpedoed with his infamous Ems Telegram. French-German relations ruptured, and Napoleon—having been assured the French army was invincible and believing a sure victory would destroy his declining prestige at home—declared the war Bismarck wanted on July 19, 1870.

It was another of the brief, brutal wars Bismarck liked to fight, although not so short as the 1866 conflict. Personally humiliated by defeat at Sedan on September 2, where he led the last vain charge before surrendering, Napoleon was deposed by a French provisional government set up in a Paris besieged by Bismarck's army. In January 1871 Paris fell, though fighting continued between the two armies in the French provinces until an armistice was declared in March. The peace, delayed by the outbreak of civil war in France, was not concluded till May, although an interim Treaty of Versailles was concluded.

Bismarck had what he wanted, as the North German Confederation was declared the German—read “Prussian”—Empire.

Terms

Under the Treaty of Frankfurt, France lost Alsace and much of Lorraine, incurred a massive indemnity of 5,000,000,000 francs, and saw the birth of the Third Republic from the ruins of Napoleon III's Second Empire, while Prussia became the center of a new, unified Germany.

As with the Treaty of Versailles (1871), the Frankfurt document began without preamble, plunging instead directly into the matter of redefining the Franco-German frontier:

ARTICLE I

The distance between the Town of Belfort and the Line of Frontier, such as it had been proposed during the negotiations of Versailles, and such as it is marked on the Map annexed to the Ratifications of the

Preliminaries of the 26th February, is considered as describing the Radius which, by virtue of the Clause relating thereto in Article I of the Preliminaries, is to remain to France with the Town and Fortifications of Belfort.

The German Government is disposed to extend that Radius so as to include the Cantons of Belfort, Delle, and Giromagny, as well as the western part of the Canton of Fontaine, to the West of a line to be traced from the spot where the Canal from the Rhone to the Rhine leaves the Canton of Delle to the South of Montreux-Château, to the Northern Limits of the Canton between Bourg and Felon where that Line would join the Eastern Limit of the Canton of Giromagny.

The German Government will, nevertheless, not cede the above Territories unless the French Republic agrees, on its part, to a rectification of Frontier along the Western Limits of the Cantons of Cattenom and Thionville which will give to Germany the Territory to the East of a Line starting from the Frontier of Luxembourg between Hussigny and Redingen, leaving to France the Villages of Thil and Villerupt, extending between Erronville and Aumetz, between Beuvillers and Boulange, between Triux and Lomringen, and joining the ancient Line of Frontier between Avril and Moyeuivre.

The International Commission, mentioned in Article I of the Preliminaries, shall proceed to the spot immediately after the Ratifications of the present Treaty to execute the Works entrusted to them and to trace the new Frontier, in accordance with the preceding dispositions.

Careful provision was made for French residents of the ceded territories, allowing any who wished, to move to France proper, without sacrificing their real property and without being accused of evading Prussian conscription laws:

ARTICLE II

French Subjects, Natives of the ceded Territories, actually domiciled on that Territory, who shall preserve their Nationality, shall up to the 1st October, 1872, and on their making a previous Declaration to that effect to the Competent Authority, be allowed to change their domicile into France and to remain there, that right in nowise infringing on the Laws on Military Service, in which case the title of French Citizen shall be maintained.

They shall be at liberty to preserve their Immovables situated in the Territory united to Germany.

No Inhabitant of the ceded Territory shall be prosecuted, annoyed, or sought for, either in his person or his property, on account of his Political or Military Acts previous to the War.

Article 7 spelled out the humiliating terms by which the French agreed to pay the unprecedented demnity. Payment was tied to the process of evacuating the occupying German troops:

ARTICLE VII

The payment of 500,000,000 (1/2 milliard) shall be made within 30 days after the re-establishment of the Authority of the French Government in the City of Paris. 1,000,000,000 (1 milliard) shall be paid in the course of the year, and 500,000,000 (1/2 milliard) on the 1st May, 1872. The last 3,000,000,000 (3 milliards) shall remain payable on the 2nd March, 1874, as stipulated in the Preliminary Treaty. From the 2nd March of the present year the Interest on those 3,000,000,000 francs (3 milliards) shall be paid each year on the 3rd March, at the rate of 5 per cent. per annum.

All sums paid in advance on the last 3,000,000,000 shall cease to bear Interest from the day on which the payment is made.

The payment can only be made in the principal German Commercial Towns, and shall be made in metal, Gold or Silver, in Notes of the Bank of England, in Prussian Bank Notes, in Netherlands Bank Notes, in Notes of the National Bank of Belgium, in first class Negotiable Bills to Order or Letters of Exchange, payable at sight.

The German Government having fixed in France the value of a Prussian Thaler at 3 francs 75 centimes, the French Government accepts the conversion of the Moneys of both Countries at the rate above stated.

The French Government will inform the German Government, 3 months in advance, of all payments which it intends to make into the Treasury of the German Empire.

After the payment of the first 500,000,000 (1/2 milliard) and the Ratification of the Definitive Treaty of Peace, the Departments of the Somme, Seine Inférieure, and Eure shall be evacuated in so far as they shall be found to be still occupied by German Troops. The Evacuation of the Departments of the Oise, Seine-et-Oise, Seine-et-Marne, and Seine, as well as the Forts of Paris, shall take place so soon as the German Government shall consider the reestablishment of Order, both in France and Paris, sufficient to ensure the execution of the Engagements contracted by France.

Under all circumstances, the Evacuation shall take place after the payment of the third 500,000,000 (1/2 milliard).

The German Troops, for their own security, shall have at their disposal the Neutral Zone between the German line of Demarcation and the Paris enclosure on the Right Bank of the Seine.

The stipulations of the Treaty of 26th February relative to the occupation of French Territories after the payment of the 2,000,000,000 (2 milliards), shall remain in force. None of the deductions which the French Government might have a right to make shall be made on the payment of the first 500,000,000 (1/2 milliard).

The treaty went on to establish certain commercial as well as spiritual rights. For example, as specified in Article 12:

ARTICLE XII

All expelled Germans shall preserve the full and entire enjoyment of all Property which they may have acquired in France.

Such Germans who had obtained the authority required by French Laws to establish their Domicile in France shall be reinstated in all their Rights, and may consequently again establish their Domicile in French Territory.

The delay stipulated by French Laws to obtain Naturalization shall be considered as not having been interrupted by the state of War for persons who shall take advantage of the above-mentioned facility of returning to France within 6 months after the exchange of the Ratifications of this Treaty, and the time which has elapsed between their expulsion and their return to the French Territory shall be taken into account, as if they had never ceased to reside in France.

The above conditions shall be applicable in perfect reciprocity to the French Subjects residing, or wishing to reside, in Germany.

By Article 16, the two governments pledged to "respect and preserve the Tombs of Soldiers buried in their respective Territories." In Article 2 of "Additional Articles" appended to the treaty, the German government offered 2 million francs "for the rights and properties possessed by the Company of the eastern Railways on that portion of its system situated on Swiss territory from the frontier at Bâle, provided that the French Government signifies its consent within a period of one month."

Consequences

With the Treaty of Frankfurt, Bismarck declared the new German Empire a satisfied power, and he placed his not inconsiderable diplomatic talents at the service of European stability. Here, too, he would prove successful, and peace among the major powers of Europe with a France free of Napoleon no longer dominant would last until the outbreak of the Great War in 1914. So, too, would the empire.