



## IMPACT OF THE LOCARNO TREATY ON EUROPEAN POLITICS

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**ABSTRACT:** *The paper examined the Locarno treaty of 1925, which tried to establish peace among some central European states, such as Germany, France, Britain, Belgium and Italy among others. The paper applied the historical-descriptive research of library instrument to generate data, and findings show that the treaties have succeeded in maintaining peace within the region especially with the creation of a demilitarized zone of Rhineland for years, but the French pressure on Germany to be punished resulted in the German bitterness and felt that the treaty was against them, which paved a way for the outbreak of the WW II. The paper concludes that the Locarno treaty can be described as a great tool that Germany used to bring back stability both economic and social. Although it didn't last very long due to the great depression and following the WWII it can be seen as a great buffer period that Germany used to become a super power once again and she truly achieved these aims. Locarno pact also had an impact on the Nazi party in Germany that came out of its ashes like a phoenix once it was clear that the Locarno pact failed or was outdated. The paper recommends that there is the need not to favour any nation against another or others in terms of conflict or resolving such not only in Europe, but in all places around the world. There is also the need for sincerity of purpose by all parties involved to put a stop in the reoccurrence of fatal conflicts.*

**KEYWORDS:** Impact, Locarno, Treaty, World, European, Politics

### INTRODUCTION

The French security system has been the fundamental cause of European unrest where repeated efforts have been made to solve the issue in a series of conferences. The Locarno treaty was signed during the time of German History known as the Stresemann era. This period was considered the time of recovery. During these years Germany went through the 'golden age of Weimar Republic.' The man responsible for this is Gustav Stresemann who was the Chancellor for a few months in 1923 and then later on the prime minister until 1929. While serving as a Chancellor the government took action to stop inflation by issuing new currency Rentenmark (Brierly, 1968). In the analysis of Sharfman (1999), during this time Germany agreed to Dawes Plan with the USA to prevent financial collapse in the future by spreading out the reparation's payments according to Germany's ability to pay. During this time investment returned to Germany. During his time as the Foreign minister after German economy started recovering Mr. Stresemann wanted to improve Germany's position in Europe and did so by seeking cooperation and diplomacy rather than revenge. This brought Germany to Locarno Pact In 1929 the German foreign minister Gustav Stresemann proposed that France, Germany and Belgium should recognize as permanent their frontiers that was agreed at Versailles.



This proposal included the promise not to send German troops into the Rhineland and the acceptance that Alsace-Lorraine was permanently part of France. The French foreign minister, Aristide Briand, agreed with Stresemann's proposals and signed the treaty. However, as Germany refused to guarantee its eastern frontiers, France sought to give Poland and Czechoslovakia the security they required by signing treaties with them.

The Treaty of Locarno was signed in October 1925, which enabled Germany to be admitted to the League of Nations. The Locarno Conference was called partly because of the failure of the Treaty of Versailles to satisfy many nations and solve conflicts between countries that remained after World War I. The Treaty of Versailles ended military actions against Germany in World War I, and resulted in the Rhineland Security Pact as well as 6 other treaties (Brierly, 1968). In the October of 1925, representatives of seven European countries met in Locarno, Switzerland, where the seven countries involved were Belgium, United Kingdom, Czechoslovakia, France, Germany, Italy and Poland. The purpose of the conference was to discuss political borders and to build permanent peace. It was the second peace conference (the first was the Congress of Vienna) where the most important issues were discussed to find settlement between France and Germany and for the first time, nations treated Germany as a friendly nation.

The Rhineland Security Pact developed as the most important treaty which allowed Germany to join the League of Nations and helped set up a neutral zone in the Rhineland, which was an area covering Belgian, French and German soil. All signing powers vowed to guarantee France's and Belgium's borders with Germany. The six other treaties made all seven nations promise to discuss their problems before resorting to war; they were all to submit all future disputes to international authority. It was guaranteed by Britain and Italy who pledged to resist whatever country that violated the demilitarized Rhineland.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is hinged on the *Liberalist theory of international relations* deals with the "freedom of individual" as it believes that humans are good natured beings. Liberalism's core ideals stress individualism, human rights, universality, freedom from authority, right to be treated equally under the protection of law and duty to respect and treat others as "ethical subjects" as well as freedom for social action (Doyle, 1983: 206-207; Fukuyama, 1992: 42). Closely connected to these individual freedoms is the concept of representative government as well as the importance of the ownership of private property, right to free economic activity without state interference (Doyle, 1983: 208; Fukuyama, 1992: 44). Liberal scholars such as Kant (1675) focused on harmony between people overseen by institutions such as judiciary and the representative form of the government where leaders exercise their authority with the consent of "free people existing in a political order" (Doyle, 1983: 209; Kant, 1675). As the liberal state is represented through sovereign government of the people, its sovereignty and integrity are not subject to any external control such as an authority (Doyle 1983: 213).

The theory has lasted, stood for test of time and championed the freedom of man which it focused on peace treaty between Germany and the United States of America to prevent financial collapses in future which also enabled Germany to be admitted into the League of Nations.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

**The rationale behind the Locarno Treaty has encapsulated:** (1) *Cooperation*: Nations promised to guarantee political borders discussed (2) *Internationalism*: The seven European nations had gotten together in order to establish a peace settlement (3) *National security*: All nations involved had to promise to keep to their political borders (4) *Regional security*: No nations were to go into the Rhineland as it was a neutral zone (5) *Total war*: This Locarno Pact was an attempt to remove tensions between Germany and France. Countries wanted an overall peace settlement and wanted to prevent a second world war.

The Locarno Treaties, also known as the Pact of Locarno, were a series of treaties between Germany, France, Great Britain, Italy and Belgium designed to guarantee peace in Western Europe following World War I. The powers initialled the agreements in Locarno, Switzerland, on Oct. 16, 1925 (Sharfman, 1999). The agreements consisted of: (1) A treaty of mutual guarantee between Germany, Belgium, France, Great Britain, and Italy (2) Arbitration treaties between Germany and Belgium and between Germany and France (3) A note from the former Allies to Germany explaining the use of sanctions against a covenant-breaking state as outlined in article 16 of the League of Nations Covenant (4) Arbitration treaties between Germany and Czechoslovakia and between Germany and Poland; and (5) Treaties of guarantee between France and Poland and between France and Czechoslovakia.

According to Brierly (1968), the treaty of mutual guarantee provided that the German-Belgian and Franco-German frontiers as fixed by the Treaty of Versailles were inviolable; that Germany, Belgium, and France would never attack each other except in “legitimate defense” or in consequence of a League of Nations obligation; that they would settle their disputes by pacific means; and that in case of an alleged breach of these undertakings, the signatories would come to the defense of the party adjudged by the League to be the party attacked and also in case of a “flagrant violation.” The treaties of guarantee between France and Poland or Czechoslovakia provided for mutual support against unprovoked attack. A further consequence of the pact was the evacuation of Allied troops from the Rhineland in 1930, five years ahead of schedule (Brierly, 1968).

The clear meaning of Locarno was that Germany renounces the use of force to change its western frontiers but agreed only to arbitration as regards its eastern frontiers, and that Great Britain promised to defend Belgium and France but not Poland and Czechoslovakia. In March 1936 Germany sent troops into the Rhineland, which had been demilitarized by the Treaty of Versailles, declaring that the situation envisaged at Locarno had been changed by the Franco-Soviet alliance of 1935. France regarded the German move as a “flagrant violation” of Locarno, but Great Britain declined to do so, and no action was taken. Germany made no effort to arbitrate its dispute with Czechoslovakia in 1938 or with Poland in 1939 (Brierly, 1968).

### Parties and Agreement

The principal treaty concluded at Locarno was that the Rhineland Pact was between Germany, France, Belgium, the United Kingdom, and Italy. Germany formally recognised its new western borders acted by the Treaty of Versailles. Furthermore, the first three signatories undertook not to attack each other, with the latter two acting as guarantors. In the event of aggression by any of the first three states against another, all other parties were to assist the



country under attack (Brierly, 1968). Germany also agreed to sign arbitration conventions with France and Belgium and arbitration treaties with Poland and Czechoslovakia, undertaking to refer future disputes to an arbitration tribunal or to the Permanent Court of International Justice.

France signed further treaties with Poland and Czechoslovakia, pledging mutual assistance in the event of conflict with Germany. These essentially reaffirmed existing treaties of alliance concluded by France with Poland on 19 February 1921 and with Czechoslovakia on 25 January 1924. These treaties also showed that relations between France and Germany had not improved to a large extent (Brierly, 1968).

### **German Security Proposals**

In studying the history of the events which made Locarno necessary and possible it is desirable to consider separately the various security proposals made by Germany. In December, 1922, the newly appointed Chancellor Cuno proposed that Germany, Great Britain, France and Italy should solemnly promise not to make war for thirty years unless the matter was decided by popular vote. This was flatly rejected by France and shortly afterwards M. Poincaré ordered the occupation of the Ruhr.

### **Second German Proposal**

The second German proposal for a security pact was made in a note of February 9, 1925. This proposal was interesting as so nearly coinciding in fundamentals with the principles embodied in the Locarno treaties. The basis on which Germany proposed to negotiate included: (1) A pact among the powers interested in the Rhine, agreeing not to wage war against each other. (2) A pact guaranteeing the present territorial status on the Rhine and the demilitarisation of the Rhineland as provided in the Versailles Treaty, and (3) Arbitration treaties in connection with these pacts.

### **French Stipulations**

After prolonged conversations with Great Britain, according to Sharfman (1999), France answered that she welcomed the idea of a Rhineland pact and made the following conditions: (1) that Germany must join the League of Nations without reservations (2) that the new pact must neither involve nor imply a modification of the peace treaties, nor of the treaties relating to the occupation of the Rhineland (3) that the signatories of the pact shall reserve their rights to take coercive action to compel the observance of existing treaties (4) that the arbitration treaties to be concluded between France and Germany and between Belgium and Germany supplementary to the Rhineland pact must be guaranteed jointly and severally by all the signatories.

### **German Stipulations**

In response to the French stipulations, Germany pointed out that while the proposal did not call for any modification of existing treaties, the German government reserved the possibility of adapting existing treaties at the proper time to changed circumstances by way of peaceful agreement. Germany protested against the French stipulation that the Allied governments should have the unilateral right to take coercive action at their discretion without previous



resort to arbitration. Germany, as a partially disarmed nation, objected to Article 16 of the Covenant of the League (Sharfman, 1999).

### **The Locarno Treaty and the Second World War**

The Pact of Locarno was mainly designed to affirm the treaty of Versailles with regards to Western Europe, while Germany was admitted into the League of Nations. The treaty attempted to promote cooperation and improved relations between western European powers, by guaranteeing that France, Belgium, and Germany were not to attack each other. However, the treaties could be seen to have created an excuse for conflict in Eastern Europe, as those borders were subject to change. Germany signed arbitration treaties with Poland and Czechoslovakia, and France signed treaties to guarantee assistance to Poland and Czechoslovakia in the event of a conflict with Germany. Due to appeasement, the treaties would fail to promote peace between Germany and its neighbours. France and Britain did not act to prevent the reoccupation of the Rhineland, and France would make no effort to back up its alliances with Poland and Czechoslovakia. The political machinations of France against Germany had created a lasting vacuum for the re-emergence of conflict in Europe where France was only out there to see that Germany was severely punished without looking at the future response of the Germans against the injustices perpetrated against them. This has led to the outbreak of the Second World War.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **Impact of the Locarno Treaty on World Politics**

The Locarno Treaties marked a dramatic improvement in the political climate of western Europe in 1924–1930. They promoted expectations for continued peaceful settlements, often called the "spirit of Locarno." This spirit was made concrete when Germany joined the League in 1926, and the withdrawal of Allied troops occupying Germany's Rhineland. The Nobel Peace Prize was given to the lead negotiators of the treaty, going to Sir Austen Chamberlain in 1925 and jointly to Aristide Briand and Gustav Stresemann in 1926 (Sharfman, 1999).

Sharfman (1999) stated that Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Poland and Czechoslovakia participated in the Locarno Conferences in Switzerland. These conferences opened up a possibility that the biggest threat to the tranquility of Europe, the ever-existing hostility between France and Germany, might at last be extinguished. Austin Chamberlain of England, one of the leaders at Locarno, was accurate in calling it "the real dividing point between the years of war and the years of peace." He and the other two leaders at Locarno, Aristide Briand of France and Gustav Stresemann of Germany, were confident that these agreements would give way to an era of peace.

He further observed that France and Germany wanted more security from each other and through the Locarno treaties they were able to achieve this by setting Germany's Western border. A central aspect of the treaties was that Germany would not choose combat as a means of resolving differences with France or Belgium. Instead, they would use diplomatic measures in order to sort out their problems. In addition, the other countries would come without delay to the aid of the attacked country should this agreement ever be broken. The



treaties would assure that the frontiers between Germany and France and between Germany and Belgium be kept. France's safety was only modestly improved, however, because the other countries in the agreement would only come to its aid if the act committed against it was considered severe. Moreover, the agreement did not restrict the Eastern border.

The treaties gave way to a sense of global goodwill, known as the "spirit of Locarno." They also helped strengthen the way for Germany's admission into the League of Nations the next year. Finally, Germany was being treated as a friendly nation by its enemies. Soon after joining the League however, the "spirit of Locarno" ran into strong opposition in Germany and France and eventually dissolved completely. The Germans were upset that their borders were so restricted, and many felt that Locarno had brought disgrace and dishonor. France was opposed to it because they felt that they were not well enough protected from Germany. Though its ideals were good and its promises were hopeful, the Locarno treaties could not prevent World War II.

The Locarno pact which was signed in 1925 promoted continental stability. It determined the borders between Germany, France and Belgium and settled the issues of the demilitarization of Rhineland. It was also responsible for the arbitration of Poland and it promised the better security within Central Europe. At the time this was seen as a significant turning point in the international affairs. With its Germany managed to achieve many things like restarting diplomacy and ending the period of isolation. However, it had strong criticism by the German nationalists who felt that it was a mistake and felt bitter about the German eastern border. Germany had a strong interest in Central Europe and this meant that with the new borders all they could do was to apply diplomacy (Brierly, 1968).

Due to Locarno pact and with the stability back in Germany even if only temporarily another achieved aim for Germany was ending of strict payments for war reparations. Instead German economy started blossoming once again and the economic cooperation with French brought to reconstruction and recovery. Even though the economy was achieving progress the strong nationalism between France and Germany even with the Locarno pact prevented for the antagonism between the two nations to be eradicated and this can be viewed as a failure of the diplomacy as we know that 15 years after this the two countries were at war once again (Jones, et al 1998). This new German behaviour that has suddenly changed from militaristic to rather diplomatic is the work of German Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann who served the longest mandate in the German history. Between 1923 and 1929 he was the man responsible for bringing social and economic stability to Germany. When he came to power, he was the chancellor at what historians characterized as the worst era in German history as the country was in total chaos. This man was able to put the pieces together, fight the criticism and push restart button. Because of him and the Locarno Pact Germany was re-recognized around the world again and it became a great power once again and this was formally acknowledged when Germany joined the League of nations. Mr. Stresemann is also a winner of Nobel peace prize and with such reputation many wondered what would have Germany been like had he stayed in power any longer, and unfortunately, he died in 1929.

His death a tragedy already for Germany wasn't the only thing that worsened the German situation. The Great depression that hit the world in 1929 and continued into 1930 quickly removed the works of Gustav Stresemann and The Locarno pact from the center of attention. Germany sank quickly back into economic and social catastrophe. Together with all of its



problems and lacking of a charismatic leader Germany's achieved aims were forgotten and the rise of the right-wingers such as Nazi's was a direct outcome of the failure to proceed with the Locarno Pact and its ideas that Mr. Stresemann envisioned (Brierly, 1968).

## CONCLUSION

Locarno treaty can be described as a great tool that Germany used to bring back stability both economic and social. Although it didn't last very long due to the great depression and following the WWII it can be seen as a great buffer period that Germany used to become a super power once again and she truly achieved these aims. Locarno pact also had an impact on the Nazi party in Germany that came out of its ashes like a phoenix once it was clear that the Locarno pact failed or was outdated.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are imperative for perpetual peaceful coexistence among the European states and other nations around the world:

- There is the need not to favour any nation against another or others in terms of conflict or resolving such not only in Europe, but in all places around the world,
- There is the need for sincerity of purpose by all parties involved to put a stop in the reoccurrence of fatal conflicts,
- The major international organisations such as the League of Nations which metamorphosed to the united nations must continue to be partial not only in peace keeping operations but in arbitration and conflict resolution, so as not create monsters out of the comity of nations as it happened with Germany.

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