

How far did Stresemann's foreign policy strengthen the Weimar regime?

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

'The Stresemann Era' is the name sometimes given to the history of the Weimar Republic between 1923 and 1929. It reflects the importance of Germany's Foreign Minister, Gustav Stresemann, and his diplomacy which was an important factor in the public's attitude to the Weimar regime. A successful foreign policy was needed. This would reduce the public hatred of the Republic's acceptance of the Versailles Treaty. It would also help Germany's economy, since sorting out reparations would be essential if the new Rentenmark was to maintain its value.

In this chapter we examine Stresemann's aims and strategy, how successful he was and whether his policy strengthened the Weimar Republic. In addition, you will decide whether he was a 'good European', an idealistic politician, committed to European co-operation or whether he was a 'good German', a determined nationalist, committed to establishing Germany's domination in Europe.

- A** What foreign policy did Stresemann pursue? (pp. 80–3)
- B** Was Stresemann a 'good European' or a 'good German'? (p. 84)
- C** How successful was Stresemann's foreign policy? (pp. 85–6)
- D** Review: How far did Stresemann's foreign policy strengthen the Weimar regime? (pp. 87–8)



■ 4A Gustav Stresemann, 1878–1929

Born the son of a Berlin publican, Stresemann studied economics at university, before going into business. Attracted to both liberalism and German nationalism, he became the youngest member of the Reichstag when elected in 1907 as a National Liberal. He became party leader in 1917. During the war, he took a very assertive line and was nicknamed 'Ludendorff's young man'. He supported unrestricted submarine warfare, opposed the 1917 peace resolution, and supported the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

In 1919 the National Liberal Party split into the German National People's Party, which Stresemann rejected as too conservative, and the German Democratic Party, which rejected Stresemann as he was too nationalist. Stresemann therefore formed the moderate conservative German People's Party (DVP), which favoured constitutional monarchy. Over the next few years Stresemann moved the DVP into a more constructive attitude to the new republic, seeing it as the best available alternative to left- or right-wing dictatorship.

Stresemann's abilities as speaker and administrator and the assassination of other leaders such as Erzberger and Rathenau meant that he emerged as the most effective Weimar politician. In August 1923 he was appointed Chancellor to deal with the economic crisis. He tackled the challenge with firm and realistic policies and although he lost the Reichstag's confidence as Chancellor in November 1923 he remained as Foreign Minister from 1923 until his death in October 1929.

In 1926 Gustav Stresemann was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his diplomatic work.

- 1 Which aspects of Stresemann's early experience might prove valuable as Foreign Minister?
- 2 Can you draw conclusions from his early career about his likely policies as Foreign Minister?