

# Kuno von Westarp's Reichstag Speech against Joining the League of Nations (January 27, 1926)

## Abstract

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After U.S. President Woodrow Wilson had called for the establishment of a League of Nations to secure future peace in his 14-point program as early as 1918, its establishment was laid down in the peace treaty that formally ended the First World War. The League of Nations began its work with the entry into force of the Versailles Treaty on January 10, 1920 (the League of Nations Charter was part of the treaty). Germany had to recognize the authority of the League of Nations but was initially excluded from membership. However, at the Locarno Conference in October 1925, Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann had negotiated a security pact, the entry into force of which required Germany to join the League of Nations. The Reichstag ratified the Locarno Treaties. On September 8, 1926, Germany was admitted as a permanent member of the League of Nations.

In this excerpt from the Reichstag session of January 27, 1926, the DNVP parliamentary party leader Kuno von Westarp speaks out strongly against Germany joining the League of Nations. Westarp was one of the founding members of the nationalist, anti-republic DNVP, which had left the government the previous year in protest against the Locarno Treaties, thus causing the government coalition to fail. In his speech, Westarp cites the provisions of the Versailles Treaty on former German territories as arguments against joining the League of Nations. The League of Nations was not only responsible for administering the Saar region, Upper Silesia and Danzig (Gdansk), it was also involved in the transfer of mandates over German territories to other states, which also included the colonies that Germany had to cede to the Allied and Associated Powers under Article 119 of the Versailles Treaty. Westarp also warns against compliance with the provisions for the military disarmament of Germany, as this would leave Germany exposed to the Allied powers.

## Source

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[...]

**President Löbe:** Count von Westarp has the floor.

Count **v. Westarp** (DNVP), Member of Parliament: "From illusions to disappointments,"

(hear! hear! From the Left)

That is the heading under which future historians will probably describe the **foreign policy of the German Republic** and its parliamentary governments, including the foreign policy of Foreign Minister Dr. Stresemann. From illusions to disappointments, from disappointments to new illusions!

We tried to stop this train wreck last year. We had to get out of the barge at Locarno when we saw that this barge was to be taken from the sunny shores of Lake Maggiore into the fog of London.

(Great amusement.)

That was the reason for the fact mentioned by the Chancellor that we felt compelled to dissolve the government coalition that existed in October of last year.

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[...]

But I don't think it's right at all to reproach each other in this situation. We are dealing with factual contradictions, factual necessities of politics, which are the ultimate cause of what we are experiencing today. For when I say that our resistance to the policy I have characterized is not yet over, it is precisely because the struggle about the Locarno Treaties and the League of Nations has not yet come to an end. The government is still fully in a position to decide freely whether it wishes to apply to **join the League of Nations**.

(Very true! from the DNVP)

Article 2 of the law of 29 November gives it the authorization, but does not impose the obligation to submit this application,

(very true! among the DNVP)

and the Locarno Treaties, which were concluded in London, contain the final provision that they will only enter into force after Germany has joined the League of Nations. That is a condition precedent. The freedom of action of all parties as to whether they wish to fulfill this condition, or believe they can fulfill it, is preserved. Nor can an obligation under international law be inferred from these events, an obligation to submit the application now.

The question of most interest in the current situation is whether and, above all, under what conditions the new government intends to make use of the authorization to apply for membership of the League of Nations.

(Very true! From the DNVP)

We were unable to get a clear answer to this question from the government statement we heard yesterday.

(Very true! From the DNVP)

[...]

We want to find out whether the current government, despite all the serious disappointments of recent weeks

(very true! From the DNVP)

really intends to apply to join the League of Nations, under what conditions, under what preconditions it intends to do so, whether it is willing to submit the application without first creating the necessary guarantees for the German Reich and people.

According to the general opinion of the House and all parties, this refers primarily to the **conditions in the occupied territories**. Let me remind you of the committee hearings on January 22. The Committee on Occupied Territories expressed in the most effective and unanimous way the grave disappointment of all parties, of the entire German people, about what happened in the occupied territories after Locarno.

[...]

I would just like to highlight a few points where recent events have only served to reinforce our view that these premises and demands must be adhered to. First of all, I must talk about omissions. There is still a discrepancy between the German interpretation and the foreign interpretation on the question of

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whether the straight line from the February Memorandum, which was also based on Article 10 of the League of Nations, to Articles 1 and 6 of the Security Pact and similar provisions of the Treaty does not imply a **renunciation of German land and people**. I am not of the opinion that some newspapers, perhaps also those close to us, have taken from time to time to say: Yes, Germany has renounced. That is not correct. I do not want to deny the German interpretation of its objective right.

(Hear! Hear! from the German People's Party. – Opposition from the Right.)

I have never done that. But I have always pointed out that this German interpretation has not been accepted by the other side,

(very true! From the Right)

that there has been and still is a discrepancy, a disagreement about this interpretation of the treaty, and I believe that it is important to resolve this discrepancy before Germany joins the League of Nations.

(Very true! From the DNVP)

One question of interpretation where things are formally similar concerns **Article 16**, where it seems to me that the need for complete clarity is becoming more and more apparent – I would say from day to day. Let us consider the international situation as it has developed in the meantime. Let me remind you of the decision on the Mosul area, which was not accepted by Turkey, which clearly shows that new possibilities of conflict between Turkey and Britain may arise from this decision of the League of Nations. Let us think of the neutrality treaty between Turkey and Russia, which was published at the same time, and where we do not know which separate agreements have been made. And the fire of the world war has not yet been extinguished. Soon it will flare up here, soon there. In the last few months, Bulgaria, Greece. Even in the Far East, between Russia, China and Japan, eternal peace does not yet seem to reign.

(Very good! From the DNVP)

Everywhere we look there is potential for conflict, for crises of the most serious kind. And here I say: it is precisely from these events that should lead the German government to ascertain absolutely that Germany's neutrality and Germany's freedom of action in every direction are completely preserved in relation to Articles 16 and 17, and we cannot reassure ourselves by saying that German interpretations in this sense exist, but we must demand, we must make it a prerequisite for the application to join the League of Nations, that full clarity be created about the German interpretations through formally binding and materially absolutely unequivocal and clear agreements with the League of Nations bodies themselves.

(Agreement among the DNVP.)

Another area where recent events have made it seem a duty to warn and admonish particularly vividly and clearly is that of the **protection of German minorities**.

(Very true! From the DNVP.)

[...] Let me remind you of the situation in South Tyrol, let me remind you of the heavy blow dealt to Gdansk by the declaration of the League of Nations Commissioner, to tie in with these examples the demand which we also made in our interpellation that there should be no question of Germany joining the League of Nations until a change in the minority policy of the League of Nations is ensured, until the protection of minorities is also ensured in those states which are not currently party to minority agreements.

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(Consent on the Right.)

With regard to **the lie of war guilt**, I have to say in the negative that nothing has happened with regard to what was promised, the notification to the other signatory powers, the establishment of an interparliamentary investigation procedure and the opening of foreign archives. Here too, therefore, the demand is justified that the application for entry into the League of Nations should not be made before something of this kind happens.

And in connection with this, in connection with the lie of colonial guilt, there is the further demand that Germany's right to its **colonies** must be recognized, at least in principle, before there can be any talk of equal rights for Germany in the League of Nations.

[...]

Finally, I must mention **disarmament** among the topics that seem to me to be particularly topical and particularly influenced by recent events. The preamble to the Locarno Treaties contains the promise that the problem of disarmament will be taken seriously.

(Laughter on the Right.)

We have often heard such promises, from the Treaty of Versailles and the preceding note to Article 8 of the League of Nations Statute and other declarations. I think that the words of an old Prussian king apply in this area in particular: What do I want with wind, I don't need empty promises, I want facts.

[...]

I have leafed through my files on [foreign] armaments plans of the last few months. It is not worth to present here the news of all that has happened in the field of armaments since the conclusion of the Locarno Treaties, how in France on January 18 the Minister of War there held out the prospect of new armaments, how in America on December 5 and even in the last few days there was talk of the need to expand their air fleet. The complaints we have heard in recent days from Hungary, which with its 35,000 men sits between armies that reach four million in a state of war, are exactly in line with our situation. In Poland, in Czechoslovakia, everywhere right now there are plans to increase armaments!

(Hear! Hear! from the DNVP.)

Germany should be quite cautious about this. Germany should not give the impression that it can be taken for a fool because that does not increase respect for it.

[...]

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