

Germany – a new nation

Before 1870 there was no such country as Germany. Instead, there was a collection of small states or areas that were loosely linked together – the people shared similar customs and spoke the same language (German).

One of the states, Prussia, was bigger than the others and the King of Prussia wanted to join all the other states together to make a stronger and more powerful state. Nearby France, Austria and Denmark felt threatened by this and tried to stop it. A series of wars were fought against all of these countries, that Prussia won, and in 1871 all the states were united together to form the new nation of Germany. As a result of the victory over France, Germany also gained the valuable areas of Alsace and Lorraine. The King of Prussia became the new German Emperor (or Kaiser).

- The new Germany made rapid social, military and economic progress. Much of the workforce was highly skilled, and the German people were generally well-educated and well-fed.
- Workers had the security of government-provided sickness pay, accident insurance and old age pensions, long before any of the other European powers.
- Germany's industrial development at this time was probably the fastest in the world. Between 1880 and 1910, Germany's coal production quadrupled and other industries such as steel, chemicals, engineering and armaments also grew rapidly.
- By 1913, Germany was producing more iron and steel and nearly as much coal as Britain. In industries such as electrical goods and chemicals, German companies dominated Europe.

Ruling Germany

In 1888, Wilhelm II became Germany's Kaiser. He was the grandson of Britain's Queen Victoria and the cousin of Britain's future king, George V. The Kaiser had spent most of his youth in the Army and dreamed of creating an army and navy to rival any other in the world.











In ruling Germany, the Kaiser had help from the parliament, or **Reichstag**, which was elected by the people. However, it was the Kaiser who introduced laws, selected people for important government jobs, declared

war and made peace. He only allowed the Reichstag to change laws occasionally. In fact, he once called the politicians in the Reichstag 'a troop of monkeys, blockheads and sleepwalkers'. In short, Kaiser Wilhelm was a dictator with complete power.

▼ **SOURCE J** Born with a badly deformed left arm, the Kaiser became an excellent horse rider, swimmer and shooter



Essential statistics: Germany in 1914

| | | |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| Population of Germany |  | 65 million |
| Size of army |  | 2,200,000 |
| Battleships |  | 85 |
| Submarines |  | 23 |
| Air force |  | 246 fighter and bomber planes, 11 airships |
| Number of colonies |  | 10 |
| Population of colonies |  | 15 million |
| Size of the colonies |  | 2.5 million square kilometres |
| Coal production per year |  | 277 million tonnes |
| Steel production each year |  | 14 million tonnes |

Key Words

Reichstag

Germany's empire

Germany's empire was small compared with both the British and French empires. However, in the late 1800s Germany claimed several areas in Africa and the Far East. The Kaiser was determined that Germany should continue to build an empire, and by the beginning of the twentieth century Germany was recognised as having the finest army in the world.

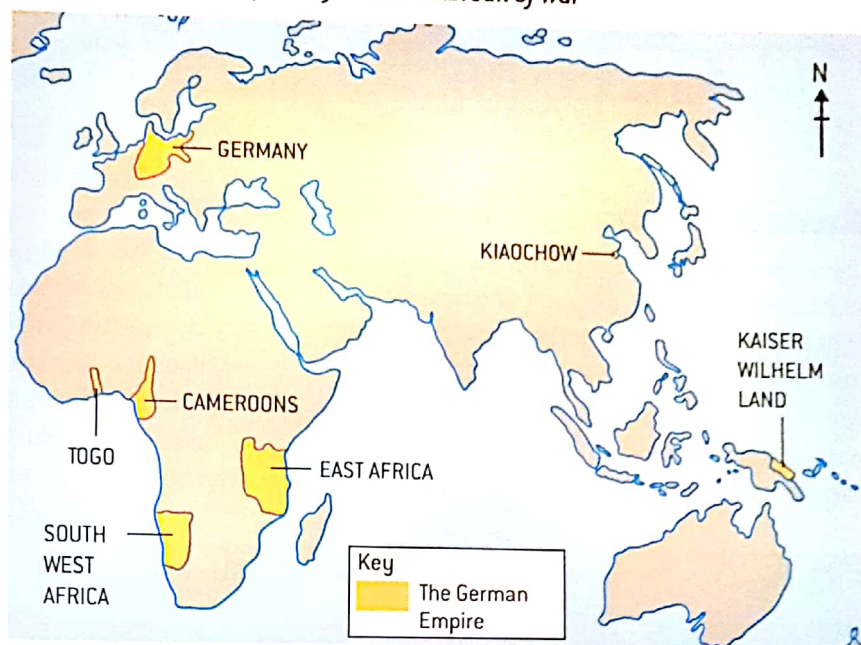
Germany's issues

The success of German industry had made many landowners, businessman and factory owners very rich. Working with the Kaiser, these people made all the key decisions in Germany at this time. But things were changing. Many of the workers in the new factories, mines and workshops were unhappy because their wages and working conditions did not seem to be improving, despite all the progress German industry was making. More and more working-class people joined trade unions and organised strikes in the hope that this might force the Kaiser, his advisers and the politicians in the Reichstag to try and improve their conditions. Several new political parties were being formed in Germany at this time too. Some wanted to rebel against the Kaiser's rule, start a revolution and take control of the country.

Extension

A series of Navy Laws were introduced between 1898 and 1912. Research why they were introduced and what impact they had on the German Navy – and international relations.

▼ K The German Empire before the outbreak of war



Work

- 1 Outline how the state of Germany came into being.
- 2 Explain why many Germans joined trade unions in the early 1900s.
- 3 You have been asked to work on a TV show about the great European powers at the beginning of the twentieth century. Your task is to write a 2-minute script called 'Germany before the First World War'. Remember to include:
 - some background information on Germany in the years before the War
 - details about the German political system
 - information on the German Empire
 - Germany's military and economic power
 - the problems Germany faced.

Practice Question

Write an account of how Germany became a powerful and ambitious European state.

8 marks

Study Tip

There are two elements for you to look at here: how Germany became both powerful *and* ambitious.

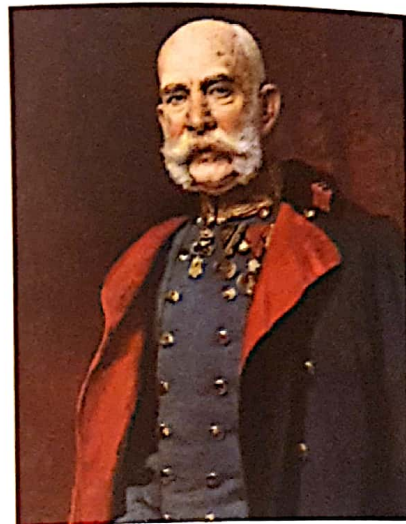
Austria-Hungary – a problem empire

The union between Austria and Hungary had taken place in 1867. Austria-Hungary was a nation of many different nationalities and **ethnic groups**, each with its own language and customs. The two largest ethnic groups were Germans (10 million) and Hungarians (9 million), but there were also Czechs, Slovaks, Serbians (or Serbs), Bosnians, Croats, Poles and many others. Overall, 15 different languages were spoken in Austria-Hungary. Many of these groups wanted independence from Austria-Hungary.

▼ **L** The ethnic divisions within Austria-Hungary before the First World War



▼ **SOURCE M** Franz Josef, Emperor of Austria-Hungary; the Emperor's personal life was a tragic one; his son committed suicide and his younger brother, Karl Ludwig, died of typhoid fever; this left Ludwig's son, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, as heir to the throne



The Austro-Hungarian Empire

Austria-Hungary did not have any overseas colonies. Perhaps the fact that so many of the ethnic groups *within* the country wanted their independence meant that the Emperor had enough to do to keep the country unified without the added complication of extra territories.

Austria-Hungary's issues

While the ageing Emperor himself was popular, the people he put in control of the various regions were generally hated. There were regular riots and demonstrations about new laws and rules that the government imposed.

Ruling Austria-Hungary

Austria and Hungary shared the same currency, but they had separate elected parliaments based in Vienna (the Austrian parliament) and Budapest (the Hungarian parliament). However, Austria and Hungary acted together (as Austria-Hungary) when dealing with other nations. Overall political authority was held by the Emperor Franz Josef – and he was particularly proud of his skills in foreign policy. At 84-years-old when the First World War broke out, he was the oldest of all the European rulers. He was a well-liked emperor, but the government officials who ran Austria-Hungary on a day-to-day basis were not popular.

There was also tension between the different ethnic groups. In December 1897, for example, ten people were killed and 200 wounded when violence erupted in Prague between Germans and Czechs.

The task of keeping Austria-Hungary unified was one of the government's biggest problems in the years leading up to the First World War. The Czechs in the north and the Croats in the south-west of Austria-Hungary wanted to rule themselves; and Serbs living in the south wanted to join with the neighbouring country of Serbia. Serbia itself was becoming increasingly more powerful – and was a strong ally of Russia.

▼ **SOURCE N** Adapted from a report from the British government's officials in Dalmatia, a southern mainly Slav province of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, 1911

Most of the population here dislike being part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire because they think the empire is anti-Slav. They think that the Emperor is really a German and favours Germans and is completely out of touch with his Slav subjects. The Dalmatian Slavs feel they are treated as an inferior race and that their region has been entirely neglected by the Emperor's government. The peasants have no affection for an emperor they blame for this.

Work











- 1 a Describe the ethnic mix of Austria-Hungary.
b Austria-Hungary faced problems caused by ethnic groups and nationalities that wanted independence. Why might this be a serious problem for Austria-Hungary?
- 2 a Create your own table to compare the strengths of the great powers of Europe, using the 'Essential statistics' table as a guide. Add columns for each country: Britain, France, Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary. Look back at all the Essential Statistics tables in this chapter to help you fill in the details.
b. Now write a paragraph explaining which country you think was the leading European power before outbreak of war in 1914. Give reasons for your choice.

Key Words

ethnic group

Slav

Essential statistics: Austria-Hungary in 1914

| | | |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| Population of Austria-Hungary |  | 50 million |
| Size of army |  | 810,000 |
| Battleships |  | 24 |
| Submarines |  | 6 |
| Air force |  | 35 fighter and bomber planes, 1 airship |
| Number of colonies |  | 0 |
| Population of colonies |  | 0 |
| Size of the colonies |  | 0 |
| Coal production per year |  | 47 million tonnes |
| Steel production each year |  | 5 million tonnes |

Extension

Italy was another European nation that was to feature in the build-up to the First World War and the war itself. Using the same headings as the countries you have already examined (ruling the country, the empire, issues within the country, and so on), carry out some research on Italy. Also, think about where Italy would be placed in your list of Europe's most powerful nations.