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We explain a correspondence between the Whitehead group and the group of  $R$ -equivalence classes of an isotropic simple simply connected linear algebraic groups, following P. Gille. This leads to the triviality of the Whitehead group for certain groups of type  $E_8$  via the study of  $R$ -equivalence classes on certain adjoint groups of type  $D_{2n}$ . (Received September 23, 2014)