

# **Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union**

by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi

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## **(Introduction to Special Supplement on Eastern Europe and The Soviet Union)**

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## **Special Supplement on Eastern Europe and The Soviet Union**

As in previous issues, The Bahá'í Studies Review is pleased to offer its readership a unique and previously unpublished compilation of

extracts mainly from the letters of the Guardian. Its significance lies in the stirring and inspiring vision it portrays of the importance of the spiritual destiny of Eastern Europe and the ex-Soviet Union, and the many examples of the Guardian's penetrating insights into world events and the ethos of the times in which he was writing. These are not only of continuing historical interest, but are relevant and applicable to contemporary phenomena. The compilation contains guidance concerning the importance of introducing the Bahá'í Faith into Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, and provides insight into the means by which this process was started and nurtured through the efforts of pioneers and travelling teachers.

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EASTERN EUROPE AND THE SOVIET UNION

A Compilation From the Bahá'í Writings

Compiled by the  
Research Department of the Universal House of Justice

1. Eastern and Central Europe

From Letters Written by Shoghi Effendi

- 1 An attempt must also be made to introduce the Faith, however tentatively, into each of the three neighbouring Baltic States, destined, in the course of time, to play a memorable part in the establishment of the Faith in North-East Europe. . .

(In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 4 July 1957 to the National Spiritual Assembly of Scandinavia and Finland)

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- 2 The continued and most lamentable division of the German nation, setting up an almost insurmountable barrier between the vast majority of the German followers of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh and their isolated brethren in the eastern territories of their country; the increasing and widespread hostility evinced by powerful adversaries belonging to the most influential Christian Church in that land—a hostility which is not only being intensified but is, slowly and imperceptibly, influencing officials in

various departments of the state, as well as sections of the Press, and, to no small extent, the public itself; the prolonged existence of ideological and political barriers impeding contact between the believers residing in the Western Zone of Germany and the inhabitants of the territories lying beyond the Iron Curtain and particularly the Baltic States, Moldavia, White Russia, Albania and Rumania, assigned to them according to the provisions of the Ten Year Plan; the intense conservatism and religious orthodoxy of the people inhabiting the Frisian Islands, Crete and Greece, constituting yet another barrier, and raising yet another obstacle in the path of the pioneers who have consecrated themselves to the task of implanting the banner of the Faith in those islands and in that historic land, in pursuance of the objectives of the world Spiritual Crusade; the limitations placed upon them by their restricted numbers and modest resources; the temptations and distractions to which a swift return to material prosperity continually and increasingly exposes them—these, no doubt, militate against the speedy and effectual accomplishment of their manifold and sacred tasks.

(In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 14 August 1957 written on his behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany and Austria)

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#### From Letters Written on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 3 He always looks with great expectation to the news of the progress of the Cause in Germany. That country together with the other states of central Europe has come out of the war, and the later developments of the political conditions, almost ruined. They all feel the need for some new spirit which will pull the world out of the morass it is in. If the teachings of the Cause be properly set forth, if its solution of the social problems be clearly expounded, the people will undoubtedly grasp its significance and further its progress.

(1 April 1926 to the Bahá'ís of Esslingen, published in "The Light of Divine Guidance: The Messages from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'ís of Germany and Austria" (Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag, 1982), p. 30)

- 4 As Europe, especially the Eastern section, has suffered a great deal from the last war the people are quite ready and anxious to hear about peace.

(24 April 1926 to an individual believer)

- 5 It is such a joy to him that the friends in Vienna are holding the unity feasts and that will surely help to keep the friends together and encourage them to greater

action. Through your efforts as pioneer workers, Vienna must become a great Bahá'í centre in Central Europe. This is what Shoghi Effendi awaits and eagerly hopes.

(6 April 1928 to an individual believer)

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- 6 He is always very glad to hear of the good news of the progress of the Cause, especially in Vienna. That is a very important centre from which the Cause could spread to Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Those regions, being occupied by people of diverse nationality and religious belief, are always a hotbed of dissension and strife. They need the teachings of the Cause to pacify them and create among them the spirit of love and comradeship. . .

(12 October 1928 to an individual believer)

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- 7 I am sure you would be glad to know that Shoghi Effendi hears frequently from your wife, who is engaged in pioneer work in central Europe—a work that is difficult and needs much patience. . . .

(22 December 1928 to an individual believer)

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- 8 Shoghi Effendi was very glad to hear of your trip to Budapest and your lecture together with Prof. R. Vambery on the Bahá'í outlook on peace. He sincerely hopes that before long we will have a group of believers there with a properly constituted Spiritual Assembly. Miss Martha Root hopes to visit there while travelling through Europe. We hope that her activities will enhance that work. Central Europe is in great need of the teachings for it has fully felt the consequences of war and international hatred. The people are seeking a spiritual light that will lead them to salvation.

(21 January 1932 to an individual believer)

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- 9 Central and Eastern Europe are much more receptive than any of the western countries. They have felt the evils of war and therefore are more receptive to spiritual matters.

(29 January 1932 to an individual believer)

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- 10 Europe, especially Central and Eastern Europe, is a wonderful field for work. The

great difficulties they have passed through these last years have made the people there peace-seeking and more ready to listen to a spiritual message proclaiming universal brotherhood. They are far more ready than the Latin countries that still possess the arrogance of victory in the last war.

Shoghi Effendi sincerely hopes that through the activities of you and the other teachers now in Europe the Cause will make a great move and many centres will be established in Central Europe. It is very important to have regular study classes to follow public lectures, so that those who become interested may not go astray. Mrs. [Louise] Gregory can be of great service along this line of grounding the few who are deeply attracted, in the teachings of the Cause.

(24 May 1932, to an individual believer)

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- 11 The Guardian firmly believes that it is preferable for you to stay in a centre and gradually establish an Assembly rather than cover much ground and leave no appreciable result once you are gone. What the Cause in Central Europe needs are well established centres that could take care of themselves and they in turn become focal points for radiating the light of guidance to the surrounding regions. And this can be achieved only by personal contact and meeting small groups as you are doing at present. With a little experience you will find for yourself how true and efficacious this method is.

(9 October 1932 to an individual believer)

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- 12 Martha [Root] is now in the Balkans and Central Europe attempting to start some permanent groups. Shoghi Effendi has arranged that Dr. Esslemont's book be translated into Greek, Rumanian and various other languages spoken in the Balkans as a preparation for intensive teaching work. When this work will be completed then Martha will be able to do her best, for with the present lack of proper literature she is greatly handicapped.

(18 January 1933 to an individual believer)

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- 13 In Eastern Europe the Cause is making wonderful headway. We earnestly hope Northern Europe will do the same. They are very enlightened and should appreciate the importance of peace and a spiritual regeneration of man.

(11 March 1933 to an individual believer)

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- 14 In one of your letters you mention Martha [Root]. She is surely doing wonderful work in Central Europe. She has not only interested many competent souls, but also has managed to have Dr. Esslemont's book translated and published in several languages. And this will render her work much more fruitful and lasting in effect.

(10 April 1933 to an individual believer)

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- 15 Dr. and Mrs. . . . are now here and give a glowing report of what is being accomplished in Bulgaria and the other countries of Eastern Europe. Shoghi Effendi hopes that these seeds, which these few American ladies are sowing so lovingly, will receive showers of divine blessings and gradually start to germinate. Those countries, more than anywhere else in Europe, should feel the disastrous and ravaging effects of war and conscientiously strive to achieve peace by an orientation of their human interests to what is spiritual and uplifting. . .

(30 April 1933 to an individual believer)

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- 16 He is indeed pleased to learn of the steps you have taken to extend your stay in Europe, and sincerely hopes that you will be thereby enabled to lend all the support and assistance you can to the extension of the teaching work in Austria, Germany and Central Europe. You are working in a field which is certainly most promising, and in which ardent and competent workers are most urgently needed. In Austria, in particular, the Guardian feels the possibilities of teaching are as numerous as they are effective. He would urge you, therefore, to concentrate at present all your efforts on that country, and also to closely collaborate with the friends in Vienna, so that through your united and harmonious co-operation the Cause may rapidly spread and become firmly established there. . .

(19 September 1936 to an individual believer)

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- 17 He considers the work of the Cause in Germany of primary importance; the German believers not only have the fertile field of their own people's minds to cultivate, but must, eventually, do a large part of the teaching work to be carried out in the future in Central and Eastern Europe. So he is very anxious to have your affairs running on a smooth administrative basis, and to also have you receive the necessary literature or means of printing it.

(30 July 1946 to an individual believer, published in "The Light of Divine Guidance: The Messages from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'ís of Germany and Austria" (Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í 1982), vol.2, p. 53)

## 2. The Balkans

From a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 18 The ills from which the world now suffers will multiply; the gloom which envelops it will deepen. The Balkans will remain discontented. Its restlessness will increase. The vanquished Powers will continue to agitate. They will resort to every measure that may rekindle the flame of war. Movements, newly-born and world-wide in their range, will exert their utmost effort for the advancement of their designs. The Movement of the Left will acquire great importance. Its influence will spread.

(Cited in a letter dated 28 November 1931 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the West, published in "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters", (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 30)

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From Letters Written on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 19 In his moments of prayer Shoghi Effendi will think of you and the other new believers of Bulgaria. He sincerely hopes that each of you will become a flaming light and become a centre of radiation throughout that region. The Balkans have for over a century been a hot-bed of political conflicts and war; may they through your spirit and the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh become the fountain-head of peace and goodwill for all that continent. National hatreds and political and economic strife have almost ruined the civilized world; may you help to turn the steps of the people back to love of God and human brotherhood.

(9 November 1931 to an individual believer)

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- 20 He feels deeply thankful and gratified for the wonderful work you and Miss Jack have been doing in Bulgaria. He sincerely hopes that as a result of your work a centre will be created there which in turn will spread the Message through the Balkans. Those countries are in great need of the Divine Message because they have been divided into warring factions that have endangered the life of Europe. Through constant war those countries have come to the verge of ruin. They need the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to bring peace and change the prevailing hatred between the factions into a mutual understanding based upon the love of God and human brotherhood.

(11 November 1931 to an individual believer)

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- 21 Shortly after His departure from Adrianople where He was exiled for five years, Bahá'u'lláh wrote a Tablet in which He states that under every stone He has laid a seed which will soon germinate.<sup>1</sup> This promise refers to the regions around Adrianople which naturally include Bulgaria. His actual words are very promising and who knows but now is the beginning of the day when those promises are to be fulfilled.

The Balkan people have for long been suffering from war and social and political strife. It is high time that peace may reign, that differences may be set aside, that strife may cease. . .

(11 November 1931 to the Bahá'ís of Sofia)

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<sup>1</sup> "Say," Bahá'u'lláh Himself declares in the Súriy-i-Ra'ís, 'this Youth hath departed out of this country and deposited beneath every tree and every stone a trust, which God will ere long bring forth through the power of truth.' ("God Passes By" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987), p. 181)

- 22 The Balkans, Shoghi Effendi believes, are a very fertile field, their people very ready. They have so long and severely suffered from wars, and their aftermath, that they undoubtedly long to enjoy a reign of permanent peace. But the work is nevertheless not so very easy, and not free from its own stumbling blocks. There is undoubtedly much prejudice to overcome, and much religious antagonism to be faced. But these are the thorns that any new field will have. We should not mind them. We should concentrate upon the promise given by Bahá'u'lláh that the hosts of the Kingdom are ever ready to pour down and assist anyone who would rise with a determined mind and a free heart.

(17 November 1931 to two believers)

- 23 As the Faith is beginning to expand over the Bulgarian country, it is necessary to bring the people into contact with the Bahá'í literature; indeed this book<sup>2</sup> will give them [the opportunity] to obtain extensive knowledge of the teachings and history of the Faith, and will prepare their minds and hearts to accept the claim of Bahá'u'lláh.

(31 October 1932 to an individual believer)

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<sup>2</sup> J. E. Esslemont, "Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era", (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987).

- 24 Miss Jack and Miss Root will surely highly value your assistance and co-operation and will be only too glad to have you with them. You all three are the shining stars in the dark and gloomy sky of the Balkans. For through the Message you have you



are able to heal all those who have been for so long, and under so many different circumstances, victims of the crudest and most deep-seated prejudices.

(17 September 1933 to an individual believer)

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- 25 The German friends have been greatly suffering as a result [of national fanaticism], during the last two years, and their activities have been largely hampered. The countries where the people are relatively more sympathetic to the Teachings are Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Romania. You should do your best, and in case you find it feasible, to extend your stay in the Balkans and try to establish some new centres there. . .

(5 October 1933 to an individual believer)

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- 26 But every effort should be made to get someone off to Greece, a very important country and far too long neglected. . .

(21 June 1953 to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany and Austria)

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- 27 Her tomb<sup>3</sup> will become a national shrine, immensely loved and revered, as the Faith rises in stature in that country.

(24 May 1954 to the European Teaching Committee of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States)

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<sup>3</sup> Tomb of Marion Jack in Sofia, Bulgaria.

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- 28 . . . [Marion Jack] remained at her post, and won for herself imperishable fame, her resting-place becoming a shrine in Bulgaria, which the people of that country will increasingly honour and cherish.

(25 June 1954 to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany and Austria)\

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- 29 The Guardian wishes to assure you and your dear wife of his prayers on your behalf. He hopes every obstacle will be removed from your path, so that you can carry on the teaching work actively and diligently. Greece is a most important country, and should have a virile Assembly, particularly in Athens.

(10 November 1955 to an individual believer)

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- 30 Your loving letter of August 17th, with the photograph of the first Bahá'í Group in Athens, and showing the first Greek Bahá'í in Greece, was received, and presented to the beloved Guardian. He was very happy to see the likeness of the Friends serving so diligently in Greece. He hopes your teaching efforts will be confirmed, and many seeking souls find eternal life through your sacrificial efforts. Greece is a most important country, as he has explained to you, and the Faith should be firmly implanted in that country, in many cities. The first step, of course, is a Spiritual Assembly in Athens.

(1 September 1956 to an individual believer)

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### 3. Russia and the Soviet Union

From Letters Written by Shoghi Effendi

- 31 There is no doubt that the day will come when the very people who are now engaged in destroying the foundations of faith in God and promoting this baseless doctrine of materialism will arise and, by their own hand, snuff out the flame of this commotion. They will sweep away the entire structure of their unrestrained godlessness and will arise with heart and soul, and with hitherto unmatched vigour, to atone for their past failures. They will join the ranks of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh and arise to promote His Cause. . . If the friends remain steadfast, and discharge their duties with loyalty and prudence, the veils of God's inscrutable wisdom will be lifted and extraordinary events will be witnessed. The hosts of divine confirmation, fortified by the power of the Spirit, will, in unimaginable ways and from unexpected quarters, provide the means for the triumph of the Cause of our Self-Subsisting Lord, and in so doing will brighten the eyes of the faithful throughout the world.

(11 January 1923 to the Bahá'ís of Kirmánsháh - translated from the Persian)

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- 32 To this uplifting movement, various external factors are being added that are tending to hasten and stimulate this process of internal regeneration so significant in the life of nascent Persia. The multiplicity and increasing facilities in the means of transportation and travel; the State visit of energetic and enlightened reformers to Persia's capital; the forthcoming and widely-advertised journey of the Sháh himself to the progressive capitals of Western Europe; the repercussion of Turkey's astounding reforms among an essentially sensitive and receptive people; the loud and persistent clamour of a revolting order in Russia against the evil domination and

dark plottings of all forms of religious sectarianism; the relentless vigour with which Afghánistán's ambitious Ruler, reinforced by the example of his gracious Consort, is pursuing his campaign of repression against a similar order of a corrupted clergy at home—all tend to lend their force in fostering and fashioning that public opinion which can alone provide an enduring basis for the reform Movement destined to usher in that golden Era craved for by the followers of the Faith in Bahá'u'lláh's native land.

(6 December 1928 to the Bahá'ís of the West, published in "Unfolding Destiny: The Messages from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'í Community of the British Isles" (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981), p. 77)

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- 33 Russia will in the future become a delectable paradise, and the teaching work in that land will be carried out on an unprecedented scale. The House of Worship established in its very heart will shine forth with dazzling splendour, and the call of the Most Great Name will reverberate in its temples, its churches, and its places of worship. We need to show forth patience and forbearance. In these momentous convulsions there lie concealed mighty and consummate mysteries, which will be revealed to men's eyes in the days to come.

(2 January 1930 to an individual believer - translated from the Persian)

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- 34 The catastrophic fall of mighty monarchies and empires in the European continent, allusions to some of which may be found in the prophecies of Bahá'u'lláh; the decline that has set in, and is still continuing, in the fortunes of the Shí'ih hierarchy in His own native land; the fall of the Qájár dynasty, the traditional enemy of His Faith; the overthrow of the Sultanate and the Caliphate, the sustaining pillars of Sunní Islám, to which the destruction of Jerusalem in the latter part of the first century of the Christian era offers a striking parallel; the wave of secularization which is invading the Muhammadan ecclesiastical institutions in Egypt and sapping the loyalty of its staunchest supporters; the humiliating blows that have afflicted some of the most powerful Churches of Christendom in Russia, in Western Europe and Central America; the dissemination of those subversive doctrines that are undermining the foundations and overthrowing the structure of seemingly impregnable strongholds in the political and social spheres of human activity; the signs of an impending catastrophe, strangely reminiscent of the Fall of the Roman Empire in the West, which threatens to engulf the whole structure of present-day civilization—all witness to the tumult which the birth of this mighty Organ of the Religion of Bahá'u'lláh has cast into the world—a tumult which will grow in scope

and in intensity as the implications of this constantly evolving Scheme are more fully understood and its ramifications more widely extended over the surface of the globe.

(8 February 1934 to the Bahá'ís of the West, published in "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters", pp. 155-56)

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- 35 Already a few among the protagonists of the Christian Religion admit the gravity of the situation that confronts them. "A wave of materialism is sweeping round the world"; is the testimony of its missionaries, as witnessed by the text of their official reports, "the drive and pressure of modern industrialism, which are penetrating even the forests of Central Africa and the plains of Central Asia, make men everywhere dependent on, and preoccupied with, material things. At home the Church has talked, perhaps too glibly, in pulpit or on platform of the menace of secularism; though even in England we can catch more than a glimpse of its meaning. But to the Church overseas these things are grim realities, enemies with which it is at grips. . . The Church has a new danger to face in land after land—determined and hostile attack. From Soviet Russia a definitely anti-religious Communism is pushing west into Europe and America, East into Persia, India, China and Japan. It is an economic theory, definitely harnessed to disbelief in God. It is a religious irreligion. . . It has a passionate sense of mission, and is carrying on its anti-God campaign at the Church's base at home, as well as launching its offensive against its front-line in non-Christian lands. Such a conscious, avowed, organized attack against religion in general and Christianity in particular is something new in history. Equally deliberate in some lands in its determined hostility to Christianity is another form of social and political faith—nationalism. But the nationalist attack on Christianity, unlike Communism, is often bound up with some form of national religion—with Islám in Persia and Egypt, with Buddhism in Ceylon, while the struggle for communal rights in India is allied with a revival both of Hinduism and Islám."

I need not attempt in this connection an exposition of the origin and character of those economic theories and political philosophies of the post-war period, that have directly and indirectly exerted, and are still exerting, their pernicious influence on the institutions and beliefs connected with one of the most widely-spread and best organized religious systems of the world. It is with their influence rather than with their origin that I am chiefly concerned. The excessive growth of industrialism and its attendant evils—as the aforementioned quotation bears witness—the aggressive policies initiated and the persistent efforts exerted by the inspirers and organizers of the Communist movement; the intensification of a militant nationalism, associated in certain countries with a systematized work of defamation against all forms of

ecclesiastical influence, have no doubt contributed to the de-Christianization of the masses, and been responsible for a notable decline in the authority, the prestige and power of the Church. "The whole conception of God," the persecutors of the Christian Religion have insistently proclaimed, "is a conception derived from the ancient oriental despotisms. It is a conception quite unworthy of free men." "Religion," one of their leaders has asserted, "is an opiate of the people." "Religion," declares the text of their official publications, "is a brutalization of the people. Education must be so directed as to efface from the people's minds this humiliation and this idiocy."

The Hegelian philosophy which, in other countries, has, in the form of an intolerant and militant nationalism, insisted on deifying the state, has inculcated the war-spirit, and incited to racial animosity, has, likewise, led to a marked weakening of the Church and to a grave diminution of its spiritual influence. Unlike the bold offensive which an avowedly atheistic movement had chosen to launch against it, both within the Soviet union and beyond its confines, this nationalistic philosophy, which Christian rulers and governments have upheld, is an attack directed against the Church by those who were previously its professed adherents, a betrayal of its cause by its own kith and kin. It was being stabbed by an alien and militant atheism from without, and by the preachers of a heretical doctrine from within. Both of these forces, each operating in its own sphere and using its own weapons and methods, have moreover been greatly assisted and encouraged by the prevailing spirit of modernism, with its emphasis on a purely materialistic philosophy, which, as it diffuses itself, tends increasingly to divorce religion from man's daily life.

The combined effect of these strange and corrupt doctrines, these dangerous and treacherous philosophies, has, as was natural, been severely felt by those whose tenets inculcated an opposite and wholly irreconcilable spirit and principle. The consequences of the clash that inevitably ensued between these contending interests, were, in some cases, disastrous, and the damage that has been wrought irreparable. The disestablishment and dismemberment of the Greek Orthodox Church in Russia, following upon the blow which the Church of Rome had sustained as a result of the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy; the commotion that subsequently seized the Catholic Church and culminated in its separation from the State in Spain; the persecution of the same Church in Mexico; the perquisitions, arrests, intimidation and terrorization to which Catholics and Lutherans alike are being subjected in the heart of Europe; the turmoil into which another branch of the Church has been thrown as a result of the military campaign in Africa; the decline that has set in the fortunes of Christian Missions, both Anglican and Presbyterian, in Persia, Turkey, and the Far East; the ominous signs that foreshadow serious complications in the

equivocal and precarious relationships now existing between the Holy See and certain nations in the continent of Europe— these stand out as the most striking features of the reverses which, in almost every part of the world, the members and leaders of Christian ecclesiastical institutions have suffered.

(11 March 1936 to the Bahá'ís of the West, published in "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters", pp. 181-83)

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- 36 We have only to look around us, as we survey the fortunes of Christian ecclesiastical orders, to appreciate the steady deterioration of their influence, the decline of their power, the damage to their prestige, the flouting of their authority, the dwindling of their congregations, the relaxation of their discipline, the restriction of their press, the timidity of their leaders, the confusion in their ranks, the progressive confiscation of their properties, the surrender of some of their most powerful strongholds, and the extinction of other ancient and cherished institutions. Indeed, ever since the Divine summons was issued, and the invitation extended, and the warning sounded, and the condemnation pronounced, this process, that may be said to have been initiated with the collapse of the temporal sovereignty of the Roman Pontiff, soon after the Tablet to the Pope had been revealed, has been operating with increasing momentum, menacing the very basis on which the entire order is resting. Aided by the forces which the Communist movement has unloosed, reinforced by the political consequences of the last war, accelerated by the excessive, the blind, the intolerant, and militant nationalism which is now convulsing the nations, and stimulated by the rising tide of materialism, irreligion, and paganism, this process is not only tending to subvert ecclesiastical institutions, but appears to be leading to the rapid dechristianization of the masses in many Christian countries.

I shall content myself with the enumeration of certain outstanding manifestations of this force which is increasingly invading the domain, and assailing the firmest ramparts, of one of the leading religious systems of mankind. The virtual extinction of the temporal power of the most preeminent ruler in Christendom immediately after the creation of the Kingdom of Italy; the wave of anticlericalism that swept over France after the collapse of the Napoleonic empire, and which culminated in the complete separation of the Catholic Church from the state, in the laicization of the Third Republic, in the secularization of education, and in the suppression and dispersal of religious orders; the swift and sudden rise of that "religious irreligion," that bold, conscious, and organized assault launched in Soviet Russia against the Greek Orthodox Church, that precipitated the disestablishment of the state religion, that massacred a vast number of its members originally numbering

above a hundred million souls, that pulled down, closed, or converted into museums, theatres and warehouses, thousands upon thousands of churches, monasteries, synagogues and mosques, that stripped the church of its six and a half million acres of property, and sought, through its League of Militant Atheists and the promulgation of a "five-year plan of godlessness," to loosen from its foundations the religious life of the masses; the dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy that dissolved, by one stroke, the most powerful unit which owed its allegiance to, and supported through its resources the administration of, the Church of Rome; the divorce of the Spanish state from that same Church, and the overthrow of the monarchy, the champion of Catholic Christendom; the nationalistic philosophy, the parent of an unbridled and obsolete nationalism, which, having dethroned Islám, has indirectly assaulted the front line of the Christian church in non-Christian lands, and is dealing such heavy blows to Catholic, Anglican, and Presbyterian Missions in Persia, Turkey, and the Far East; the revolutionary movement that brought in its wake the persecution of the Catholic Church in Mexico; and finally the gospel of modern paganism, unconcealed, aggressive, and unrelenting, which, in the years preceding the present turmoil, and increasingly since its outbreak, has swept over the continent of Europe, invading the citadels, and sowing confusion in the hearts of the supporters, of the Catholic, the Greek Orthodox, and the Lutheran churches, in Austria, Poland, the Baltic and Scandinavian states, and more recently in Western Europe, the home and center of the most powerful hierarchies of Christendom.

(28 March 1941 to the Bahá'ís of the West, published as "The Promised Day Is Come" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980), pp. 103-5)

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- 37 In one of the most remarkable Tablets revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, passages of which have already been quoted on previous occasions, written in the evening of His life, soon after the termination of the first World War, He anticipates, in succinct and ominous sentences, the successive ebullitions which must afflict humanity, and whose full force the American nation must, if her destiny is to be accomplished, inevitably experience. "The ills from which the world now suffers," He wrote, "will multiply; the gloom which envelops it will deepen. The Balkans will remain discontented. Its restlessness will increase. The vanquished powers will continue to agitate. They will resort to every measure that may rekindle the flame of war. Movements, newly born and world-wide in their range, will exert their utmost effort for the advancement of their designs. The Movement of the Left will acquire great importance. Its influence will spread."

The agitation in the Balkan Peninsula; the feverish activity in which Germany

and Italy played a disastrous role, culminating in the outbreak of the Second World War; the rise of the Fascist and Nazi movements, which spread their ramifications to distant parts of the globe; the spread of communism which, as a result of the victory of Soviet Russia in that same war, has been greatly accelerated—all these happenings, some unequivocally, others in veiled language, have been forecast in this Tablet, the full force of whose implications are as yet undisclosed, and which, we may well anticipate, the American nation, as yet insufficiently schooled by adversity, must sooner or later experience.

(5 June 1947 to the Bahá'ís of the West, published in "Citadel of Faith: Messages to America 1947-1957" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980), pp. 20-27, 37)

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#### From Letters Written on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 38 He does not endorse, however, the circulation of the statement on communism, and considers that if such a document fell into the hands of the wrong people it could cause a great deal of harm, especially in those countries where the believers are living under Soviet rule or in states strongly influenced by communism. The issues touched upon are too vital and too interwoven with present-day politics for us to make any written comment upon them. However he feels that orally pioneers could be apprised of these things and warned to be extremely discreet in communicating our viewpoints to those they teach in Europe, and elsewhere. The word communism cannot be dissociated from the Soviet Political Regime, and great wisdom is required to make our viewpoint clear without giving the impression we are for or against any existing government.

(7 July 1947 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada)

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#### 4. Germany's Role in Eastern Europe

##### From Letters Written by Shoghi Effendi.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> All extracts cited in this section are from postscripts in the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi appended to letters written on his behalf.

- 39 The Plan now being prosecuted with such diligence, fidelity, unity and enthusiasm by the long-oppressed, great-hearted, indefatigable, much admired German Bahá'í community, despite the exhaustion following a prolonged ordeal, is entering upon its concluding phase. This first collective enterprise, embarked upon by a community which, by virtue of its size, its experience, its past achievements, occupies a pre-



eminent position in the European continent, and is destined, in view of its capacity, its fortitude, its resilience and tenacity of purpose, to play an outstanding role in both contemporary and future Bahá'í history, must, through a concerted and supreme effort on the part of its members, be brought to a triumphant conclusion.

Its successful termination will be but a signal for a series of enterprises, each more glorious than the one preceding it, which will carry the fame of this community, already tested in the crucible of afflictive trials, and richly endowed by the tender favours of its Founder, Who blessed with His Presence its leading centre, to regions far beyond the confines of its homeland and as far as the Eastern fringes of the Asiatic continent.

In such a glorious venture, and in the course of so vast, so momentous and sacred an enterprise, it will, if it discharges manfully its present task, be seconded in its noble exertions by the concerted efforts of all the budding communities in the European continent, and will play a notable role, in collaboration with the trustees of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan labouring throughout the American continents, and with its sister communities toiling in Africa, South-East Asia, and Australasia, in achieving the spiritual conquest of the entire planet.

Much depends, however, on the manner in which it discharges the responsibilities of the present hour. The administrative base from which it must spread out into Eastern and Southern Europe, and beyond these spheres into the heart of Northern Asia, as far as the China Sea, must first be thoroughly consolidated. The valiant battalions that are to carry the banner of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh to distant climes, amidst alien races, and throughout the length and breadth of immense territories and in inhospitable surroundings, must, to begin with, increase in number, acquire added experience, and deepen in their faith and understanding. The literature with which the bearers of God's redeeming Message must be equipped when launching out beyond the frontiers of their native land must, preparatory to their arduous crusade, be multiplied and adapted to the mentality of those diversified peoples and races inhabiting so vast a section of the globe.

(30 October 1951 to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany and Austria, published in "The Light of Divine Guidance", pp. 178-79)

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40 The total success of the Plan, now demanding the concentrated attention of the entire German Bahá'í community, is indeed indispensable for the adequate discharge of the still greater tasks that lie ahead of its members, and which, in themselves, will constitute the prelude to the unfoldment of the glorious Mission awaiting them, as soon as the present obstacles are removed, in both Eastern Europe and the heart of

the Asiatic continent. The extent of their future undertakings in both continents; their contribution to the Global Crusade to be launched throughout the whole planet; their particular and, in many ways, unique reinforcement of the work, connected with future Bahá'í research and scholarship, in view of the characteristic qualities of painstaking thoroughness, scientific exactitude and dispassionate criticism distinguishing the race to which they belong—these are too vast and complex to be assessed at the present time.

...

The participation of the Bahá'í community, in both Germany and Austria, individually as well as officially, in the forthcoming Stockholm intercontinental Conference—to which I trust its members will contribute a notable share, in view of the part they are destined to play in the future awakening of the European continent—will, no doubt, launch them upon the initial stage of their glorious Mission beyond the confines of their respective countries. Theirs will be the twofold and highly challenging task of consolidating, steadily and rapidly, the administrative foundations of the Structure which is being painstakingly established by them in the heart of the European continent, and of implanting the banner of the rising Order of their Faith in the neighbouring sovereign states and dependencies of that continent and even beyond its borders as far as the heart of Asia.

(30 May 1952 to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany and Austria, published in "The Light of Divine Guidance", pp. 185-86)

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- 41 The German and Austrian Bahá'í Communities, on whom 'Abdu'l-Bahá lavished His favours, for whose future He cherished such high hopes, occupying such a central position in a continent endowed with such great potentialities, must, by reason of their unique and predominant position, their past history, their virility, tenacity and splendid accomplishments, assume a preponderating role in the conduct of a Crusade in which all Bahá'í communities dwelling on the European mainland, both young and old, are called upon to participate to the utmost of their capacity with all the resources at their disposal.

They stand, moreover, at this crucial hour in their destiny, on the threshold of a new era in their history—the era that must witness the initiation of their mission beyond the borders of their homeland, and one which must culminate in their carrying the banner of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh across the eastern frontiers of Europe, and as far as the territories lying in the heart of the Asiatic continent.

(21 June 1953 to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany and Austria)

42 To their [German Bahá'ís] brethren in the Eastern Zone, so gravely handicapped by the unfortunate disabilities which they have so long and so patiently suffered, consistent support, in whatever way possible, should be extended, and every avenue should be explored to ensure that the flame burning in those valiant hearts, so heavily burdened by cares and anxieties, will not be extinguished. The no less vital obligation to introduce, however tentatively, the Faith in the territories lying beyond the eastern confines of their homeland, and particularly in the Baltic States, must be promptly and seriously considered, for upon it will, to a very great measure, depend the success of the Mission envisaged for them by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and now confirmed through the provisions of the Ten Year Plan. . .

(14 August 1957 to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany and Austria)

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