The Baha'i Faith in Europe

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Seena Fazel1

Europe has a rich Baha’i history with a number of the oldest and most
established
Baha’i communities worldwide. The impact of two visits between 1911 and 1913
by
‘Abdu’l-Baha assisted in the strengthening of these early communities and
the
religion’s emergence to a wider public. Some northern European Baha’i
communities
experienced large growth from the 1950s, and, in the 1990s, new Baha’i groups
were established in central and eastern Europe. In 2020, there are Baha’is
resident
in every European country apart from the Vatican City. Communities are thinly
spread throughout the continent with the largest Baha’i communities in the UK
and
Germany. Important contributions have been made by European Baha’i
communities
in the areas of Baha’i studies and public relations.

Early interest in the Babi-Baha’i religions
The early history of the Babi-Baha’i religions was documented in European
newspapers, mentioned by some public figures, and came to the attention of a
few
diplomats and orientalists. In 1845, The Times of London reported on the
persecution of the Babis, which is the first such report in any
western-language
newspaper (Momen 1981: 4). Some European diplomats and orientalists started
writing about the Babis in the 1860s. Early examples include the French
diplomat
Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau in his 1865 book, Religion et philosophies dans
l'Asie centrale, and the orientalist A.K. Kazembek, who taught at St Petersburg
University and wrote a book on the Babis, also published in 1865 (Ioannesyan
2013:
30). Hungarian orientalist Arminius (Armin) Vambery published a volume in
German

in 1867, Meine Wanderungen und Erlebnisse in Persien. The first public mention and presentation of the Babi religion in Europe was probably made by Matthew Arnold, a poet and cultural critic (and author of poem Dover Beach), speaking in 1871 at the Birmingham and Midland Institute, in Birmingham, England. The first mention of the Baha'i Faith appears to have been by Professor Edward Granville Browne, an academic orientalist, who spoke at the Literary Society of Pembroke College, Cambridge, in 1889 and quoted Baha'u'lláh's words, 'Ye are all the fruits of one tree

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and the leaves of one branch', in a lecture at the South Place Institute, London, in 1890. In other European countries, there are no recorded public presentations until Gabriel Sassi, who was commissioned by the Martinist Order, to give an address on theBaha'i religion at the Paris Exposition of 1900 (Smith 2007: 109). Browne had become interested in the religion after reading Gobineau and wrote monographs and academic articles about the Babi-Baha'i religions and a book, A Year Among the Persians (1893), about his experiences of travelling throughout Persia and meeting Babis and Baha'is. He continued to write some academic articles, although his interest waned after the Persian Constitutional Revolution of 1905–11 (Cole 2012: 485). Russian orientalists were involved in early translations. Baron Rosen, who was based at St Petersburg University, published a Russian translation of one of Baha'u'llah's texts in 1893. He deposited many manuscripts and letters at the St Petersburg Institute of Oriental Manuscripts. One of his students, A.G. Tumansky, who met some notable early Baha'is in Ashkhabad from 1890, also published translations, including of Baha'u'llah's Most Holy Book (Kitab-i-Aqdas) in 1899 (Ioannesyan 2013: 8). A.L.M. Nicolas, who had been first interpreter at the French legation at Tehran, published several early translations of Babi texts during 1902–1914.

Direct encounters between Europeans and the Central Figures

There were some direct contacts with the religion's central figures. Among the most notable was that of the court-appointed physician, Dr William Cormick, who was born in Iran from an Irish family, and assessed the Bab medically for the governor of Azerbaijan, Crown Prince Nasiru'd-dín Mírza in the summer of 1848 (Flannery 2004).

Some years later, Cormick recalled that the Bab said that all Europeans would 'come over to his religion', and that the Bab was observed to be reading the Bible in prison (Amanat 1989: 391). Other important encounters are those of Browne with Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha in 'Akká in 1890, and also with Mírzá Yahyá Subh-i-Azal in Cyprus while Browne was on his way to Palestine (Cole 2012: 485).

Browne's pen-portrait of Baha'u'llah has been widely published, partly as it included the quote, 'Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind'. Browne's scholarship on the religion was influential but became increasingly critical, partly due to Baha'i quietism during the Constitutional Revolution.

Beginnings – first communities in Paris, London, and Stuttgart

The first communities in Europe were formed at the start of the 20th century. One centre of activity was Paris. Phoebe Hearst, an early American Baha'i who was a wealthy heiress and philanthropist, travelled through Paris in 1898 on her way to visit 'Abdu'l-Baha in Palestine, and encouraged May Bolles (later May Maxwell), who had moved to Paris in 1894, and Mary Thornburgh-Cropper, an American living in London, to join this trip. On her return to Paris, Bolles introduced the Baha'i teachings to notable early converts such as Agnes Alexander, who was the first Baha'i teacher in Hawaii, Japan, and Korea; Thomas Breakwell, an early English Baha'i (and who died in Paris in 1902); Hippolyte Dreyfus, the first French believer (who translated some Baha'i texts and wrote an introductory book); and to expatriate Americans as Laura Clifford Barney, Charles Mason Remey, Juliet Thompson, Marion Jack, and Sydney Sprague, who all became prominent Baha'i teachers.

Lady Blomfield and her daughter heard of the Faith in 1907 in Paris from Bertha Herbert, who later married Horace Holley (Fazel and Hassall 1998: 36). Holley was another significant Baha'i who first heard of the Faith in Paris in 1909, and later became one of the most prominent American Baha'is and was appointed a Hand of the Cause in 1951.

Other centres were in London and Stuttgart. When Mary Thornburgh-Cropper returned to the UK, she told her friend Ethel Rosenberg, a miniaturist painter, about the religion. Rosenberg became the first native British Baha'i in 1899, and organised some meetings mainly in London (Osborn 2014: 89). Two Germans, Dr Karl Edwin Fischer and Alma Knobloch, who became Baha'is in America, returned to Germany, in 1905 and 1907, respectively, and started Baha'i activities in Stuttgart (Stockman 1996: 35). Knobloch was an effective teacher and gave the first public address in Germany in 1907, and also travelled to Switzerland and Austria to speak about the Baha'i Faith. A short-lived committee was set up around this time to organise further events, the first such consultative body in Europe. In 1913, there were more Baha'is in Germany than in all other European countries, mostly centred on Stuttgart but with communities in neighbouring towns, and 63 individuals signed a letter to 'Abdu'l-Baha (Stockman 1996: 38). One other country with recorded Baha'is was the Netherlands, where George Enzlin considered himself a Baha'i around 1913, and who spoke to a theosophical society about the religion (De Vries 2012: 95).

'Abdu'l-Baha's travels

A key event for these nascent communities was 'Abdu'l-Baha's two journeys during 1911–1913 where he visited Switzerland, France, Germany, Hungary, Austria, England, and Scotland. In his first trip, from August to December 1911, 'Abdu'l-Baha visited France, Switzerland, and then travelled to England, where he stayed with Lady Blomfield in London. He visited Bristol, where he met the poet Ezra Pound. He also made a day trip to Oxford, where he spoke at the University at Manchester

College as a guest of a biblical scholar, Professor Thomas Kelly Cheyne, who considered himself a follower of the Baha'i religion.

In his second visit, from December 1912 to June 1913, 'Abdu'l-Baha visited England, Scotland, Austria-Hungary, and Germany. He visited Edinburgh and spoke at New College, followed by 8 days in Germany (Stuttgart, Esslingen, and Bad Mergentheim), and also Budapest, where he met a number of prominent persons and academics, including the orientalists Arminius Vambery and Ignaz Goldziher (Lederer 2004: 109–126). In these places, 'Abdu'l-Baha spoke with local people involved in progressive causes, including suffragettes, Esperantists, and those affiliated with new spiritual movements of the time, such as the Theosophists. The impact of 'Abdu'l-Baha's visits in Europe have been chronicled in some detail but not subject to academic investigation (Egea 2017, Egea 2018).

These visits provided some impetus to the early Baha'i communities of England, Scotland, France, and Germany, and 'Abdu'l-Baha meeting with early Baha'is confirmed their beliefs. In addition, it strengthened ties with progressive movements at the time, especially Theosophists, suffragettes, and Esperantists. Further, the media interest generated by his visit, including in national and regional newspapers such as The Manchester Guardian, Daily Telegraph, Scotsman, Oxford Times, and Nieuwe Rottadamsche Courant, was a small but important part of the emergence of the Baha'i Faith from obscurity (Egea 2018: 461). This continued with Baha'i presentations at large multi-faith conferences—in 1924, there were two (one of which was read by Mountford Mills and another by Ruhi Afnan) at a London 'Conference of Some Living Religions Within the British Empire' (Hare 1924: 736;

Baha'i World 1928: 225). In 1936, George Townshend presented at the World Congress of Faiths (Baha'i World 1937: 614–19).

Development of Baha'i communities throughout Europe

After the first world war (1914–18), there was increasing activity, especially in Germany, where many new Baha'i groups were established, and a magazine (Sonne der Wahrheit) was printed (Smith 1989: 449). In a survey of the Baha'i world in 1919–1920, John Esslemont noted interest among university students and professors in Switzerland, and that there was one Baha'i in Greece and one in Yugoslavia (Momen 2004: 102). The Baha'i communities in England and Germany continued to expand, and in 1923, national Spiritual Assemblies were formed for the British Isles and one for Germany and Austria.

From 1925, more detailed information is provided in Baha'i yearbooks. There

were Baha'is living in eight countries: Austria, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland, and European Russia. The first Baha'i Year Book (1925–26) identifies two Baha'i 'centres' in France, two in Austria, two in Switzerland, three in Italy, three in England, and 26 in Germany. The strength of the German Baha'i community was also apparent from its four magazines in 1926—'the official magazine', a quarterly one published by the Committee of Education of the NSA (National Spiritual Assembly) of Germany, a children's magazine (Das Rosengaertlein), and Mitteilungen, the bulletin of the Baha'i assembly of Hamburg (Baha'i Year Book 1926: 103). Of the worldwide total of 11 magazines, four were in German. The number of countries increased from 8 in 1925 to 11 in 1928 with the addition of Denmark, Norway, and Yugoslavia (Smith 2015: 352–69). Individual Baha'is also started to reside in Sweden (1920), Denmark (1925), and Norway (1927). In 1926–28, a list of spiritual assemblies is provided with four in England (London, two in Manchester, Dorset), one in France (Paris), one in Switzerland (Lausanne) and five in Germany. Baha'i 'groups' were also present in Denmark (Copenhagen); Austria (Graz, Vienna); Italy (Portofino ['in summer only'], Florence, Como, Torino, Genoa); Switzerland (Geneva, Yvorne [or Vand, where Forel lived], and Zurich; and Sweden (Boviken and Uddevalla) (Baha'i World 1928: 182–187; Baha'i World 1930: 218).

A 1928 survey of Baha'i activities reported regular public meetings in London and Manchester, that the Parisian community 'maintained Baha'i meeting-places conducted in both the French and English languages' (Baha'i World 1928: 28), and increasing interest in Germany, partly through links with Esperantists. Despite this, the British and French groups remained quite small, with less than a hundred people until the 1930s, and the other communities remained even smaller (Smith 1989). There was also an 'International Baha'i Bureau' in Geneva that acted as a meeting place for 'Baha'is coming to Geneva though their interest in the activities of the League of Nations and of other international bodies centred in Geneva' (Baha'i World 1928: 30). It published a magazine in German, French, and English. New groups were established in the late 1920s, and by 1930, three new countries had a Baha'i presence (Holland, Hungary, and Poland). There were 14

Baha'i 'assemblies and groups' in England and 38 in Germany. New groups were reported in Budapest, Ensqhede (Holland), Oslo, Warsaw, and Capraz (Yugoslavia), and 'young people's Baha'i groups' in Uddavalla (Sweden) and five German cities. A number of German academics were reported to be studying the Baha'i Faith (Root 1928: 300–311). In 1932–34, there were local spiritual assemblies in Austria (Vienna), Bulgaria (Sofia), Germany (with 7) and England (London and Manchester). New Baha'i groups were reported in Tirana (Albania); Antwerp (Belgium); Plovdiv, Sofia, Turnovo, and Varna (Bulgaria); Brno, Prague, and Pressburg (Czechoslovakia); Gyor (Hungary); Radviliskis and Yoniskis (Lithuania); and Bucharest (Rumania). There is uncertainty about some of these countries, as later official Baha'i sources suggest that Albania and Lithuania were not opened to the religion during 1921-1953 (Baha'i World 1970: 460–461), and Lithuania was opened in 1977 (Baha'i World 1981: 105). Countries with Baha'i groups but no assemblies increased in 1932–34 (with 8 groups in Switzerland, four in Holland, three in Italy, three in Sweden, three in Austria, and two in Norway) (Baha'i World 1936: 426–432).

Nordic countries followed a similar pattern. Their first Baha'is were individuals who had converted in the US. However, they were unable to attract more converts, and these communities did not grow until the 1940s and 1950s. For example, in Sweden, August Ruud and Edvark Olsson, who had become Baha'is in the US, and lived in Kenosha and Chicago, moved back to Sweden in 1920 and 1922, respectively (National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Norway 2020). However, the first local Spiritual Assembly (LSA) in Sweden, which was in Stockholm, was formed more than 25 years later, in 1948. A Norwegian, Johanna Schubarth, who became a Baha'i in Urbana, Illinois, moved back to Norway in 1927, but there were no other Baha'is in Norway until 1946 (when Solveig Corbit pioneered there) (Khan 2003: 191). The first LSA there was in Oslo, also in 1948. In 1925, Johanne Sorensen, a Dane, converted during a short stay in Honolulu and returned to Denmark (Warburg 2004: 233). However, the next converts occurred in the late 1940s, when two American women (Dagmar Dole and Eleanor Hollibaugh) moved to

Denmark, which paved the way for 38 Danes to declare as Baha'is. The first LSA was formed in 1949 (Warburg 2004: 243).

In 1939, there were Baha'is in 22 countries throughout the continent, with the addition of Finland, Irish Free State, and Iceland (Table). However, outside of Great Britain and Germany, the presence was very small. These two countries made up 40 of the 91 localities in 1939, and 11 of the 14 local spiritual assemblies (Baha'i World 1942: 688–92). However, the Baha'i community in Germany was outlawed in 1937 by the Nazis because of the religion's 'international and pacifist' teachings (Smith 1989), and property was confiscated and some Baha'is were imprisoned. In Poland, a prominent Baha'i of Jewish origin, Lydia Zamenhof, was killed in the Treblinka concentration camp. The second world war brought a suspension to Baha'i activities in occupied European countries. In Britain, this was not the case, and the community was active and continued to grow.

Intensive efforts were made to re-establish communities in Western Europe following the war, including Baha'is moving from North America. This led to local Baha'i communities being established in all northern and western European countries (Sprague 1949: 11). In 1949, these North American Baha'is ('pioneers') established communities in Luxembourg, Portugal, and Spain; the German national Spiritual Assembly was reformed; and there were 142 localities and 41 LSAs (Baha'i World 1952: 520–74). There was also a scattering of Baha'is in central and eastern Europe but governments allowed no formal Baha'i activities in countries that were part of the Soviet sphere of influence. Thus, in 1949, Baha'is were thinly spread in most countries in mainland Europe, with no Baha'i presence in Greece, Austria, Albania, Romania, and a few small states (such as Liechtenstein, Andorra, Monaco, San Marino, and the Vatican City), and with a larger community in the British Isles (Smith 2015).

Table: Countries where Baha’i communities existed in 1926 and subsequent years of establishment

1926	1928	1930	1932	1939	1949
Austria	Denmark	Holland	Albania	Finland	Luxembourg
France	Norway	Hungary	Belgium	Iceland	Portugal
Germany	Yugoslavia	Poland	Bulgaria	Irish Free State	Spain
Great Britain		Czecho-slovakia			
Italy		Lithuania (?)			
Sweden		Romania			
Switzerland					
European Russia					

One other aspect of early European Baha’i history is its role in diplomatic work, particularly on behalf of the persecuted Iranian Baha’is. This started with European diplomats who lobbied for persecuted Babis. The British were instrumental in safeguarding 'Abdu'l-Baha's life during the first world war. By the 1920s, this work continued in the ‘International Baha’i Bureau’ headed by Jean Stannard in Geneva (Baha’i World 1928: 30).

Another important event was the passing of Shoghi Effendi in London in 1957. His resting place at New Southgate cemetery remains an important place for Baha’is to visit. The first Baha’i World Congress was held in London in 1963 at the Royal Albert Hall. Around 6,000 Baha’is attended and the first Universal House of Justice was announced and presented at the congress. The only Baha’i House of Worship in Europe is Langenheim village on the outskirts of Frankfurt. In 1953, the first application was made to purchase land for such a building but the process was complicated by opposition by local Protestant and Catholic churches, and planning refusals and appeals. Work started in 1960 and it was opened in 1964 (Baha’i World 1970: 733–741) with a distinctive concrete and glass modernist design.

Institutional developments and growth since the Second World War in Europe

With increasing numbers of new Baha’is in Europe, developing Baha’i institutions and communities became important. Four periods of institutional development can

be outlined. The first was the establishment of local and national Baha'i bodies from
1920s onwards, as described above.
The second was a major international plan (the Ten Year Crusade) to increase the number of localities, 1953–1963. In the first year, Baha'is moved to
Andorra, the Canary Islands, Greece, Cyprus, Liechtenstein, Malta, and San Marino
(Baha'i World 1970). This continued throughout these years, with Baha'is coming
particularly from North America and Iran. In some European countries, this changed
communities significantly. For example, 17 Iranians arrived in Denmark in 1961 to
add to a community of 59 people (Warburg 2004: 246).
The third was a steady increase in the population of Baha'is in the 1970s as local people joined the Faith (rather than having moved to such areas). Much of the
increase in the early 1970s came from young, single people who were part of a wider
countercultural movement. An example is Denmark, where the community doubled in size when 80 people converted from 1971–1974 (Warburg 2015). Iranian immigration remained important—32 Baha'is moved to Denmark between 1975 and 1990 (Warburg 1995: 189).
Finally and fourth, following the collapse of communism, there was a new period of institution building in central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s coordinated
by the Baha'i World Centre, who encouraged Baha'i in neighbouring countries to
move there to assist in this process. Romania had early successes; the first local
Spiritual Assembly in eastern Europe since the second world war was elected on 21
March 1990 in Cluj.
In terms of national bodies, after the first two NSAs were formed the British Isles and Germany/Austria in 1923, there were no other new NSAs until a joint one
for Italy and Switzerland was elected in 1953. By the end of the Ten Year Crusade in
1963, another 14 were established (France in 1958; Austria in 1959; Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland in 1962). No further national Baha'i institutions were
formed until the NSAs of Iceland and Ireland were established in 1972, followed by
Greece in 1977, Cyprus in 1978, and the Canary Islands in 1984. In central and Eastern Europe, national bodies were established for Romania (1991);

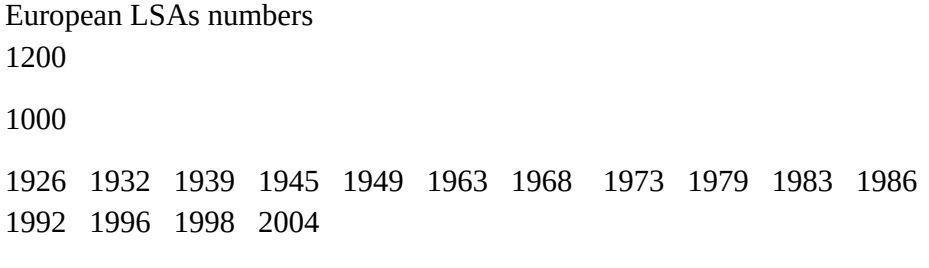
Czechoslovakia (1991); Russia, Georgia, and Armenia (1992); Albania (1992); the Baltic States (1992); Bulgaria (1992); Hungary (1992); Poland (1992); Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova (1992); and Slovenia and Croatia (1994). Armenia, Georgia, and Belarus all elected separate NSAs in 1995, Sicily in 1995, Moldova in 1996, and
separate NSAs for the Czech and Slovak Republics were formed in 1998. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania elected separate NSAs in 1999.

The number of local Spiritual Assemblies (LSAs) provide a clearer perspective on the growth of the Baha'i community in the second half of the twentieth century. In
absolute numbers, this has changed considerably over short time periods, partly as a
consequence of meeting the deadlines of international plans set by the Universal
House of Justice, which was often accompanied by Baha'is moving into new areas
so that there were nine adult Baha'is available to elect an LSA. In 1945, there were 6
LSAs in Europe (Smith 2004: 20). In 1963, there were 172 LSAs and the largest numbers were 48 in the British Isles (excl. British Guyana), 30 in Germany, 12 in
Italy, and 12 in Switzerland. This had increased to 180 LSAs by 1968 (with 8 in Austria, 6 in Belgium, 54 in the British Isles, 1 in Eire, 3 in Denmark, 4 in Finland, 6 in
France, 29 in Germany, 15 in Italy, 3 in Luxembourg, 9 in the Netherlands, 4 in Norway, 7 in Portugal, 15 in Spain, 4 in Sweden, and 8 in Switzerland) (Universal
House of Justice 1968). Over the next decade, this increased more than three-fold.

In 1979, there was a large increase to 637 LSAs. This further grew to 687 LSAs by
1986, and again in 1992 to 845 (Universal House of Justice 1993), a rise mostly explained by new Baha'i communities of central and eastern Europe (which had 112
LSAs in 1992 or 13% of the total) (Baha'i World 1998: 222-223). This gradual increase was sustained in the 1990s with 832 LSAs in 1993, 1,041 in 1996 (Universal House of Justice 1997) and 958 in 1998 (Baha'i World 1999). The last
update from annual Baha'i yearbooks was 2003–2004 when 860 LSAs were reported in Europe, with an inflection point around 1997–98, when LSA numbers started to decline (Figure). Although European-wide LSA numbers has not been published in official sources since this time, they have continued to decline. Based
on available national community reports, there are around 600 LSAs in 2020. This
decline is partly explained by the emphasis in Baha'i communities shifting towards

other institutions, such as devotional meetings and group study events (known as
'study circles'). These latter are not proxies for Baha'i membership, but include
people interested in the community, teachings, and activities, most of whom do not
formally enrol as Baha'is. There are few numbers on these activities—one official
source reported 570 study circles in 2001, which increased to 1,663 in 2006
(Universal House of Justice 2007). The most recent summary of the Baha'i World
Centre provides no statistics on this or any other comparable metric, rather it outlines
selected information by community and country about certain initiatives.

Figure: Number of Local Spiritual Assemblies in Europe based on official sources



In terms of numbers of individual Baha'is, Peter Smith has produced
estimates based on information from the Baha'i World Centre. In 1963, there were
4,900 Baha'is in Europe, which increased to 8,900 in 1968. In 1973, this rose to
17,200, and 19,800 in 1978. In 1983, it was 20,700, and 24,500 in 1988 (Smith
2004: 33). The highest proportionate growth was between 1963 and 1973. Warburg
estimated that there 40,000 European Baha'is in 2001, which increased to 50,000 in
2015 (Warburg 2015). Other sources, such as the World Christian Encyclopedia,
provide alternative estimates of Baha'i numbers, which are overestimates as they

focus on a looser definition of adherence but provide an overview of the number of
countries where there is an active Baha'i presence. In 2020, this source, now known
as the World Christian Database, estimated 166,000 Baha'is in Europe (including
Russia) (Johnson and Zurlo 2020). However, based on examining individual
countries with more validated sources of information (such as annual reports of
national Baha'i communities), this is around 3–6 times too high for membership
numbers. For example, the UK NSA reports around 8,000 Baha'i members in 2020,

whereas the World Christian Database estimates it at 45,000 adherents, more than 5-fold higher.

Individual countries

Turning now to individual countries, the most recent overview was from 1998 when Iceland had the highest number of LSAs per million population (34) followed by Luxembourg (27), Cyprus (8), and Ireland (6) (Fazel and Hassall 1998: 38; Smith 2004: 36). The countries with the smallest Baha'i presences, excluding the countries of the former Eastern Bloc, were Italy (1.1 LSAs per million), France (0.6), and Greece (0.6). In 2019–20, using national Baha'i community annual reports, there were 5 LSAs in Iceland (14 LSAs per million population), 11 in Luxembourg (18/million), 16 in Norway (3.0), 9 in the Republic of Ireland (1.8), 47 in Italy (excluding Sicily) (0.8), 6 in Greece (0.6), and approximately 30 in France (0.4). This suggests clear reductions in LSAs per million population for Iceland, Ireland, Italy, and possibly France.

In absolute numbers, in 1998, the two largest European Baha'i communities were reportedly Albania (13,000 Baha'is) and Romania (7,000). Countries with the most Baha'is per million population were Albania (4,029), Iceland (1,345), Luxembourg (983), Portugal (605), Cyprus (529), Romania (308), Ireland (175) and Norway (173). This contrasts with considerably smaller communities in France (24), Italy (32), and Spain (44) (Warburg 1995: 184–85). In 1992, Albania reported 3,000–4,000 Baha'is (or 940–1250/million), and Romania 1,000 (or 44/million) (Baha'i World 1998). In 2014, Margit Warburg outlined Baha'i populations per million for Iceland (1,118 per million), Norway (238), Finland (142), Sweden (113), and Denmark (67) (Warburg 2015). In 2019–20, the rates were similar: Norway (207), Finland (138), Sweden (106) and Denmark (69).

By comparison, Baha'i numbers in 2019–20 show declines in some Eastern European countries over the last decade. In Albania, it is currently estimated that there are hundreds of Baha'is (at around 100–200 Baha'is per million) and in Romania around 4,000 (or 200 per million). The number with known addresses is

even less; in the hundreds. Iceland has around 350 Baha'is or 950 Baha'is per million population (NSA of the Baha'is of Iceland 2020) and Ireland around 550–600 Baha'is (or 120 per million). Reliable numbers are available in some national annual reports, some of which provide information on net growth. These numbers are complicated by whether one only counts Baha'is with known addresses and whether one includes very recent Iranian immigration, because some are claiming they are Baha'is to improve their chances of securing refugee status.

The two largest European Baha'i communities, the UK and Germany, illustrate the difficulties in examining trends over time. The problem of whether and how to count unknown addresses is demonstrated in the UK—the number increased from 574 in 2014 to 1,914 in 2018 (with no change in the numbers with known addresses). In 2020, in the UK, there were an estimated 6,149 Baha'is with known addresses and another 1,818 without such addresses; around 120 Baha'is/million population. Trends in UK numbers demonstrate minimal annual net growth of 0.5% (including births and immigration) over the last few years with new conversions having decreased from around 100 to around 50–70 per year, and small annual increases partly due to net immigration.

In Germany, there were around 5,835 Baha'is in 2020 or around 69 per million population. German Baha'i numbers have increased from 4,404 in 2000 to 5,835 in 2017, around 4% annual growth, but around two-thirds of all new enrolments were recent Iranian migrants. Without these recent Iranian migrants, over 2012–2017, there were around 59 new enrolments per year and 28 withdrawals (i.e. net of an additional 31 Baha'is per year). There were 106 LSAs in 2005 in Germany (1.3 LSAs/million) (Baha'i World News Service 2005), which decreased to 90 in 2020 (1.1 LSAs/million).

Some observations can be made on Baha'i trends over time. First, three countries with large populations—France, Germany, and the UK—had their Baha'i communities start at similar times and were bolstered by the visit of 'Abdu'l-Baha.

Before the second world war, Germany seemed to have advanced considerably faster than the UK and France in terms of the growth of local assemblies and groups, and in the range of their Baha'i activities (e.g. having a children's magazine and two other national periodicals). Since 1945, though, the UK has become the leading

Western European Baha'i country numerically, and it continues to have more LSAs and Baha'is in absolute terms and per head of population. Despite Paris's early status as the leading centre in Europe, France took 35 years longer than the British Isles and Germany/Austria to form its first national assembly, which it did in 1958, and continues to have less LSAs per million population than other countries (including half that of Italy).

Second, smaller countries, particularly islands, have relatively large Baha'i communities. This is partly a reflection of international Baha'i plans which prioritized establishing a presence in every country, which led to Baha'is moving to many smaller countries to establish communities there. Other possible explanations include a particular country's openness to religious diversity and alternative forms of religious expression. Across the Nordic countries, this might be part of the explanation of the 10-fold difference between Iceland and Denmark or Sweden.

Third, there appears to be no straightforward north/south or Protestant/Catholic explanation for differences in Baha'i numbers between European countries. One example of this is a comparison between Portugal with a Baha'i population at 605 Baha'is/million and 2.4 LSAs/million and Greece with around 10–20 Baha'is/million and 0.6 LSAs/million—both of which are southern European countries. Another is that of Ireland, a Catholic country, with many more Baha'is and LSAs per head of population, compared to Italy. Peter Smith has argued that smaller countries may be more liable to 'endogenous' factors such as pioneers (Baha'is immigrating from other more established communities), and local initiatives while larger countries will be influenced to secular trends (Smith 1984: 90).

Fourth, many of the early Baha'i communities in Western Europe were established by American or Western European women who had become Baha'is in the US. Fifth, a large impetus to the development of these communities came from many Iranian Baha'is moving to mainland Europe as part of the Ten Year Crusade. This continued with economic migration of Iranians in the 1960s and 1970s, and then after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 when the arrival of refugees bolstered Baha'i communities in many countries. This means that many of these communities have large proportions of Iranian expatriates and their children; in many countries

around
half. Finally, growth in these communities since the 1970s has been small, and in
many countries, there has been virtually no growth for the last few decades. There
have been very few examples of large numbers of conversions anywhere in Europe
which have been sustained, with the possible exception of the early 1970s in the UK
and Ireland.

Notable European Baha'is

Among the better-known Baha'is include the British potter Bernard Leach, the
environmentalist Richard St Barbe-Baker, suffragette Alice Buckton (Osborn 2014)
and athlete Nelson Elvora, the 2008 gold-winning Olympic triple jumper. Queen
Marie of Romania, a granddaughter of Queen Victoria, came to hear about the
religion through Martha Root, an American Baha'i teacher, when she visited
Romania in 1923. She wrote letters expressing her acceptance of Baha'i beliefs
towards the end of her life, although her biographies make little to no mention of her
Baha'i affiliation. August-Henri Forel, a Swiss etymologist and neuroanatomist, and
whose image was on a Swiss banknote from 1968 to 2000, became a Baha'i in 1920
when he was in his early 70s.

Themes in European Baha'i community life

Europe has a large diversity of religious and cultural traditions, and this is reflected in
wide variations in many aspects of Baha'i community life. One notable feature of the
Baha'i community in Europe has been its contribution to Baha'i literature and
scholarship. In the UK, Hasan Balyuzi wrote a series of biographies of the central
figures of the Baha'i Faith that remain important sources on its early history (Momen
1995: xi–xx). John Ferraby, who with Balyuzi and Townshend was appointed a Hand
of the Cause in the British Isles, wrote a scholarly introductory book in 1957, All
Things Made New. George Townshend, who was based in Dublin, Ireland, assisted
Shoghi Effendi with translations of Baha'i texts and wrote introductory books and
works on the Baha'i religion's relationship with Christianity and Islam. From the
1970s, a small number of British Baha'is drew on academic methods, convened

regular conferences (Smith 1979, 1980) and seminars,1 and published a series of books, monographs, and journal papers. Two periodicals, Baha'i Studies Bulletin (1982–2000) and Baha'i Studies Review (1998–current) were regular outlets for presentations from these seminars (Fazel 2018). In Germany, scholarship was centred around the work of Udo Schaefer, who wrote introductory works and systematic surveys of Baha'i ethics. A comprehensive and scholarly apologetic work, Desinformation Als Methode (published in English as Making the Crooked Straight) co-authored by Schaefer, is the only book to have been highlighted in the annual message to the Baha'i world from the Universal House of Justice, describing it as a 'signal victory for the German Baha'i community' (Universal House of Justice 2000). Aspects of it were discussed in a special issue of World Order magazine, the Baha'i periodical (World Order 2004). In Italy, Alessandro Bausani, was a prominent academic orientalist, made contributions to Baha'i scholarship. Periodicals were published in Italy (Opinione Baha'i)2 from 1977 and France (Pensee Baha'ie) from the 1970s.

A second feature of the European Baha'i community has been in its public relations work. This has raised awareness of the persecution of Iran's Baha'is, which remains the largest non-Muslim minority in Iran, and lobbied governments and international organizations to call for the Iranian government to cease this persecution. The Baha'i International Community Office in Geneva continues to raise awareness of the plight of Iran's Baha'is, and national communities have brought the matter to the attention of their respective governments and European institutions. The persecution of other Baha'i communities, including those in Egypt and Yemen, have been a focus of recent efforts.

In summary, I have summarised the early interest in the Babi-Baha'i religions in Europe, and outlined its early beginnings in Paris, London and Stuttgart. 'Abdu'l-Baha's two trips to western and central Europe during 1911-13 provided a major impetus to these early communities and generated considerable media interest. Over the next few decades, detailed information on Baha'i communities is

provided in official Baha'i yearbooks and related publications, which show that the number of local and national groups steadily grew throughout western Europe. A major increase in the number of countries opened to the Baha'i Faith occurred during 1953 to 1963 as part of an international plan, and large numbers of individuals converted in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Local Spiritual Assembly numbers, which provide a consistent and reliable metric to examine Baha'i growth, increased from the 1940s until the late 1990s, but have declined since then. Despite this, many individual Baha'i countries have continued to grow numerically, partly due to immigration, particularly from Iran. In addition, a closer look at Baha'i statistics demonstrate the relative strength of some island nations, including Iceland. New communities formed in central and eastern Europe from the 1990s, which remain thinly spread. Notable European Baha'is have come from a wide variety of backgrounds, including the arts, sciences and sport. Two themes stand out in terms of the wider European Baha'i contribution to the international Baha'i community: Baha'i literature and scholarship, and public relations work, particularly in relation to the persecution of Iran's Baha'is.

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Apart from Bausani, notable papers include those by Hossein Avaregan in

Apr-Jun/Jul-Sept/Oct-Dec 1981
‘Profezie con valore scientifico I–III’ [Scientifically-sound
prophecies]; Apr-Jun 1987 ‘Sul valore scientifico delle
profezie; considerazioni di uno studioso’ [The scientific character of
prophecies: personal scholarly reflections];
and Jan-Mar 1990 ‘Punti razionali comuni fra Corano e Vangelo’ [Common
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and the Gospel].

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