

# Venice plays host to 'the Third Rome'

by Mark Burdman and Rachel Douglas

During the first days of August, the Soviet Union formed a new Culture Foundation, which is aimed at enhancing the cultural expressions of the worship of "Holy Mother Russia." One of the four individuals chosen to head the organizing committee for the Foundation's founding conference in 1986 is Academician D. S. Likhachov, a chief spokesman for the "Russian Party" of the U.S.S.R., who, in the late 1940s, authored a pamphlet on Russian history that featured the support of the Senate of Venice, during the 16th century, for Russia's announced mystical ambition to become the "Third and Final Roman Empire," succeeding Rome itself and Constantinople.

Events which transpired at the Cini Foundation of Venice's San Giorgio Maggiore Island, during the week of Sept. 14-21, would seem to be a chapter lifted from Likhachov's pamphlet. The Italian region of Veneto, of which Venice is the main city, sponsored a series of cultural meetings, art exhibitions, and "folklore" gatherings, under the theme, "Europa Genti"—"European Peoples."

Chief organizer Carlo Bernini, president of the Region of Veneto, announced on Sept. 14 that the aim of the events would be to forward "European unity." From the evidence of the events themselves, this "unity" would be on the basis of destroying European Judeo-Christian culture and the nation-state, by advancing localist, linguistic-separatist movements, and praising the decadent cultural models of Mother Russia. Italy's *La Repubblica* reported in its Sept. 13-14 edition, that the conference would draw up a map of a "Europe of the regions, emphasizing the singular culture of localities." This, however, would be a Europe under Soviet cultural, economic, military, and political hegemony.

## Chagall and Mother Russia

The featured art exhibition was a collection of works of Russian-born lunatic-abstract painter Marc Chagall, the works exhibited at Venice's Church of St. Stae, and loaned to Venice by the Soviet Ministry of Culture and by museums in France and Italy, as well as by galleries and private collections. According to Italy's *La Stampa* Sept. 15, the works invoke the "childhood and youth of Chagall, spent in Vitebsk," a town in Russia. These works, said the Turin daily,

express Chagall's "nostalgia for his own ethnic roots."

One must set this report side by side with that of the Soviet "cultural" journal, *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, Sept. 3, in an article entitled, "The Culture Foundation Prepares for its Constituent Conference." One of the main aims of the new Foundation, *LitGaz* stressed, would be "active participation in the development of international cultural ties and exchanges, and the tracking-down and return to the Motherland of national treasures of our fatherland's culture."

A similar eruption from the blood and soil of Holy Mother Russia came from a second direction. Among the Cini events were panels with the titles, "The Ethnic and Regional Roots of Our Continent, From the Atlantic to the Urals, From the North Sea to the Mediterranean," and "The Cultural and Local Traditions and the Roots of Europe." A featured participant was the head of the Institute of Ethnography of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Yulian Bromley, whose activity puts him in a central post for coordination of terrorism, in both its "communist" and "Nazi" forms, as seen most eloquently in the role ethnic-separatist and linguistic-separatist groups play in terrorism in Spain and France in particular. As vice-president of the International Society for Ethnography and Folklore in Europe, Bromley will be a sponsor of an ethnographers' conference in Zurich, Switzerland, in the spring of 1987.

In his Sept. 15 presentation, Bromley informed his Cini audience that the Soviets have abandoned the objection to traditionalist cultures in the U.S.S.R. characteristic of the "post-revolutionary phase" of the Soviet Union. In recent years, he asserted, "there has prevailed, and is continuing, the tendency toward the concrete recuperation of these cultures."

A third prong of the Soviet thrust in Venice, was on the economic side. On Sept. 19, there was a Cini panel on "Economic Cooperation in Europe," featuring Vyacheslav V. Sychev, the secretary-general of the Soviet-led Comecon economic bloc, speaking on the same podium as high-level officials of the European Community and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). Four days later, the *International Herald Tribune* reported a "flash flood of activity" between Comecon and EC officials, over economic deals.

Without question, Mother Russia was pleased by all this attention and help from Venice.

On Sept. 16, the Soviet government daily *Izvestia* reported favorably on the Venice events, noting that the goal of the symposiums "is for the voice of the European peoples to sound ever louder in the struggle for a peaceful future."

One day earlier, *Izvestia* had also featured "The Venetian Peace Regatta," reporting on a race of 400 boats, which took off down the Grand Canal, from St. Mark's Cathedral, "resurrecting a tradition of the past." In this setting, various ostensible "Western tourists," American and otherwise, were quoted, attacking the United States as war-mongering, and proclaiming, "I personally know and see, what care the Soviet Union takes for the fate of the world."