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The Formation of the Image of Republican Spain in the Soviet Union, 1936-1939. Construction, Mediation, Outcomes.

PhD Project*

This project analyses the formation of the image of Republican Spain in the Soviet Union during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). In the first chapter, the author will show the intensity of cultural relations between the USSR and Spain in the spheres of literature, arts, music, cinema, theatre and so on during this period. Also the influence and participation of Soviet authorities and the role of the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS) in these contacts will be examined. A special focus will be given to the history of workers' delegations from Spain to the USSR. The main sources are documents of the VOKS as well as reports from the archival fonds of the Comintern and the Central Committee of the VKP(b).

The central topic of the second chapter will be the Soviet agitation and propaganda concerning the situation in Spain. The author will analyse the instructions given to agitators as well as the circumstances of the fundraising campaign for the "women and children of heroic Spain". Also the role of the press and the images produced by political caricatures in Soviet newspapers and special albums will be taken into account. The results of this effort by Soviet authorities will be shown in the third chapter. The images connected with Republican Spain which came into existence in the mass conscience of Soviet people are reconstructed from letters sent by "ordinary people" to the Comintern and the departments of the Central Committee. Also diaries, especially of Soviet writers, will be used to reconstruct these images.

"Soiuz Sovetskikh Pisatelei v pervye mesiatsy voiny v Ispanii [The Union of Soviet Writers during the First Months of the Spanish Civil War]. In: Rossiiskaia istoriia (2010), 5, pp. 57-61. (Summary of the author's article)

The article describes the position of the Union of Soviet Writers concerning the Spanish Civil War during the first months of the conflict (July to December 1936). Soviet writers actively participated in the propaganda campaign of "solidarity with the heroic Spanish people". They frequently published articles in Soviet newspapers, sending greetings to their Spanish colleagues who "exchanged pens for rifles". The author shows that this activity was affirmed at the highest levels of the Soviet party and state apparatus. Soviet writers and their families also became part of the fundraising campaign for "women and children of heroic Spain".

Soviet writers created several works of literature connected with Spain, such as the collection of poems and articles "My s Vami!" ("We are with you!") published in Autumn 1936. Ilya Erenburg accused the participating poets of vulgarity and provoked a discussion in the Union. The most important propagandistic masterpiece, however, was the play "Salut,

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Ispaniya" ("Salut, Spain"), written by Aleksandr Afinogenov in November 1936 and staged in more than 100 theaters all over the USSR. According to Afinogenov's diaries, though, he was not that much interested in the Spanish Civil War, so the author suggests that Afinogenov merely wanted to confirm his loyalty. As a result, the article concludes that the activities undertaken by the Union of Soviet Writers and its members were diverse, yet approved (and in some ways initiated) by Soviet authorities.

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