



Venice in peril

High tides and decades of political muddling have put Venice in peril. The financial crisis now risks accelerating the process. The local authorities are so desperate for funds that they are quite happily prepared to emasculate the city by allowing corporate sponsors to erect huge billboards over historic buildings under restoration.

Garish hoardings advertising the Eni oil group and Lancia cars have taken over the Bridge of Sighs, while Swatch has defaced the façade of the Biblioteca Marciana. And the Correr Museum on St Mark's Square is also about to be smothered with a sign.

The authorities have now asked Assicurazioni Generali to move out of their historic offices in the world's "most beautiful drawing room", as Napoleon called St Mark's Square, to expand the Correr Museum. They also suggested Generali could pay for the restoration. The insurer's veteran chairman Antoine Bernheim politely told them to jump in the lagoon.

