

Report: Charity Head's Putin Plug Was Forced

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The head of a major children's charity was pressured into shooting a commercial supporting the presidential candidacy of Vladimir Putin, under threat of having the charity's funding cut off, Gazeta.ru reported Wednesday.

Chulpan Khamatova, a prominent actress and the founder of Podari Zhizn, or Gift of Life, appeared in a campaign spot for Putin that appeared online Tuesday and was much discussed on social networks.

Some commenters speculated that Khamatova may have been forced into shooting the 30-second clip, citing her lack of enthusiasm in the video and rumors of pressure placed on her and her charity.

In the video, she praises Putin for helping the charity save children's lives and says that is why she is going to vote for him in the March 4 presidential election.

Some comments under the video on YouTube express sympathy for her. Others described her

as a traitor.

"Hostage in the arms of terrorists," one of the comments read.

A source who works at Khamatova's charity told Gazeta.ru that the actress had indeed been pressured into appearing in the ad.

"Yes, she was forced, she was threatened," the source said. "Not her personally, but children were threatened. The fund was threatened, and [they] threatened to cut off oxygen to the blood center, cut off financing."

Gift of Life provides financial assistance for medical treatment of children suffering from severe illnesses. While headed by Khamatova, the charity has received regular financial help from the government for its programs.

Putin toured a Moscow children's medical center with Khamatova on Wednesday.

A Putin spokesman called the comments about pressure on Khamatova "bacchanalia" and said she "sincerely supports Putin," which she confirmed during their Wednesday meeting, RIA-Novosti reported.

Khamatova herself didn't make any comments. The theater and movie actress is internationally known for starring in "Goodbye, Lenin!" in 2003.

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