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Italians Offered Cash to Film 'Thank You Russia' Videos for Coronavirus Aid – Reports

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Critics have argued that Russia's package of decontamination units and military medical staff sent to Italy, dubbed "From Russia With Love," was an attempt at a publicity coup for Putin in the West. **Russian Defense Ministry / TASS**

Russian nationals in Italy are offering Italians money to film themselves thanking Russia and President Vladimir Putin for recent coronavirus aid, Italy's La Repubblica newspaper reported Sunday.

Russia dispatched army medics in March to help disinfect hospitals and care facilities in a northern Italian region that has been hit hardest by the country's coronavirus outbreak. The aid was followed by allegations that most of the Russian supplies were useless and that some of Russia's contingent included spies, which Moscow dismissed as "Cold War fake news."

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According to La Repubblica, potential recruits are offered 200 euros ($218) via WhatsApp to post one thank-you video on Twitter, Facebook or Instagram intended for an unnamed Russian media outlet.

“They need 15 Italians who say something good about Russian humanitarian aid,” reads one of the WhatsApp messages, which were allegedly sent by Russians living and studying in Italy.

Text-based thank-you notes are said to pay less. An unnamed Italian TikTok user who posted a short thank-you clip told La Repubblica that her friend got paid 20 euros for a similar video.

“It’s premature to argue that the 200-euro video ‘campaign’ is part of some strategy [...] but suspicion remains,” the newspaper wrote.

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Russia’s Embassy in Rome said it was unaware of any solicitations on social media and called La Repubblica’s report “provocation by fraudsters.” It said the embassy has received “hundreds of calls” from Italians sincerely thanking Russia for its coronavirus aid.

The report comes two weeks after BBC Russia reported that Italians who received wide coverage in Russian state media for playing the Russian anthem or waving the Russian flag had either family or financial connections to Russia.

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Italy has been one of the world’s hardest-hit countries by Covid-19, with almost 160,000 infections and nearly 20,500 deaths. Russia has reported 21,102 cases and 170 deaths so far.

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