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In Leaked Email to Russia, Argentinian Official Decries 'Very Critical' Sputnik V Shortages

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Arrival of Sputnik V vaccines in Buenos Aires, Argentina - 31 Mar 2021 **Zuma / TASS**

Argentina is in a "very critical situation" as it faces a shortage of second doses of Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine, a senior official told Russian vaccine producers earlier this month in a leaked email obtained by Argentina's La Nacion newspaper.

In the July 7 email addressed to Anatoly Braverman, a senior official at the Russian Direct Investment Fund that markets Sputnik V worldwide, an adviser to President Alberto Fernandez said the country was still waiting for over 18.5 million doses of Sputnik V. Of those missing jabs, 5.5 million were first-component doses and 13.1 millionwere second-component doses.

"At this point, the entire contract is at risk of being publicly canceled," the adviser, Cecilia Nicolini, wrote in the email published Thursday, saying the delays were "putting our government at risk."

Nicolini on Thursday confirmed the email's authenticity to La Nacion. The RDIF and Nicolini did not immediately respond to a request for comment from The Moscow Times.

Argentina's left-wing government became the first Latin American country to import Sputnik V vaccines at the end of last year, but has since struggled to obtain enough second doses of the two-component jab.

According to Bloomberg, while the country of 45 million people has so far given out 26 million Covid-19 vaccine shots, only around 10% of Argentinians are fully vaccinated, a gap partly explained by widespread shortages of Sputnik V's second dose. In May, Mexico also complained that production delays were leading to shortages of Sputnik V's second component.

The delay comes as Argentina, one of the hardest-hit Latin American countries by the pandemic, threatens to be overrun with the surging Delta variant, with experts warning that patients inoculated with one dose are at greater risk.

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"The one-dose strategy isn't enough with the Delta variant," Argentinian immunologist Eduardo Lopez told Bloomberg this month.

In her email to the RDIF, Nicolini says the country "urgently needs at least 1 million *[second doses]* to inoculate elderly people this weekend," adding that Sputnik has provided less than "the minimum."

"We always responded by doing everything possible for Sputnik V to be a major success, but you are leaving us with very few options to continue fighting for you and this project!" the email concludes.

Peer-reviewed research published early this year said that Sputnik V is 91.6% effective against the original Covid-19 strain. Argentinian health officials have previously said their studies have shown Sputnik V to be more effective at preventing coronavirus infection than the Chinese vaccines also widely used in Argentina.

The email appears to be another setback for Russia's stuttering vaccine diplomacy as the country increasingly falls short of its promised deliveries of the jab.

The RDIF has said it is on track to produce 1.6 billion doses in 2021 through agreements with 25 manufacturing facilities in 14 countries. However, experts at the analytics company Airnitiy previously told The Moscow Times that the hoped-for explosion in international Sputnik V production has yet to take off.

Earlier, The Moscow Times also revealed that through a complex scheme, the RDIF awarded a firm linked to a royal middleman in the United Arab Emirates exclusive resale rights for Sputnik V in at least five countries across three continents at huge mark-ups, sparking anger among local opposition parties.

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