

Charity and Politics Make A Bad Mix

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The campaign for Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's presidential bid released a series of videos last week in which more than 20 prominent actors, film directors, classical musicians and pop stars produced [videos](#) under the general headline "Why I Am Voting for Putin." This once again demonstrates the problems of mixing culture and politics in a country where the former is often dependent on the Kremlin's goodwill.

But the largest controversy involved Chulpan Khamatova, the popular actress and co-founder of the Gift of Life charity, who also appeared in a pro-Putin video. An anonymous source in the charity told Gazeta.ru on Wednesday that Khamatova was pressured to appear in the video, implying that government funding for the charity could be cut off if she didn't agree to support Putin in this way. Many noted that in the [video](#) Khamatova speaks reluctantly, looks visibly under stress and is on the verge of tears.

The video sparked a heated debate on the Web. Many sympathized with her being taken "hostage" by the Kremlin, while others called her a "traitor."

It's true that Khamatova's charity, which helps children with cancer and other severe illnesses, relies heavily on the government to fund its projects. But up until now, Khamatova and her charity have abstained from openly campaigning for Putin.

While the blogosphere was teeming with discussions about whether Khamatova should have "sold her soul to the devil" — even for a good cause — Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov assured journalists that Khamatova wasn't pressured and that she sincerely supports Putin on her own.

Meanwhile, Khamatova has refused to comment on the issue, fueling speculation that the pressure from the Kremlin has not abated.

But there may be a bright side to this story if public awareness about the need to help the country's severely ill children increases, along with private donations.

The government should continue to charities, but it is reprehensible to demand political loyalty in exchange. Meanwhile, citizens and companies can play an important role as a check on this abuse. The greater the amount of private donations to charities like Gift of Life, the less likely the Kremlin will be able to manipulate a good cause for political goals.

Lawmakers can make a valuable contribution to this effort by expanding the number and level of tax deductions for private charitable donations.

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