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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Ukraine Says Billions Needed to Rebuild Devastated East

By The Moscow Times

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The damaged main terminal of the Donetsk Sergey Prokofiev International Airport is pictured during fighting between rebels and Ukrainian government forces in Donetsk, eastern Ukraine.

Ukraine will need at least $2 billion to restore war-shattered eastern areas currently under the control of government forces, the country's Finance Minister Oleksandr Shlapak said.

This figure — more than 1 percent of Ukraine's rapidly shrinking gross domestic product — does not include the cost of rectifying the damage that the months-long struggle between pro-Russian separatists and the Ukrainian army has inflicted on areas such as the city of Donetsk, which before the war housed almost a million people and is today under separatist control.

"In my opinion, the state of affairs in [the separatist-controlled] zone is a great deal worse," Shlepak said at meeting with journalists in Washington earlier this week, news agency Ukrinform reported.

In the areas controlled by Kiev, funds would go first of all towards resurrecting the area's "mutilated" residences and infrastructure such as electricity, water and gas supply systems, he said.

The Ukrainian government will likely need help to foot the bill. Kiev is already functioning on multibillion-dollar life support from the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank said earlier this month that Ukraine's economy would shrink by 8 percent this year.

The conflict in eastern Ukraine began with separatist demonstrations following the ejection of Ukraine's former pro-Russian government in February, but quickly transformed into a full-blown war for control over the area that has claimed more than 3,600 lives, according to the United Nations.

The fighting has slowed but continued even following a ceasefire declared in early September.

Ukraine and the West have accused Russia of aiding and abetting the conflict through a steady supply of weapons to the separatists and direct military interference, claims that Russia has repeatedly denied.

The Ukrainian government will hold an international donor conference in December in hopes of attracting donations for rebuilding the area, Shlepak said.

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