

Russia Mulls 'Leisure Zone' in Place of Azovstal Plant Ruins

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Russian military vehicle next to the Azovstal plant in the occupied city of Mariupol. **AP / TASS**

Russia plans to replace the badly damaged Azovstal steel plant in the captured Ukrainian port city of Mariupol with either an industrial park or a leisure zone, a Russian minister [said](#) Wednesday.

Deputy Prime Minister Marat Khusnullin said rebuilding was already underway the site, which became a symbol of Ukrainian resistance after its outnumbered defenders held out for months against a brutal Russian assault.

"There's no need to restore Azovstal," Khusnullin told state-run broadcaster Rossiya 24. "This zone can continue to operate as an industrial park or recreation area."

Azovstal owner Rinat Akhmetov, Ukraine's richest man, said last month that he [plans to sue](#) Russia for \$20 billion in losses as a result of the destruction of the plant.

Akhmetov's company Metinvest – Ukraine's largest pre-war employer – [said](#) in April that it

would “never operate under Russian occupation.”

As many as 153 Metinvest staff were [killed](#) during the Russian seizure of Mariupol, according to the company.

Khusnullin also said that Russia plans to expand the capacity of Mariupol’s port and develop local tourism. “The costs of this work are difficult to estimate, but they’re fairly high,” he told Rossiya 24.

Denis Pushilin, who heads the pro-Moscow separatist Donetsk People’s Republic in eastern Ukraine, [said](#) last week that the Azovstal plant would be turned into a technological park, public park or residential area.

Russia took full control of Mariupol last month when an estimated 2,500 Ukrainian soldiers holding out in the Azovstal plant surrendered.

Some of the Azovstal prisoners have been transferred to Russia with captured Ukrainian commanders [reportedly](#) held in Moscow’s notorious Lefortovo prison.

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