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St. Petersburg Funnels $1.5Mln from City Budget to Mariupol Reconstruction – Media

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A sign with the names of St. Petersburg and Mariupol inside intersecting hearts appeared on Palace Square in St. Petersburg this week. **vk.com/spb.live**

St. Petersburg has contributed 100 million rubles ($1.5 million) toward the reconstruction of Mariupol, the southern Ukrainian port city largely destroyed by Russian troops this year, the independent media outlet Rotonda reported.

The allocation has apparently cut into the city's budget for ice and snow cleanup, making the streets of Russia's second-largest city — already notorious for their treacherous snow and ice cover every winter — especially dangerous for residents.

A city-owned enterprise, Center, was ordered in June to pay 300,000 rubles ($4,836) to a woman who broke her leg slipping on an icy street that the company was responsible for keeping ice-free, Rotonda reported.

Center filed an appeal with a local court earlier this month to reduce the compensation amount.

In its appeal, Center disclosed its expenses, which included over 100 million rubles for "rebuilding and restoration works" in Russian-occupied Mariupol, Rotonda reported, citing a copy of the appeal it obtained.

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"The money sent from the St. Petersburg budget to Center for cleaning up [the city] was spent in Mariupol [instead]," city opposition deputy Boris Vishnevsky said.

"And that was only in the first half of the year. It could very well have continued to be spent in the second half. So don't be surprised why the city is being cleaned so badly. The money went to Mariupol," Vishnevsky wrote on his Telegram channel.

Center's appeal was ultimately rejected.

St. Petersburg Governor Alexander Beglov has faced repeated criticism for the condition of the city's streets in wintertime.

Video published by St. Petersburg-based media Wednesday morning showed locals pushing a city bus to free it from a snowdrift.

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Earlier this year, Beglov announced that St. Petersburg would form a “twin city” partnership with Mariupol, which Russia captured in May following a months-long siege in the face of dogged Ukrainian resistance.

In September, St. Petersburg Vice-Governor Nikolai Linchenko vowed that no money from the city budget would be allocated for the "restoration of Mariupol and humanitarian aid to its residents.”

That month, Russia claimed to have annexed Mariupol following widely disputed referendums in four partially occupied Ukrainian regions.

On Tuesday, the Russia-installed head of the southern Kherson region Vladimir Saldo announced major construction works in the Russia-occupied territory.

“We will try to compete with Mariupol in a good way: Which of us will build new neighborhoods, schools, kindergartens and roads faster, [for example]," said Saldo.

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