

# Land Ownership Laws Should Be Amended as Soon as Possible, Official Says

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The privatization of state-owned lands proposed by Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev will allow for more efficient use of land plots, but a clear mechanism for selling those lands needs to be created, an Economic Development Ministry official said Monday.

The existing legislation should be amended “as soon as possible” for the government to put the plots up for tender, said Andrei Ivakin, head of the property department at the ministry.

Privatizing state-owned land is primarily aimed at the more efficient use of those land plots, rather than just cash injections into the federal budget, he said at a news conference, RIA-Novosti reported.

About 92 percent of the country’s territory is owned by federal or local government, Ivakin said, adding that those lands include forest territories that are not liable to privatization.

Last week, Medvedev called for state-owned lands to be put up for sale, a measure that he said would help improve the investment climate.

The initiative is questionable, because sale to private investors might result in land remaining idle, as happened to the lands of former collective farms that had been privatized after the collapse of the Soviet Union, said Oleg Repchenko, head of real estate portal IRN.ru.

In one example, he said, landlords of agricultural plots in the Moscow region “own hundreds of thousands of hectares, and these lands are not in use at all.”

Setting higher taxes for idle land plots would help solve the problem, as owners would have to use them in order to not overpay, Repchenko said.

The government intends to push forward legislative initiatives that would allow idle lands owned by private investors to be taken away and put up for tender in order for those plots “not to collect dust,” Ivakin said.

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