

EU to scrap mobile roaming fees

BRUSSELS, BELGIUM: The European Parliament endorsed a sweeping package of EU telecommunications reforms, including a much-awaited measure to end roaming charges for cross-border mobile phone use.



The EU's Neelie Kroes says roaming charges between EU member states will be dropped by 2015. Image: [Phys.Org](#)

A plenary sitting of parliament in Brussels voted to ban mobile phone surcharges, which hit users as they cross national borders in the European Union - a ban to take effect by December 2015.

If enacted, the legislation would require mobile phone companies to offer "roam like at home" packages to cover the whole of the EU, or allow customers to subscribe to separate service providers without changing their original SIM card.

The vote was welcomed by EU Commissioner for the digital agenda Neelie Kroes, who has been fighting for the reforms in a bid to dismantle obstacles lying in the way of a common telecommunications market.

"This is what the EU is all about - getting rid of barriers to make life easier and less expensive," Kroes said.

Phone and data

The legislation, which covers both phone calls and data transmission, now needs the approval of the European Council, representing the EU's 28 member states, before returning to parliament after the European elections in late May.

Commission officials said they were confident the legislation could be enacted by October.

Europe's telecommunications industry reacted angrily to the vote, claiming it was a "step in the wrong direction" and one which would harm the EU's business competitiveness.

Luigi Gambardella, chairman of telecommunications operators group ETNO, said the vote risked "derailing the original objectives" of the EU's ambitious digital reform project and could undermine job creation.

In particular, ETNO objected to another part of the legislative reforms requiring that Internet service providers (ISPs) grant all services available on the net equal access - an idea known as "net neutrality."

If enacted, the reforms would prevent ISPs from blocking access to certain sites, or slowing download speeds for customers wanting to log on to those sites - a practice which some ISPs have used to damage competing services.

But ISPs argue that such restrictions would see bandwidth otherwise earmarked for education or telemedicine lost to recreational bandwidth use.

Gambardella called on EU member states to reject this part of the legislation or face the prospect that access to innovative and high-quality services will be negatively affected.

The reform bill was launched in September by the European Commission, the EU's executive arm, in an attempt to create a single telecommunications market and boost competition among largely nationally based mobile phone companies.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge

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