

EC "Major Step" Towards Single Telecoms Market

Written by Marco Attard
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The European Commission announces what it describes as its most ambitious plan in 26 years of telecoms market reform-- one involving the reduction of consumer charges, simplification of red tape and new rights for users and service providers.



"Further substantial progress towards a European single market for telecoms is essential for Europe's strategic interests and economic progress," EC president Jose Manuel Barroso says. "For the telecoms sector itself and for citizens who are frustrated that they do not have full and fair access to Internet and mobile services."

The so called "Connected Europe" plan involves the scrapping of roaming fees, building on the roaming cap the EC introduced on 2012. If all goes to plan, from 1 July 2014 companies will have to either offer phone plans that apply everywhere within the 28 EU states ("roam like at home") or allow customers to opt for a separate roaming provider without need for a new SIM card.

The EC will also ban international call premiums within the EU for both fixed and mobile calls, with the price of intra-EU mobile calls set at no more than €0.19.

Further proposals include the right to plain language contracts, easier provider/contract switching, the right to drop a provider if internet speed promises are not fulfilled, and 12-month contracts.

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When it comes to net neutrality the EC proposes the banning of internet content blocking and throttling, giving users full and open internet regardless of subscription cost and speed. Providers will still be able to provide "specialised services" (IPTV, VoD, business-critical cloud applications) with assured quality, but only if this does not interfere with internet speeds promised to other customers.

On the business side all 28 EU members will have a single authorisation, together with coordinated spectrum assignment and more efficient cross-border investment plans.

"The legislation proposed today is great news for the future of mobile and internet in Europe," Digital Agenda Commissioner Neelie Kroes says. "The EC says no to roaming premiums, yes to net neutrality, yes to investment, yes to new jobs. Fixing the telecoms sector is no longer about this one sector but about supporting the sustainable development of all sectors."

According to the EC telecoms make 9% of the European digital economy.

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