

EU travellers to get cheaper mobile messages

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A person uses a mobile phone in Paris. European travellers will pay less to send text messages and access the internet via mobile phone networks, under a compromise deal thrashed out by EU negotiators Tuesday, a spokesman said.

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The scheme -- which must yet be approved by the full [European Parliament](#) and the 27 member states -- continues efforts to cap "roaming" charges -- the cost of using mobile phones while travelling in another EU nation.

EU nations and Euro MPs also agreed to new cuts in [mobile phone](#) calls seeking to lower [tariffs](#) gradually to a ceiling of 35 cents (47 US cents) a minute for "roaming calls" from 2011, the parliamentary spokesman said.

The new plans broaden the net for the regulated prices by including texting for the first time.

The negotiators from the European Parliament and 27 member states called for a maximum price of 11 cents for text messages sent while abroad in the European Union, much lower than the current EU average of 29 cents which is almost 10 times the cost of sending an SMS at home.

In some countries the price of sending a "roaming" [text message](#) is as high as 80 cents.

For those surfing the internet on their [mobile networks](#), the plan is to impose a ceiling of 80 cents per megabyte downloaded from 2010, dropping to 50 cents a year later.

The agreement to cut "roaming" charges for mobile telephone calls continues a process begun in 2007 amid concerns that holidaymakers and others were being ripped off while abroad.

The current maximum cost for such a call is 45 cents a minute.

This should drop to 43 cents in July, the EU negotiators said, two months earlier than planned.

The EU negotiators decided to continue lowering the maximum tariff to 39 cents next summer and 35 cents in the summer of 2011.

Also from this summer, mobile [telephone operators](#) will have to charge by the second, rather than topping up to the nearest minute.

They will however be allowed to charge for 30 seconds for any very short call.

The deal thrashed out behind closed doors in Strasbourg will be put up for full parliamentary approval next month.

Parliament's chief negotiator, Romanian liberal Adina-Ioana Valean, welcomed the deal, expressing the hope that it would pass smoothly through the legislative hurdles, "in order to benefit European consumers from this summer."

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