

EU picks two operators for satellite services to remote areas

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The European Commission announced on Thursday that Inmarsat Ventures and Solaris Mobile had been chosen to beam high-speed Internet services to rural and remote areas in Europe not connected to existing networks.

Once the system is up and running, in a targeted two years' time, millions more EU consumers and businesses all over Europe will have access to mobile satellite services thanks to innovative portable terminals carried by a person or mounted on a car or ship.

That will help bridge the digital divide in the availability of high-speed internet coverage in Europe by reaching rural and less populated regions.

The two chosen companies will have exclusive rights to beam high-speed internet access, mobile television and radio or emergency communications to cellphones and computers over a specifically reserved spectrum.

Since the radio signals would rely on satellites, operators could offer the services in far-flung places not currently covered by base stations for mobile telephone networks.

Satellite communication services are already available but at a high radio frequency that requires often clunky equipment that has held back their wider use except for in geographically isolated places.

The candidates were chosen according to the technical and commercial quality of their proposals as well as their geographic coverage, consumer and competitive benefits, and possible public sector uses, such as disaster relief.

"Mobile satellite services have huge potential: they can enable Europeans to access new communication services, particularly in rural and less populated regions. I therefore welcome that we have now cleared the way for the swift launch of these pan-European services," said EU Telecoms Commissioner Viviane Reding.

"A Europe-wide market for mobile satellite services is now becoming a reality. I call on the Member States to take without any delay all the required follow up steps in order to allow a timely and proper launch of mobile satellite services," she added in a statement.

Britain's Inmarsat and Dublin-based Solaris Mobile are leading providers of satellite-based mobile services.

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