

EU aims to slash mobile phone roaming charges

July 6 2011, by Claire Rosenberg



The high cost of using smartphones and tablets across the European Union is set to be slashed under European Commission plans to slash expensive roaming bills.

The high roaming costs of using smartphones and tablets across the European Union are to be slashed under a new plan issued on Wednesday to give users greater choice in a more competitive, regulated market.

In a season that often sees disgruntled vacationers returning home to shock bills after calls and downloads in other EU nations, the [European Commission](#) said it was time "to get to the root cause of [roaming](#) rip-offs, namely the lack of competition."

To force phone operators to offer better deals, telecoms commissioner

Neelie Kroes is submitting legislation offering [Europeans](#) the possibility from July 1, 2014, of buying a stand-alone roaming service from any provider while keeping their own number.

If a consumer opted for a separate contract, their device would automatically switch to the pre-selected roaming provider when travelling -- without change of number or [SIM card](#).

Once approved by the [European parliament](#) and the 27 member states, the new regulation will also give [mobile operators](#), including "virtual" operators without an own network, the right to use other operators' networks in the EU.

"Within a single market there is simply no justification for huge mark-ups, just because you've crossed an invisible border that is supposed to have disappeared," Kroes told a news conference.

With travellers currently paying anywhere from two to 12 euros for a single megabyte of data -- 100 e-mails, an hour browsing or a minute-long music download -- the Commission will also introduce a retail price cap for data roaming, while keeping an existing rates cap on voice and SMS calls.

"Competition is still very weak," said Kroes.

"Just as structural measures to increase competition in air travel have brought down air fares and increased choice very substantially, I am confident that structural measures to increase competition on the roaming market will ensure customers get a significantly better deal."

Kroes admitted that at the end of the day the aim was to abolish roaming charges altogether in a single Europe, but said that for the moment "this is a breakthrough".

Under the new price cap for data roaming, from July 2012 e-mails and the Internet will cost 90 cents a [megabyte](#), dropping to 0.70 euros in 2013 and 0.50 euros in 2014.

Currently, the EU has imposed maximum rates known as "Eurotariffs", which came into force in 2007, first for voice calls but later extended to text messages.

Until the stand-alone roaming service comes into effect, the system, initially due to be phased out in 2012, is to be extended until 2016 to act as what Kroes labelled "a safety net."

Rates under that system however will continue to be decreased.

The maximum price for making a phone call abroad would drop from 0.35 euros a minute today -- not including sales tax -- to 0.32 euros in 2012, 0.28 euros in 2013 and down to 0.24 by 2014.

Sending an SMS would cost 0.10 euros from next year instead of 0.11 today.

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