

EU lags behind on 4G: official

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A mobile phone plays a video of BFM TV taken during the launch of the SFR 4G mobile network in La Defense, Paris business district on January 29, 2013. EU member states should do more, and faster, to introduce next-generation 4G mobile phone services if Europe is to reap the benefits of the new technology.

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About 75 percent of the European Union population of about 500

million has no access to 4G services, EU Digital Agenda Commissioner Neelie Kroes said on Thursday.

In stark contrast, in the United States more than 90 percent of the population had 4G access, she said.

Kroes said that of the 28 member states, three—Cyprus, Ireland and Malta—had no 4G at all while only Germany, Estonia and Sweden had advanced systems in place.

There was virtually no 4G coverage in rural areas across the EU, Kroes said, with the EU accounting for only five percent of global 4G connections.

"This is no way to run an economy. It means ... that Europeans living in rural areas and those on holiday get treated like second-class citizens," Kroes said.

"It doesn't matter where you are, you pay money for a device and mobile subscription and it should work."

4G operates five times faster than the current 3G network and allows users to download large e-mail attachments quickly, watch live television without buffering, make high-quality video calls and play live games on the go.

It is seen as the next essential step in the telecommunications revolution and Kroes has repeatedly lambasted EU countries for lagging behind.

Earlier this week, she said she had to reluctantly agree to delays in nine out of 14 member states who had committed to free up 800 megahertz bandwidth for 4G use by January this year but had failed to make the deadline.

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