# Europe Union OKs constant chatting on flights

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In this Thursday, April 15, 2010 file photo, grounded aircraft are seen at Belfast City airport, Northern Ireland. Passengers on European airlines may soon be able to use portable electronics including cell phones and tablet computers any time during flights, under new safety guidelines issued Friday, Sept. 26, 2014. The Cologne-based European Aviation Safety Agency said that starting immediately, European airlines can, at their own discretion, allow passengers to leave electronics on the entire flight, without the putting them into "airplane mode." (AP Photo/Peter Morrison, File)

(AP)—European skies may soon be alive with the sound of small talk

with new safety guidance allowing the use of all portable electronics, including cell phones, at any time during flights.

Under the guidelines issued Friday by the Cologne-based European Aviation Safety Agency, European airlines can, at their own discretion, allow passengers to leave electronics on during the entire flight, without the putting them into "airplane mode."

"We're basically opening the door where, in theory, you'll be able to continue making your phone call through the gate throughout the flight ... like you would on a train," spokesman Ilias Maragakis told The Associated Press.

Standing in the way is the difficulty of getting a cell phone signal at high altitudes, and also how passengers will react to the thought of sitting next to a chatterbox across the Atlantic.

That'll be up to the airlines to figure out as they implement the new regulations. In most European trains, for example, there are "silent" cars where talking on phones is prohibited but it seems unlikely a scheme like that would work on anything but the largest jets.

In addition to phones, the guidelines apply to all other portable electronics, including book readers, tablet computers, mp3 players and other devices.

EASA said airlines sill now need to decide what devices they will allow and how they will allow them to be used. EASA also cautioned that even within airlines, the devices allowed could depend upon the aircraft type.

Airlines will also have to certify that their planes aren't affected by transmission signals before they allow devices to be used.

"Basically we are saying you can have it switched on, and it's up to the airline first to allow you," Maragakis said.

EASA's previous guidance, from last year, allowed electronic devices for almost the whole flight, so long as they were not transmitting any signals by being put into "airplane mode."

Similarly, the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration last year lifted its own restrictions on the use of most personal electronic devices during takeoffs and landings—but not cellphone calls, which fall under the Federal Communications Commission. Passengers were also told to keep the devices on "airplane mode."

Before that, the FAA long had barred the use of electronic devices below 10,000 feet (3,048 meters) because of concern they could cause electronic interference with aircraft systems during landings, the phase of flight when accidents are most likely to occur.

Maragakis said the new guidance applies to any European-based carrier, no matter where the flight originates.

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