

EU unveils new plan to scrap mobile roaming charges

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The European Union's executive arm unveiled new plans Wednesday aimed at ending costly mobile phone roaming charges next year after coming under fire from providers and consumer groups over its previous scheme.

Unlike the previous proposals from the European Commission to cap roaming-free use at 90 days per year, the new plan would set no limits on time or the volume of data used. The new arrangements will be based on where phone-users live or an EU country that they regularly visit, like a neighboring state where they might work.

Providers who are broadly opposed to the end of roaming charges could take action if customers do far more roaming than domestic use. They fear that once the new plan takes hold, people might buy cheap services or SIM cards in another European country, and then use them at home.

Consumer groups say that roaming calls within Europe currently can cost up to 2 euros (\$2.23) per minute; about 20 times higher than the cost of mobile calls within the same country. Yet EU data suggests that it costs little more for phone companies to connect such calls.

The EU's executive body has long promised to end roaming charges by June 2017. Its previous announced scheme, with a widely-criticized 90-day charge-free limit, was quickly dumped by Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker a few days before he delivered a key-note "State of the European Union" address to parliament last week.

The measures will now be examined by providers to see if they would actually work.

"Let's discuss with stakeholders," Commission Vice President Andrus Ansip told reporters. "Where it will end, I don't know. Maybe we have to set even some kind of volume-based safeguards in the future."

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