

Mobile phone calls on planes make slow take off in Europe

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An airplane comes in for a landing. A year after they were authorised, the use of mobile phones aboard planes remains very limited in Europe, with only 27 planes equipped to allow them, the European Commission said Thursday.

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"That is not a big number, we have in Europe 4,900 commercial aircraft," commission spokesman Martin Selmayr admitted.

"But that number is expected to grow," he added, while admitting that he and his fellow spokesman dreaded the idea of being contactable even at 35,000 feet.

A year ago Brussels introduced rules allowing [phone](#) services on aircraft across the EU, via technology allowing a phone network to be created on board.

So far three European airlines -- Ryanair (Ireland), TAP (Portugal) and bmi (Britain) -- have equipped some planes to allow inflight calls.

That is possible as there are now two providers of on-board mobile communications services; OnAir (Geneva) and AeroMobile (London) which work with the airlines interested in making such services available to their passengers.

The number of specially equipped plans is expected to double by the end of the year, constituting "a promising start" according to the EU executive.

"The possibility to use a [mobile phone](#) onboard an aircraft is particularly sought after by business travellers and younger passengers," said EU telecoms commissioner Viviane Reding.

However a study issued last September which covered a number of countries -- including Britain, France and Germany as well as the United States -- found that most travellers oppose the use of mobile phones on planes.

Asked whether the use of phones should be barred on planes, 77 percent of those who had flown agreed.

Selmayr was quick to note that mile-high phones could also be used for text messaging or to access the Internet.

He also assured that the prices involved should not be sky-high.

Current indications are that the price of on-board phone services so far start from around 1.60 euros per minute for a voice call and approximately 0.43 for a [text message](#), the commission said.

However Ryanair has announced higher tariffs; some 50 cents for a text message and two to three euros per minute for a voice call.

As far as the annoying prospect of half the passengers intoning "I'm on the plane" then

disturbing their neighbours by outlining their business plans, Selmayr also had some reassurance.

"Airlines need to make efforts to make sure that those who want to use this service can do so without disturbing other passengers in the cabin," he said.

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