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MEPs heard loud and clear on telecoms laws

The telecommunications sector in Europe received a shake-up today as the European Parliament voted on the Telecoms Single Market regulation. It tackles a range of issues such as consumer mobile phone contract cancellation rights; switching providers; a ban on roaming charges and efforts to create Net Neutrality safeguards i.e. ensuring consumers' internet traffic is not unduly discriminated, slowed or services blocked outright by network operators.

Two main outcomes of today's vote are calls to ban roaming charges by December 15th, 2015 and for Europe to protect Net Neutrality.

MEPs want a Europe with Net Neutrality protection

The European Consumer Organisation commented (cite Guillermo Beltra, digital policy team):

"Net neutrality is as close as it gets to being the issue of our times for the internet. We are reassured to see MEPs say equitable internet provision must be realised.

"It is in no-one's interest to see overt control of internet traffic speeds and access pass too far into the hands of Europe's handful of network operators. Net Neutrality is the buffer against such a scenario. It's also a bulwark against a future 'two-tier' internet of consumers paying premiums to access certain services or operators prioritising their own content while degrading the speed of competitors. Internet traffic management is like a good referee in football – it's needed in minor emergencies and should otherwise go unnoticed."

Ban on roaming costs

"Roaming has been the hydra of EU regulation in recent years. Tackle call and SMS costs? Data remains high. Try and promote competition? The big operators resist. But thankfully today the European Parliament have signposted the end of the road. We've been taken on a few detours over the years, but a ban on roaming throughout the 28 countries of the EU is now in sight for next year. If we live in a true Single Market, then the justifications for roaming charges run out of credit.

"Everyone wins with this. Currently 47% of travelers never use mobile internet because data costs are so ominous. So with a ban we can expect usage to continue to spike. Holidaymakers and travelling phone users will not have to do the familiar data function switch off when their plane, train or automobile crosses a border."

Contact: John Phelan +32 (0)2 789 24 01 press@beuc.eu

ENDS