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EU reaches unambitious deal on Roaming charges and Net Neutrality

Negotiations between the European Parliament and Council on a Telecoms Single Market regulation concluded today, setting a deadline to abolish roaming charges and making a start on an EU-wide Net Neutrality principle (i.e. treating internet data equally and banning the blocking of internet services).

A ban or a plan for a ban?

Monique Goyens, Director General of The European Consumer Organisation commented:

"Bill shock, prohibitive pricing and consumers' ingrained hesitancy over using mobile devices when abroad have characterised the European telecoms market for years. Roaming amounts to a negligible part of telecoms revenue streams, yet it hits consumers' pockets hard. Over half of travellers turn off their data function entirely¹, so the need for intervention has long been clear.

"Today a deal has been drafted with a date to demolish the last digital borders of roaming charges. However, there is devil in the detail. The abolition of retail roaming prices by 2017 is dependent on a wholesale market review being completed, which promises to be a tough task. We cannot call it the end of roaming when there are in-built exceptions to allow providers to charge consumers when they go abroad if they fear it's too costly. It is critical that the EU and national governments observe the deadline and finally ban roaming."

Net Neutrality in EU – some data to slip the net

"A robust Net Neutrality law involves protections against undue management of traffic and discriminatory commercial practices. What Europe is essentially saying here is that all internet data is born equal, but some is more equal than others. We applaud the new onus on Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to treat traffic equally, but safeguards against the impact of 'specialised services' are not strong enough.

"In the end, negotiators also decided not to tackle commercially driven discriminations such as 'zero rating', where operators exempt content from data allowances and thereby shepherd users away from competitors' content. Such exemptions enable the largest telecoms operators and content providers to continue to shape the market to the detriment of consumer choice. Such increasingly common practices must be addressed."

ENDS

¹ [Eurobarometer](#), published 2014.