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Consumers win with new, revised EU roaming rules

Today Member States approved an update to the rules on roaming, extending the existing rules to 2032 and introducing improvements that will further benefit consumers. The new rules will now enter into force as of July of this year.

In addition to a continued ban on roaming charges, telecom operators will have to provide consumers with the same quality of service when roaming as when they are in their home country, if technically feasible. Consumers who roam at present are too frequently placed on lower speed networks which affects their roaming experience.

Consumers will also be better protected against bill shocks caused by connecting inadvertently to a non-EU mobile or a satellite network (such as when travelling close to the border of a non-EU country, or on airplanes or boats). Telecom operators will need to provide information to consumers about the possible costs of connecting to such networks and give consumers an easy way to opt out of connecting to them.

Ursula Pachl, Deputy Director General of the European Consumer Organisation (BEUC), said: "One of the EU's greatest success stories for consumers continues with this extension and improvement to the EU's roaming rules. The ban on roaming charges inside the EU will remain and consumers will now be entitled to the same quality of service as at home when they are roaming. These are aspects consumers really value when they travel and show some of the tangible benefits the EU Single Market can generate for people."

A major hurdle for consumers in the EU telecoms market, however, remains the cost of intra-EU calls and messaging – when you call or message somebody in another country from home. Despite the caps introduced, fees for these calls are often exorbitant and do not reflect the actual costs for telephone operators of connecting such calls. EU legislators have recognised this and are calling on the Commission to act on this issue by 2024. BEUC asks the Commission to listen to the concerns of both consumers and EU legislators and address this problem as soon as possible, so as to extend the success in banning roaming charges to intra-EU calls and messages.

Ursula Pachl added:

"Intra-EU calls and messages are still a thorn for consumers in the EU telecoms market. Calling somebody in another country is often prohibitively expensive and, most importantly, there is little justification for these high costs. It's high time to put an end to the practice of charging consumers huge fees for calling somebody just because they are in another EU country. Reducing the cost of intra-EU calls and messages is an important yet missing piece of the Single Market puzzle."

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