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European Parliament vote on EU Telecoms Package

Today saw the European Parliament's Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO) committee vote on the EU overhaul¹ of its laws governing telecommunications.

Europe's telecoms sector has long been under-competitive and riddled by national barriers which saddle consumers with high prices, onerous and unclear contracts, poor options for switching telecoms operator, roaming charges and an increasingly distorted internet provision.

The 'European Single Market for Electronic Communications Regulation' seeks to address these and today's vote on consumer aspects of the Regulation will be followed by a plenary vote expected in April.

Commenting, Monique Goyens Director General of The European Consumer Organisation said:

"Much like the telecoms services this regulation deals with, the result is mixed. It's no doubt a boon for European consumers that some longstanding barriers to switching will be tackled. If you are dissatisfied with say your internet or phone service levels, terminating your contract will become easier to do, in a shorter space of time and the onus will be on the receiving provider to oversee the transition for you. Currently, the nuisance of grasping that nettle makes many consumers stay where they are with poor service.

"Another frequent source of dismay is when consumers buy internet services due to advertised internet speed promises which turn out to be more fantasy than fantastic. This package would help regulate some of those claims, welcome news indeed.

"There are also new provisions which guarantee consumers' freedom to access the open internet without undue discrimination from operators, a small step in the right direction to ensure they do not become the internet's gatekeepers.

"On the flipside, we regret that the Parliament missed the opportunity to eradicate some of the most egregious practices. Fees demanded for early termination of contracts lock consumers in and have no place in competitive, dynamic markets.

"Increasingly, consumers buy bundles of minutes, SMS and data on their phone contracts, and often end up not using them. Today was an opportunity missed to ensure they can carry their unused credit over to the next month, thereby ending such kinds of unjustifiable loss.

"Roaming charges are incongruous with the notion of a true Single Market. Thankfully, the committee has given a clear signal to MEP colleagues that 2016 must be the latest date for the end of roaming."

¹ <http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/connected-continent-legislative-package>