



Ensure open access for internet service suppliers and ban roaming fees, say MEPs

Committees Committee on Industry, Research and Energy
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Internet access providers would be barred from blocking or slowing down selected services for economic or other reasons by the latest draft EU “telecoms package” legislation voted by Parliament on Thursday. MEPs also voted to ban “roaming” charges for using a mobile phone in another EU country, as of from 15 December 2015.

“Today's vote is a great step towards strengthening the telecommunications single market. Parliament wants to abolish retail roaming charges for voice, SMS and data by 15 December 2015 and improve radio spectrum management to develop 4G and 5G throughout Europe”, said rapporteur Pilar del Castillo Vera (EPP, ES).

“We have achieved further guarantees to maintain the openness of the Internet by ensuring that users can run and provide applications and services of their choice as well as reinforcing the Internet as a key driver of competitiveness, economic growth, jobs, social development and innovation”, she added. Ms del Castillo's report was approved by 534 votes to 25, with 58 abstentions.

Equal internet access for service suppliers

MEPs want clear rules to prevent internet access providers from promoting some services at the expense of others. EU telecoms regulator BEREC reported that several internet access providers were blocking or slowing down services like “Skype”, which is used to make phone calls over the internet.

Internet access providers would still be able to offer specialized services of higher quality, such as video on demand and business-critical data-intensive “cloud” (data storage) applications, so long as these services are not supplied to “the detriment of the availability or quality of internet access services” offered to other companies or service suppliers.

MEPs shortened the European Commission's list of “exceptional” cases in which internet access providers could still be entitled to block or slow down the internet. MEPs say these practices should be permitted only to enforce a court order, preserve network security or prevent temporary network congestion. If such “traffic management measures” are used, they must be “transparent, non-discriminatory and proportionate” and “not be maintained longer than necessary”, they add.

MEPs underline that internet access should be provided in accordance with the principle of “net neutrality”, which means that all internet traffic is treated equally, without discrimination, restriction or interference, independently of its sender, recipient, type, content, device, service or application.

Ending “roaming” charges in 2015

MEPs also amended the text to ban “roaming” charges (extra fees for using a mobile phone to call, send text messages or access the internet in another EU country) anywhere in the EU as of 15 December 2015. If roaming services are abused, however, capped charges could exceptionally be imposed, MEPs say.

Next steps

Press release

The European Parliament voted on its first reading of the draft legislation, in order to consolidate the work done so far and hand it over to the next Parliament. This ensures that the MEPs newly elected in May can build on work done during the current term.

Procedure: *Co-decision (Ordinary legislative procedure), first reading*

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