

Wholesale roaming markets

The end of roaming costs within the European Union (EU) – promised at political level for over a decade – is near. Four successive regulations have decreased (but not ended) roaming charges for calls, texts and data by more than 90 %. In 2015, the Council and the European Parliament agreed to abolish roaming charges in the EU from 15 June 2017. A precondition is to have new rules in place for wholesale roaming markets. Parliament is expected to vote on the proposal (following agreement in trilogue negotiations) at its April I plenary session.

Background

In 2015 the Council and European Parliament agreed in Regulation (EU) [2015/2120](#) that on 15 June 2017 roaming charges for mobile phone use would be abolished in the EU. After that date, the '[roam-like-at-home](#)' ([RLAH](#)) system would become a reality for all European citizens travelling within the EU. The regulation did not, however, address the wholesale roaming market, on account of the need to investigate market conditions in more depth. A [review](#) for the European Commission concluded that national wholesale roaming markets were not working well and needed regulatory intervention. In June 2016 the Commission therefore [proposed](#) a regulation establishing the maximum level of wholesale roaming charges that telecoms operators can charge each other for calls, text messages and data from 15 June 2017.

An important step towards the EU digital single market

The EU mobile communications market remains [fragmented](#), with no single mobile network covering all Member States, and [wide differences](#) when it comes to national mobile retail deals and mobile data traffic. The abolition of retail roaming charges in the EU remains a key priority in the establishment of a [digital single market](#) to improve the situation. For this to be sustainable throughout the EU, national wholesale roaming markets need to be competitive and enable operators to offer retail roaming services without any charges to customers in addition to the domestic price. This might put some domestic charging models at risk, and hence [stakeholders are divided](#), particularly when it comes to the data caps proposal: while consumers, small operators and operators in Nordic countries (where unlimited mobile data deals are common) want lower wholesale data caps, others, mainly large operators and those in tourist destinations, want higher caps to recover all related costs and allow for investments to upgrade their networks for the increased data traffic. The lower the data cap, the larger the amount of data consumers can use when travelling in the EU, if their home provider applies the '[Fair Use rules](#)' approved by the Commission in 2016, which enable providers to limit the amount of data consumers can use when travelling.

European Parliament position

On 29 November 2016, Parliament's Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) [voted](#) for a significant reduction in the data wholesale caps proposed by the Commission, whereas the Council [proposed](#) higher departing data caps. At the third trilogue meeting on 31 January 2017, an [agreement](#) was reached to lower significantly the wholesale data caps originally proposed, to take into account the falling unit price of data over time. As part of the agreement, the Commission will conduct a review of the wholesale market by the end of 2019, and provide the Parliament and Council with an interim assessment by 15 December 2018, considering any initial effects of the abolition of retail roaming surcharges. The Commission will subsequently submit reports to the European Parliament and Council every two years.

First reading: [2016/0185 \(COD\)](#); Committee responsible: ITRE; Rapporteur: Miapetra Kumpula-Natri (S&D, Finland). See the EPRS 'EU Legislation in Progress briefing', [Wholesale roaming regulation](#).

