

**Question for written answer E-009564/2013
to the Commission**
Rule 117
Paul Rübzig (PPE)

Subject: Mobile phone bills: third-party billing fraud

Third-party billing enables service providers (website operators, for example) to charge customers for their services via the customers' mobile phone bills. It appears that this system is being fundamentally abused to the extent that scammers are colluding in order to circumvent the multi-stage process designed to make distance selling secure. One way in which they do this is by crippling the process with malware; alternatively, they can simply invoke a contractual relationship. Both from a consumer protection viewpoint and in macroeconomic terms, third-party billing fraud is a serious problem.

1. Is the Commission aware of this situation, and does it realise that, given the supranational scale of the collusion, what is involved is a 'European' problem that has to be dealt with at European level?
2. What will the Commission do to halt this practice, which occurs widely within the EU and frequently extends beyond the confines of individual Member States?
3. Does it have any plans to resolve the problem in such a way that the present 'opt-out' arrangement, whereby a customer, when entering into a contract with a mobile phone network operator, agrees automatically – and more often than not unknowingly – to third-party billing, would be replaced by an 'opt-in' arrangement, whereby the third-party billing option would be allowable only if the customer deliberately chose to accept it?