



Net neutrality: Industry MEPs want stricter rules against blocking rival services

Committees Committee on Industry, Research and Energy [18-03-2014 - 11:56]

Internet providers should no longer be able to block or slow down internet services provided by their competitors, says the Industry Committee which on Tuesday approved rules to protect net neutrality. Under the latest draft EU “telecoms” package legislation, MEPs also voted against “roaming charges”, extra costs for using a mobile phone in another EU country. These charges should be banned from 15 December 2015, MEPs say.

"With today's Industry Committee vote the European Parliament has taken one great step towards consolidating the telecommunications single market. The committee has not only proposed abolishing retail roaming charges for voice, SMS and data by 15 December 2015, but also tabled substantive proposals, e.g. on efficient spectrum management, that will allow 4G and 5G deployment throughout Europe" said Pilar del Castillo Vera (EPP, ES), who leads Parliament's work with the package.

"Moreover we have built in further safeguards for internet openness, by ensuring that users can run and provide applications and services of their choice as well as strengthening the internet as a key driver of competitiveness, economic growth, social development and innovation", she added. Her report was adopted by 30 votes to 12, with 14 abstentions.

Net neutrality: end discrimination of competitors

MEPs inserted strict rules to prevent telecoms companies from degrading or blocking internet connections to their competitors' services and applications. In 2012, for example, EU telecoms regulator BEREC reported that several internet providers were blocking or slowing down services like “Skype”(used to make phone calls over the internet).

Companies would still be able to offer specialized services of higher quality, such as video on demand and business-critical data-intensive cloud applications, provided that this does not interfere with the internet speeds promised to other customers. Measures to block or slow down the Internet would be allowed only in exceptional cases, e.g. where specifically ordered by a court.

Ending “roaming” charges in 2015

A broad majority of the committee members backed plans to ban “roaming” charges within the EU as of 15 December 2015. However, to protect telecoms companies against “anomalous or abusive usage of retail roaming services”, MEPs ask the European Commission to lay down guidelines for exceptional cases in which companies would be allowed to apply charges. These charges would, however, have to be below the caps laid down in current roaming rules.

Unlike the Commission, MEPS saw no need to regulate prices for international phone calls made from the caller's home country.

Paving the way for faster mobile internet

As ever more people use mobile internet connections to download or upload ever more data, pressure on the available radio spectrum frequencies required is stretching this resource to its limits. To ensure that all available radio spectrum resources are used to the full, MEPs inserted amendments to make it easier to trade in and lease rights to use parts of the radio spectrum. These rights should be valid for at least 25 years, they say, in order to encourage investment, innovation and competition.

Press release

Next steps

The telecoms package is to be put to a vote by Parliament as a whole at the 2-3 April plenary session. Striking a deal on the text with national telecoms ministers will be one of the first priorities for the next Parliament, to be elected on 22-25 May.

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