

2007 EU Telecoms Reform #4

Empowering European consumers

Telecoms liberalisation and competition has benefited Europe's consumers. They enjoy more choice at lower prices. However, consumers do not always get a good deal, still partly dominated by telecom incumbents, especially when it comes to broadband. But many Europeans also can't switch operators, and 10% still do not have broadband access. The EU Telecoms Reform therefore wants to put the citizen centre stage in Europe's evolving single telecoms market. Citizens should be better informed, get better services and see their rights better protected by truly independent telecoms watchdogs. Effective competition should deliver the most important aim of telecoms regulation: freedom of choice for consumers.

Today's rights

Consumers already enjoy a number of important rights under the EU's 2002 Telecoms Rules. These cover transparency in telecom tariffs, the single Europe-wide freephone emergency number '112', protection against spam and malicious software, privacy protection, and dispute resolution mechanisms.

In addition, the EU Telecoms Rules ensure that basic communication services are available and affordable to all European citizens, including consumers with special needs or disabilities.

Tomorrow even more

Despite the achievements so far, more must be done to ensure that Europeans reap the full benefits of a dynamic and increasingly borderless telecoms market that promises more choice and greater variety of products at lower prices.

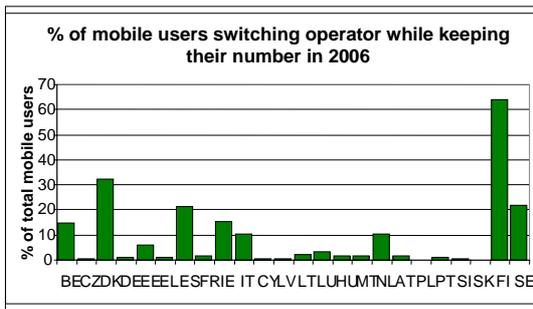
With the 2007 EU Telecoms Reform, the Commission therefore is strengthening user rights in the telecoms sector. For the Commission, an empowered consumer who has freedom of choice is an important guarantee for effective competition.

BETTER INFORMATION ON PRICES

Bewildered by an ever-increasing number of communications products and services? You're not alone: 34% of consumers admit that they have difficulties in comparing the offers of different providers and many appear not to take advantage of beneficial offers. Portuguese consumers, for example, are paying €700 million per year more than they would if they were all on the best tariff. The new rules will therefore oblige telecoms providers to publish all the relevant information on prices and other conditions so it is easier for consumers to make informed choices before purchasing products.

SAME NUMBER, DIFFERENT OPERATOR ALL IN ONE DAY...

It will also become easier to switch providers. Ever had problems keeping your fixed or mobile telephone number when changing operator? Under the new rules, the whole process of changing and re-activation may not be over one working day, making it much easier and faster for consumers to switch operators. In 2006 only 31.4 million mobile subscribers took advantage of this.



Today, the porting of numbers between providers takes on average about 8 days for fixed telephone numbers and about 5 days for mobile telephone numbers; the most effective countries are Malta (1 day), Germany, Austria, and Finland (3 days), while porting a fixed telephony number can still take up to 30 days in Estonia, and up to 20 days in Slovakia for mobile numbers.

... AND WITH GUARANTEED SERVICE

The EU Telecoms Reform will ensure that consumers are not discouraged from changing service providers when they want and that adjustment to future technological developments can be swiftly dealt with.

IMPROVED EMERGENCY ACCESS THROUGH '112'

You are in an emergency and need help urgently? You don't know where you are? Your access to emergency services will be greatly improved. When dialling '112', emergency services should receive information enabling them to find where you are. They will then be able to dispatch help more rapidly. In addition the new rules will ensure that these numbers are accessible from any phone, anywhere in Europe.

The new European Telecom Market Authority will monitor the progress in all EU Member States on caller location information and on activities to make citizens aware of 112.

ACCESS TO FREEPHONE NUMBERS FROM ABROAD

At present, it is not possible to access many freephone or business service numbers when calling from one Member State to another. Consumers on holidays, or abroad for work can therefore have a problem accessing public administration contact points (e.g. for health and pension systems, public utilities), or pre-sale/after sale services. The EU Telecoms Reform will guarantee that access to these numbers is granted from everywhere in the EU. If you have to pay for this access, you should be told clearly in advance.

For further information:

Information Desk
 European Commission - Information Society and Media DG
 Email: info-desk@ec.europa.eu
 Tel: +32 2 299 93 99
<http://ec.europa.eu/comm/>

IMPROVED ACCESSIBILITY FOR USERS WITH DISABILITIES

Do you feel left behind in this fast moving information society, just because you have a disability? The reform will ensure that if you or a member of your family has a disability, you or your relative will benefit from greater access to telecoms services. The reform will also facilitate access to emergency services through '112' as well as complement the existing TV channels with subtitles, audio descriptions or sign language.

EVEN BETTER PRIVACY AND SECURITY

Ever fear your personal information being stolen? Is your inbox overflowing with spam? Current privacy and security provisions will be strengthened under the new rules. Telecoms operators that encounter a security problem will have to tell their customers when their personal data has been compromised, so customers can take necessary precautions. The new European Telecom Market Authority will have the tools to deal with viruses and other cyber attacks and to ensure a better European response.

Spam is estimated to be between 40-90% of all emails, while malware is said to cost \$13 billion globally. The new rules will provide better instruments to combat spam, malware and other security threats. Legal action against spammers will be reinforced. In addition, it will be made clearer that the current privacy rules also apply to telecoms that use smart radio tags (RFID) and similar devices.

GREATER ACCESS AND GUARANTEED 'NET' FREEDOMS

Need to look up information? Access or use certain internet applications? What if your internet provider restricts you? Ensuring the internet continues to be a driver of innovation and growth is why the reform protects citizens' so-called net freedoms. The reform will ensure that consumers get clear and timely information about any limitations imposed by their provider, enabling them to switch to another operator. Where there is no viable alternative, your provider should not be allowed to block or restrict your access.

PARTICIPATION OF CONSUMERS IN DECISION-MAKING

The new rules will ensure that national regulators take the interests of consumers better into account when assessing telecoms markets, by establishing a consultation mechanism.