

Digital Single Market

Staying in touch while on board ship

EU action on radio spectrum is helping those on board ships stay in touch through mobile communications.

Ongoing work

After equivalent work on the use of [GSM phones on aircraft](#),^[1] the Commission found a coordinated approach could also be worthwhile for ships - mobile communication services on board vessels (MCV). The Commission therefore issued a mandate to CEPT (the European Conference of Postal and Telecommunications Administrations) to undertake all relevant studies to ensure the technical compatibility of MCV services with other radio spectrum users in the EU, including land-based mobile networks. Current demand for the provision of MCV services relies on GSM-based technology, and thus the mandate focused on this first.

What were the reasons behind this initiative?

The objective of this activity was to develop pan-European communication services on board vessels by facilitating regulatory and technical coordination across the EU. In practical terms, the target was to enable continuous coverage for mobile network customers. Currently, mobile users on board ship are served only by land-based operators when near the coastline of a country or within a port. Some ships have also been equipped with MCV capabilities, but these have mainly been available only when located on the high seas, outside the territorial seas of individual countries (12 nautical miles distant).

However, relying exclusively on these two approaches has often resulted in imperfect coverage during a ship's journey, in particular within territorial seas. In practice this is where many European ships spend a significant portion of their travelling time, in particular in the cruising industry. Providing more extensive coverage within territorial seas was considered a good business proposition by the MCV industry - helping passengers and crew members stay connected, and also enabling specific wireless applications which require continuous port-to-port connections.

Procedural context

The Commission received the results of the technical studies in July 2009 and prepared, together with EU Member States, a draft [\[2\] Commission Decision on harmonised conditions of use of radio](#)

[spectrum for mobile communication services on board vessels \(MCV services\)](#) [3], which was considered in the Radio Spectrum Committee (RSC). On 8 February 2010, the RSC gave a positive regulatory opinion on the draft, after which the text was subject to a one-month scrutiny period by the European Parliament. The Commission then adopted the Decision on 19 March 2010, with its provisions to be implemented by the Member States no later than twelve months after entry into force.

The coordination of authorisation and licensing issues relating to MCV was also considered within the Communications Committee (COCOM) and its Working Group on Authorisations and Rights of Use (WG AUTH). This work has resulted in a draft [Commission Recommendation on the authorisation of systems for mobile communication services on board vessels \(MCV services\)](#) [4], which was the subject of a positive advisory opinion in the COCOM on 8 February. Subsequently, following a one-month scrutiny period by the European Parliament, the Recommendation was adopted on the same day as the Decision.

More information

- [Commission Decision on harmonised conditions of use of radio spectrum for mobile communication services on board vessels \(MCV services\)](#) [5]
- [Commission Recommendation on the authorisation of systems for mobile communication services on board vessels \(MCV services\)](#) [6]
- [EC Mandate to CEPT on MCV](#) [7]
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[2] <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/media/browser?render=media-popup&fid=3660>

[3] https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/multisite/digital-agenda/sites/digital-agenda/files/mcv_decision_infocopy.pdf

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[7] https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/multisite/digital-agenda/sites/digital-agenda/files/mandate_rsc08-49_mcv.pdf

[8] <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/how-get-involved-eu-radio-spectrum-policy>

[9] https://ec.europa.eu/info/departments/communications-networks-content-and-technology_en