

Brussels, 7 April 2008

Commission paves the way for in-flight mobile phone use across Europe

The European Commission today introduced rules to harmonise conditions for the take-off of pan-European mobile communication services on aircraft. These services will allow businesspeople and consumers to receive and make calls and messages safely with their own mobile phones while flying all over Europe. This means that the 90% of European air passengers that already carry mobile phones on-board aircraft can remain contactable during flights.

"Pan-European telecom services, such as in-flight mobile telephony, need a regulatory 'one-stop shop' to operate throughout Europe and this is why the Commission has acted today. One regulatory decision for all European airspace was required for this new service to come into being," said Viviane Reding, the EU's Telecoms Commissioner. "Now we expect operators to be transparent and innovative in their price offerings. In-flight mobile phone services can be a very interesting new service especially for those business travellers who need to be ready to communicate wherever they are, wherever they go. However, if consumers receive shock phone bills, the service will not take-off. I also call on airlines and operators to create the right conditions on board aircraft to ensure that those who want to use in-flight communication services do not disturb other passengers."

The measures announced by the Commission today will harmonise the technical and licensing requirements for the use of mobile phones on board aircrafts. Passengers' phones will be linked to an onboard cellular network connected to the ground via satellite. The system will at the same time prevent phones from connecting directly to mobile networks on the ground below. This will ensure that transmission powers are kept low enough for mobile phones to be used without affecting the safety of aircraft equipment or the normal operation of terrestrial mobile networks.

Harmonising the technical requirements for the safe deployment of in-flight mobile communication services will enable the national licences granted to individual airlines by the Member State in which they are registered to be recognised throughout the EU. For example, an aircraft registered in France or Spain will be able to offer mobile communication services on aircrafts to passengers when flying over Germany or Hungary without any additional licensing procedures.

In proposing rules for one of the first truly pan-European telecoms services, the European Commission is responding to demand from air passengers to use their mobile phones during flights, as well as from industry, which would like to respond to this demand. Following testing of in-flight mobile communication services in some countries (notably in France and Australia), a number of telecom operators and airlines are planning to launch this service in the course of 2008, bringing connectivity to one of the few situations in daily life where communication has until now been very limited.

OFCOM, the UK telecoms regulator, announced on 26 March that it will allow airlines to offer mobile communications on board aircraft in line with the common European approach (<http://www.ofcom.org.uk/consult/condocs/mca/statement>)

Background

Mobile Communication services on Aircraft are pan-European telecoms services. Two measures have today been adopted by the Commission:

- A **Commission Recommendation** for a harmonised approach on licensing which will promote **mutual recognition between national authorisations for mobile communications services on aircraft**.
- A **Commission Decision** which sets out **harmonised technical parameters of onboard equipment for in-flight mobile phone use throughout the EU** that will allow Member States to recognise each other's licences for mobile communications on board aircraft without risk to mobile networks on the ground.

In addition to these measures, **air safety issues** are addressed by airworthiness certification procedures for equipment for in-flight mobile phone use, provided by the European Aviation Safety Agency for the whole EU and by civil aviation authorities, to ensure the safe use of technology in the aircraft cabin. **Security considerations** related to the use of in-flight use of mobile phones are also being tackled by competent national justice and home affairs authorities.

Commercial considerations, such as **pricing** of in-flight mobile-phone use, are not yet addressed in the measures taken by the European Commission today, in view of the fact that these are still nascent services. The EU Roaming Regulation (see [IP/07/870](#)), which will be reviewed before the end of the year, deals with roaming on *terrestrial* networks only. The cost of mobile communications on board aircraft therefore will fall, first of all, under the remit of the service provider. The European Commission will, however, closely monitor the levels and transparency of prices charged to consumers.

In August 2007, the Commission already proposed harmonised rules to support another pan-European application, mobile satellite services ([IP/07/1243](#)). This shows that, in view of technological and economic developments in Europe, the demand for pan-European services is growing. However, the EU's Telecoms Rules, last revised in 2002, have not kept up with this development. This is why the Commission's proposals of 13 November 2007 to reform the **EU Telecoms Rules** ([IP/07/1677](#)) aim to support the development of a truly integrated Single Telecoms Market. They are currently being discussed by the European Parliament and by the Council. The reform should allow closer coordination between the EU Member States and among national regulators when preparing the regulatory conditions for the launch of trans-national or pan-European services in the European Union.

For more information:

Text of today's Commission decisions:

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/policy/radio_spectrum/ref_documents/index_en.htm

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