

European Regional Bureau Newsletter



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Internet Access

Global: Western Balkans regional roaming agreement enters into force as of this week

- The Western Balkans regional roaming agreement officially [entered](#) into force on 1st July, representing a significant drop in the prices that users from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia will pay when roaming within the region.
- As a result of the agreement, consumers will see their calling costs become eight times cheaper, and costs for data dropping on average from €3/MB to €0.20/MB, said a Commission [press release](#).
- The agreement was initially [signed](#) by the Western Balkan ministers on 4 April in Belgrade and was welcomed as an important signal of “tangible regional cooperation” in the region by Mariya Gabriel, EU Commissioner for Digital Society and Economy.

Spain: Curbing depopulation through access to Internet

- The European Commission shared more information this week about its plans to boost fast-speed WiFi in Spain.
- Responding to a parliamentary question asked back in April 2019 by Spanish MEP Inmaculada Rodríguez-Piñero, who recalled the work of the Spanish government in ensuring Internet access for rural areas to revitalise local economic activity and reverse the effects of depopulation, of which 53% of Spanish territory is at risk, the Commission recalled the funding support it has provided to 734 Spanish municipalities, each awarded 15,000 vouchers to install WiFi hotspots, through the WiFi4EU programme.
- According to MEP Rodríguez-Piñero (PSOE, S&D), currently 86.4% of Spanish households have access to the Internet according to the National Statistics Institute (INE), however, only 28.4% of rural areas have access to speeds above 100 Mbps, a gap that is due to the weak incentive for private companies to install the necessary fibre-optic cable.
- The Commission [answered](#) to the MEP earlier this week it remains committed to bridging the digital divide, and that in the next programming period, the EC will continue its support through the Connecting Europe Facility, the InvestEU Programme and Structural Funds to enhance digital connectivity at regional and rural level.

Trust

EU: Newly appointed European top jobs and reshuffling Commission of portfolios

- After three days of intense negotiations, the European Council agreed on Tuesday July 2nd a package for the EU's top jobs with the unexpected nomination of Ursula von der Leyen, Germany's Defence Minister, as European Commission President.
- Other nominees include Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel (Renew Europe) who was voted by the Council's members as their new president, replacing Donald Tusk; Spanish Foreign Minister Josep Borrell (S&D) was nominated as the High Representative for Foreign Affairs, and Christine Lagarde (EPP), nominated President of the European Central Bank.
- The European Parliament, which will have to validate this set of candidates, has appointed Italian Socialist David Sassoli, a former journalist and MEP, as President.

EU: The European Parliament elects key digital posts

- The European Parliament has [released](#) the full Committee membership list, with new faces like the former German Justice Minister Katarina Barley in the LIBE Committee (Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs), the German Pirate MEP Patrick Breyer in JURI (Legal Affairs).
- Other old faces like former Commissioner Andrus Ansip in the IMCO Committee (Internal Market and Consumer Protection) feature among the list of newcomers.
- The EPP Group has been the first to release the [list](#) of Committee Coordinators, an influential position as it grants its holder the responsibility of whipping votes for their respective political group in the Committee. The EP's other political groups are expected to announce their key posts before the end of July.

EU: Borderless crime calls for borderless measures

- Eurojust and Europol have released their third joint [report](#) addressing developments and common challenges in the fight against cybercrime.
- The report classifies the challenges into five categories which include loss of data, loss of location, challenges associated with national legal frameworks, obstacles to international cooperation and challenges of public-private partnership.
- The study concludes that electronic evidence will gain a prominent role in the future years. It also highlights how the borderless nature of cyberthreats requires a high level of coordination and specialisation amongst all parties involved, and it finally calls for an international comprehensive legal framework to face fundamental problems such as access to cloud data and encryption.

EU: European Commission releases country reports on Internet openness

- The European Commission published on 5 July the annual Country Reports from National Regulatory Authorities (NRAs) on compliance with the provisions on open Internet.
- These papers serve as the basis for the European Regulators for Electronic Communications' (BEREC) Report on the implementation of the Internet neutrality rules expected later this year.
- Although not all reports are available in English, some interesting results [includes](#) providers in the Netherlands now having a "better understanding of the requirements laid down in the net neutrality regulation". Conversely, the Irish regulator points out that the absence of enforcement powers undermining the effect of the legislation in the country.

France: National Assembly adopt first draft of new hate speech law

- On 4 July, French MPs [amended](#) the draft online hate speech law, setting it on course for a final vote on Tuesday next week before heading to the Senate.

- All amendments put forward by the government and Rapporteur Laetitia Avia were accepted, while some MPs raised concerns about the risks of bypassing judges in removing lawful content.
- The new amendments would broaden the scope to include posts denying crimes against humanity, while also including a legal provision ensuring that illegal content deleted by platforms can be saved for one year for research or prosecution purposes.

The Netherlands: Stricter 5G standards for telecom providers

- The Dutch government [announced](#) earlier this week in a note sent to the parliament that it will improve 5G security requirements for telecom providers to reduce risks of security bridges.
- The note outlines that the government is releasing “additional security measures” later this year in an effort of making operators comply with stricter security rules.
- Amongst the proposed measures: stricter requirements for providers of services or infrastructure relevant to “critical” parts of the telecoms network, and constant interlocation between the Dutch government and the telecoms operators in order to assess potential risks of hacking and espionage.

Germany: Facebook fined €2 million for breaching hate speech law

- The Federal Office for Justice (BfJ), a department of the German Justice Ministry, [announced](#) earlier this week the imposition of a 2 million euros fine to Facebook for breaching the German’s Network Enforcement Act, a legal provision against illegal online content.
- According to the BfJ, the fine is the consequence of Facebook’s misleading [2018 Transparency Report](#) content as the social media giant did not report on the real number of complaints about illegal content received.
- The fine represents the first time an EU Member State sanctions an American social media giant for not being transparent about how it deals with hate speech.