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Statement of Regional Cooperation Council Secretary General Majlinda Bregu for FENA

The roaming prices reduction with EU expected to start as of 1 October

This year the agreement on roaming should take effect, according to which mobile phone calls and the use of mobile internet in the countries of the Western Balkans and the EU will be paid at the same prices that apply in those countries.

- 1. When could it happen?**
- 2. What remains to be done in this sense?**
- 3. What will be the benefits for citizens when this happens?**

First of all let me clarify that when speaking about the reducing roaming charges between the EU and WB, we are talking about the Declaration, not an Agreement. Namely, after more than a year long groundwork and consultations, which included the strong engagement of the EU and Western Balkans telecommunications operators, dedicated support of the European Commission, Regional Cooperation Council, as well as region's authorities commitment, at the EU-Western Balkans Summit held in Tirana on 6 December last year, the telecommunications operators from the European Union (EU) and the Western Balkans signed a Roaming Declaration thus enabling the reduction of the data roaming charges between the EU and the Western Balkans as of 1 October 2023.

This means that every Western Balkan and EU telecommunications operator, signatory of the Declaration, will consider introducing retail rate plans and options with lower data charges for their roaming users in mobile networks of other signatories, with the first significant reduction of data roaming prices as of 1 October 2023.

In practical terms, benefits are manifold. This will reduce cost of roaming for citizens of the Western Balkans travelling to the EU and vice versa as well as lower business operating costs and encourage doing business outside of their own borders. This initiative is remarkable, especially since it has been done on voluntary basis between telecommunications operators.

But this is just the start of the process that in the coming years should go in the direction of further reductions, finally leading to prices close to the domestic ones.

We informed on this thoroughly last December, and here you can find more info:

<https://www.rcc.int/campaigns/13/stay-connected>

<https://www.rcc.int/news/792/significant-reduction-of-data-roaming-prices-between-western-balkans-and-eu-to-start-as-of-1-october-2023>

The process of data roaming charges reduction is complimented by the work of local authorities and policy-makers As per the conclusions of the Western Balkans Digital Summit 2022 (<https://www.rcc.int/docs/647/conclusions-of-the-western-balkans-digital-summit-2022>), the region has made a commitment to accelerate the implementation of policy reforms in the telecommunication sector, and finalize it no later than the end of 2023.

The reduction of roaming charges between the EU and WB as of 1 October this year builds up on the success of the Roam Like at Home regimes in both the EU and the Western Balkans. It took EU more than 10 years to come to that Roam Like at Home place, and for WB it took less, some two and a half years, a fact we are very much proud of. It was not easy, and it took all our negotiating skills, with strong and unequivocal support from the European Commission

(DG NEAR and DG CONNECT), cooperation among operators, but also a political will from all WB governments, but at the end regional cooperation delivered. Same goes for roaming between our region and EU. The first question we were asked after the Roam Like at Home has come to action in our region in July 2021, was when the roaming prices with the EU will be lowered. And that is the first thing we have started working on after that 1 July. What we promised we delivered so, I'm happy the roaming prices between the Western Balkans and the European Union are going down with the leaves next fall. This is also a sign of seriousness of EU policies towards the Western Balkans. At the end, the purpose of all our endeavours is to support mobility and simplify connectivity of citizens and businesses of the EU and Western Balkans. To make people lives easier, better. That is what regional cooperation is all about.

More info: <https://www.rcc.int/campaigns/13/stay-connected>
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