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Title: EU and You - What do EU values mean to me as a YEA?

Have you ever returned home from abroad only to be unpleasantly surprised by an obscenely high mobile phone bill? Sounds familiar? Then you must have encountered the downsides and obstacles posed by extra roaming charges for interpersonal communication.

The EU observed the issue of extra roaming charges applied when consumers use their phones for calling, texting or internet outside their national borders quite some time ago. The European Commission's first initiative in this area came in 2006, when it launched a consumer website on roaming tariffs. Soon after that, the first roaming regulation was implemented in 2007,¹ which introduced limits on the maximum roaming charges that could be applied and a mandatory warning text message about extra roaming charges. In order to prolong these measures, a new regulation was introduced in 2012,² which is still currently in place until later this year. The initiative to create a Digital Single Market is one of the breakthrough moments. It is meant to remove virtual borders, boost digital connectivity and make it easier for consumers to access cross-border online content,³ thus building upon the core pillars of the EU – freedom of movement for people, goods, services and capital. The Roam Like at Home (RLAH) initiative, which was launched in 2015,⁴ reduced roaming surcharges even more and set up a pathway for their complete suspension. The latest agreement from the European Parliament and the Council reached in December 2021 ensures that the reality of “roamingless” travel across the EEA continues.⁵ This is especially important to reiterate within the scope of the EU's digitalisation priorities,⁶ since digital initiatives such as this one acquired new relevance with the COVID-19 crisis, which has jeopardised EU freedom of movement at its very core.

Following these trends, the Eastern Partnership⁷ and Western Balkans (WB, WB6)⁸ jumped on the charge-free-roaming bandwagon. Eastern Partnership countries have generally agreed upon the Regional

¹ Regulation (EC) No 717/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council, 27 June 2007, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A32007R0717>

² Regulation (EU) No 531/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council, 13 June 2012, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32012R0531>

³ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, *A Digital Single Market Strategy for Europe*, 6 May 2015, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A52015DC0192>

⁴ Regulation (EU) 2015/2120 of the European Parliament and of the Council, 25 November 2015, available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2015.310.01.0001.01.ENG

⁵ 27 EU countries and 3 EFTA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway).

⁶ European Commission, *EU Priorities 2019-2024: A Europe fit for the digital age*, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age_en

⁷ Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

⁸ Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo,* Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.

Roaming Agreement (RRA), which is yet to be signed and aims to reduce roaming prices between these countries by 90% over the next five years.⁹ On the other hand, the RRA has already been implemented by the WB6 since 1 July 2021, but with a big difference – extra roaming charges for SMS, calls and data have been suspended completely! This represented a major step towards joining the EU for the six WB economies and had a big positive impact on the population, especially young people, who circulate around the WB6 on a daily basis.

Personally, I experienced these benefits first-hand in the EU during my Erasmus+ stay, but also while visiting part of the WB in 2021. I remember a strange feeling of freedom when using my phone GPS to navigate my way around other European cities and when calling or texting friends from all over Europe to meet for classes or drinks. It was during moments such as these that I understood the essence of the European success story. The EU is not some abstract concept that is alienated from its citizens, dealing only with large and complicated political issues, but quite the contrary, it exists in order to improve its citizens' quality of life. Even though the issue of roaming might seem a small achievement, it is nevertheless a significant one and required years of negotiations, hard work and effort from the relevant stakeholders in order to make the idea of roaming-free travel a reality, thus further strengthening the four EU freedoms. This is exactly why European success stories such as this are closest to me as a YEA and the most important for young people in general.

⁹ EU4Digital, *Regional Roaming Agreement: how roaming prices can fall in Eastern partner countries by almost 90%*, 15 April 2021, available at: <https://eufordigital.eu/regional-roaming-agreement-how-roaming-prices-can-fall-in-eastern-partner-countries-by-almost-90/>