Electronic communications: universal service, users' rights relating to networks and services

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The committee adopted the report by Malcolm HARBOUR (EPP-ED, UK) amending the proposal under the codecision procedure (1st reading). The key points raised by the report included the need to ensure that the connection provided allowed users effective access to the internet and that Member States took special measures to ensure that disabled users and those with special needs could take advantage of the choice of companies and service providers available to the majority of users. However, the definition of users with special needs should be decided after public consultation. The committee also wanted tariffs to be structured so as to be affordable for people on low incomes or with special social needs. To ensure that users· needs were met even in cases of durable market failure, undertakings identified as having significant market power should provide services under reasonable, transparent and non-discriminatory conditions and not charge excessive prices or inhibit market entry. Member States should publish transparent, accurate and up-to-date information and national regulatory authorities should publish regular reports on trends in tariffs. Member States should also take all necessary steps to safeguard services in the event of catastrophic network breakdowns. Other amendments dealt with such issues as the European telephone numbering code ·3883·, data security and the European emergency number ·112·. On the latter point, the committee stressed that the provision of caller location information to authorities handling emergency calls should not compromise data protection or civil liberties. Compliance with the directive on personal data protection in electronic communications was essential.