

Russian and Finnish Mobile Operators Discuss Roaming

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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HELSINKI — Major Russian and Finnish cellular communications operators have begun the process of negotiating the reduction of international roaming tariffs.

Taking part in the talks on the Finnish side are leading companies Elisa, TeliaSonera and DNA, while Russia is represented by its largest mobile operators — MegaFon, Mobile TeleSystems, and VimpelCom. Also joining in are Finnish Communications Minister Suvi Linden and his Russian counterpart, Communications and Press Minister Igor Shchyogolev.

The urgency of these negotiations is underscored by data on the number of visas being issued to citizens of the two countries, Shchyogolev said. "Around a million Russians received Finnish visas in 2010," he said.

"If one considers that many residents of St. Petersburg and the Leningrad region hold multientry visas, it becomes clear that the number is very high, and according to the Russian

Embassy in Finland, around 300,000 Finns received visas to Russia," the Russian minister said.

"The goal of our discussions is working out a model that could be used not just with Finland, but also with other countries," Shchyogolev said.

Representatives from the Russian companies have said Finland figures strategically in the country's roaming plans, and there is more need for roaming services every year.

At the end of last month, Russia and the European Union launched expert-level talks on the possibility of Russia being included in the unified EU directive on roaming.

VimpelCom Ltd. is holding an extraordinary shareholders meeting in Amsterdam on Thursday to decide the fate of its proposed \$6.8 billion takeover of Naguib Sawiris' Wind Telecom, which has assets in Algeria, Italy, Egypt and other countries.

Norwegian operator Telenor clashed with other shareholders over the possible merger with Wind Telecom, saying the price of the deal may be too high and it could hamper the development of the company. VimpelCom chief executive Alexander Izosimov said last week that the merger would help the company expand in emerging markets.

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