

Ministry Begins 4G Frequency Tender

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The Communications and Press Ministry has opened a much-anticipated competition for 4G wireless frequencies, with winning telecoms operators to be announced July 12 and licenses to take effect in 2013.

Operators can now submit applications for the frequencies, which the ministry is offering in four separate allotments. Each lot covers all of Russia. The ministry will award lots to the operator that "collects the most points" for meeting the ministry's criteria, it said Thursday on its website.

"The primary goal of Roskomnadzor, which developed the terms of the competition, was to provide the people of the Russian Federation as fast as possible with mobile broadband services using the LTE standard," the ministry said. Roskomnadzor oversees communications regulations.

Analysts have said the Big Three — MegaFon, Beeline and Mobile TeleSystems — have the best chances. But the ministry said Thursday that "the terms of the competition

practically exclude the possibility of a single operator winning more than one lot," indicating that a fourth operator can win.

Tele2 Russia, the fourth-biggest mobile operator by subscribers, "is going to take part in the competitions," company spokesman Kirill Alyavdin said.

In a formal statement, Tele2 Russia president Dmitry Strashnov said the company was "disappointed" with the competition terms and the exclusion of its recommendation to award regional licenses.

"We are surprised that the competition terms include criteria for owning and expanding a company's own network, which clearly gives an advantage to certain operators and puts operators that don't have federal licenses at an obvious disadvantage," Alyavdin said by e-mail.

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