

Article Name - Syria to get third mobile operator

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Syria to get third mobile operator

Cabinet approves having another operator enter the market

By [Vineetha Menon](#) Published August 26, 2010



Syria is to have a third mobile operator, the country's cabinet revealed at its weekly session.

According to the Syria Arab News Agency, the new operator will enter the market in a three-phase process, "including initial rehabilitation, investment and technical rehabilitation and the financial auction".

The cabinet has also granted an initial approval to offer full mobile licences to Syria's existing operators, Syriatel and MTN Syria, which currently operate services under Build-Operate-Transfer (B.O.T.) agreements. However, such a move will rely on the two operators honouring certain unspecified financial obligations to the public treasury.

Last year, mobile phone users in Syria [staged a boycott of services](#) to protest against high tariffs.

Josep M. Moya, a partner at Delta Partners, said that mobile users in Syria were probably frustrated not just with the relatively high cost of calls and per minute billing, but also the restrictive validity of top-up cards.

At the time, customers buying the most popular card, worth SYP150 (\$3.25), had only seven days to use the credit before facing disconnection. This system forced mobile users to spend a minimum of SYP600 per month, making continuous mobile services too expensive for many Syrians.

Operators did extend the validity period of the cheapest card to 15 days, but the restriction remained a source of annoyance to mobile users.

Kuwaiti operator Zain expressed some interest in the new licence, according to Kuwaiti newspaper *al-Rai*. The newspaper quoted sources within Zain as saying: "Zain is waiting for Syria's government, which announced the opening of a bid for a third operating telecom ... to issue the terms and conditions required for applying and attaining the license."

In 2009, Zain held talks to buy Syriatel, but the talks were postponed for unrevealed reasons.