



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs

Industrial Transformation and Advanced Value Chains
Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing Systems

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GROWC3/

COMMON CHARGERS – State of Play

1. Background

On 15 December 2015, the Commission received the first draft of a "Letter of Intent on future common charging solution for smartphones" (see Annex) from Digital Europe. In the first part of the letter, Digital Europe acknowledges the success of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), highlighting that most of the manufacturers, also those who did not sign the MoU, now adopt a common charger (micro USB Type B). Major exception is currently represented by Apple, which keeps its proprietary interface ("Lightning"). The widespread adoption of the micro USB Type B is recognised as contributing to reduced waste and improving significantly consumer convenience.

2. Assessment of the proposed Letter of Intent

The letter of intent shows a weak commitment to keep a common charger for the years to come. The document is not a Memorandum of Understanding. The signatories are only required to have the intention to take reasonable efforts to allow transition to the new USB Type-C. Digital Europe has discussed with us a few options over the last months. We believed that the new USB Type-C was the technical solution proposed and accepted by the large majority of Digital Europe members for the new standard of chargers. Therefore, we were expecting a firm commitment on the use of the USB Type-C in the first place. To our knowledge there is only one member of Digital Europe that opposes the use of the USB Type-C.

The absence of a clear and strong commitment to use the new USB Type-C as a common connector for all new generation smart phones opens the way to the use of different chargers. The market for chargers runs therefore the risk to be fragmented once again in the years to come. Such an evolution would severely undermine the work, the achievements and the benefits accomplished in the last years.

This situation would not be in line with the Radio Equipment Directive 2014/53/EU provisions, which explicitly require adopting a common interface for chargers.

The main argument used by opponents to a clear commitment in this area relates to the alleged preclusion of innovation that a common charger would lead to. It has to be recalled in this context that the Commission never prescribed a specific technical solution, letting manufacturers free to decide, asking only to agree on a common interface. Moreover, manufacturers could, if they so wish, deploy two charging interfaces

(one common and one proprietary, for instance) on their devices. The use of adaptors was suggested to Digital Europe as another compromise solution, as agreed with the Cabinet.

3. Conclusion

The weak commitment in adopting a common charger with the consequent envisaged delays before its introduction on the market, may have in its favour the possibility to achieve a quick agreement between manufacturers. However, there is a political risk that the EP requests the Commission to clearly implement the provisions of the Radio Equipment Directive, where the EP has succeeded in including a clear reference to the need of a common charger, empowering the Commission to do it through a delegated act if need be. The risk of a new fragmentation of the charger market has the potential to eliminate the successes achieved so far with respect to consumer convenience and environment protection.

In a CAB-DG meeting of 17 February 2016, it was agreed to reply to Digital Europe and ask them to firmly commit on the use of USB Type-C as common connector, when the standard is available, and those using a different solution commit to provide appropriate adaptors. In the case that no acceptable reply would be forthcoming, a discussion on whether the next step should result in a regulatory approach would be organised.

Our letter to Digital Europe has just been sent after the CAB's green light.

Annexes: Draft letter of Intent.
 Letter of reply to Digital Europe.