

E-mail to be sent by HoU of GROW/C3

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your e-mail of 6 March 2020. President von der Leyen has asked me to reply to you on her behalf.

I would like to reassure you that the Commission is well aware of the issues you mention in your email, and I tend to agree with you that the standardisation of charging cables for smartphones is just a small part of a bigger problem.

Nevertheless, please allow me clarifying on the ‘common charger’ action first.

The European Parliament, with a resolution of 30 January 2020^[1], requested the Commission to adopt legislative measures for a common charger under the empowerment conferred by the Radio Equipment Directive. Although nowadays the situation has much improved compared to 10 years ago, where more than 30 types of chargers were present thanks to the 2009 voluntary agreement among manufacturers facilitated by the European Commission^[2], having a unique charging solution for smartphones would still provide consumer benefits. If people for example need to recharge their phone at the office or while travelling, they could use the charging cables of one of their colleagues/friend irrespective of the different smartphones’ brands or models. Not to mention that lack of intervention could bring back to a proliferation of charger types.

Additionally, but not less important, reducing the number of charger types should also reduce e-waste, as older chargers could be reused and therefore fewer new charger may be placed on the market. These positive environmental effects would be enhanced if combined with decoupling, that is, dissociating sales of smartphones from sales of chargers.

To address broader challenges you mention in your email, the EC will present by 2021 a ‘Circular Electronics Initiative’^[4], mobilising existing and new instruments to embed circularity in the electronics put on the European market.

In line with a new Policy Framework on Sustainable Products, this initiative will promote longer product lifetimes via reusability and reparability of components and upgradeability of software.

In order to ensure that consumers have easier access to repair services, spare parts, critical software updates, etc., the EC will look to revise EU consumer law and establish a ‘right to repair’, with a focus on electronics and ICT products.

Specifically concerning mobile phones and their batteries, a recent study from the Joint Research Centre, ‘Material Efficiency of smartphones’ (https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC116106/jrc_e4c_task2_smartphones_final_publ_id.pdf), acknowledges, inter alia, the influence of batteries on the overall durability of the device.

^[1] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0024_EN.pdf

^[2] https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/electrical-engineering/red-directive/common-charger_en

^[4] <https://circulareconomy.europa.eu/platform/en/sector/electronics>

The need of ensuring battery disassembly and/or longevity for increasing the durability of smartphones, and the importance played by software for the battery management, were in particular highlighted in chapter 6 of the cited report. Mobile phones and smartphones will be scrutinised specifically in a separate Ecodesign and Energy Labelling Preparatory Study, just started a few days ago. It is too early to foresee the scope and areas that this study will address, but issues like the ones just mentioned will most likely be addressed. The study website should be ready within the next weeks, and there will be the chance for interested stakeholders to comment on the discussion documents and to present position papers.

Yours sincerely,


Head of Unit



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