

Apple hits out at EU plans for a universal smartphone charger

Ares(2020)5935317

Tech company says proposals for mobile devices would harm innovation



Apple said on Thursday that forcing it to ditch its Lightning connector would inconvenience hundreds of millions of its customers © MAHMOUD KHALED/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock

Tim Bradshaw, Global Technology Correspondent AN HOUR AGO

Apple has hit out against European plans to force tech companies to adopt a universal standard charger for all smartphones and other electronics, arguing that doing so would hamper innovation.

Earlier this month, the European Parliament revived a decade-long argument about mandating a so-called “common charger” for mobile devices.

Maros Sefcovic, vice-president of the European Commission for inter-institutional relations and foresight, said in a recent [speech](#) that such a scheme would be more convenient for consumers and reduce electronic waste.

“We will look at a combination of policy options, including regulatory and non-regulatory measures, to achieve our objectives,” he said, after what he called a “missed opportunity” for a voluntary approach from the tech industry.

Since Europe’s campaign for a common charger began in the late 2000s, the number of different charging cables and connection ports used by smartphone makers has reduced from dozens to three: two variants of USB, an industry standard, and Lightning, which is proprietary to iPhones and iPads.

We hope the Commission will continue to seek a solution that does not

In its first statement in response to the latest proposals, Apple said on Thursday that forcing it to ditch Lightning would inconvenience hundreds of millions of its customers and create an “unprecedented volume” of waste.

restrict the industry’s ability to innovate

Apple

“We believe regulation that forces conformity across the type of connector built into all smartphones stifles innovation rather than encouraging it, and would harm consumers in Europe and the economy as a whole,” Apple said. “We hope the Commission will continue to seek a solution that does not restrict

the industry’s ability to innovate and bring exciting new technology to customers.”

The Silicon Valley company — which made \$24.5bn in its most recent financial year in sales of iPhone accessories including headphones, smartwatches and chargers — has switched to USB-C connectors for its latest iPad Pro models but has been relying on Lightning since 2012, when the iPhone 5 began a transition from its previous charger model.

While the average smartphone has increased in size since then, Lightning connectors are about 20 per cent smaller than most USB-C equivalents, leaving more space inside a handset for other components, such as batteries.

Apple’s official Lightning cables sell for upwards of \$19 in the US (€25 in Europe, £19 in the UK).

A study by consultancy Copenhagen Economics, commissioned by Apple last month, found that while 49 per cent of households rely on different connector types, only 0.4 per cent of European consumers said they “regularly experience any significant issue” with charging their devices due to incompatible cabling.

Apple argues that mandating a single type of cable would delay the introduction of future improvements and create more waste as consumers are forced to ditch accessories such as in-car adaptors and speaker docking stations.

Many smartphones now offer [wireless charging](#), with the biggest manufacturers such as Samsung and Apple largely supporting the same “Qi” standard. It is unclear how the new European proposals would handle wireless charging.

There has been speculation that after removing the iPhone’s headphone jack, its devices could one day remove the Lightning socket altogether to rely entirely on wireless charging and connectivity.

However, MEPs have insisted that a new regulatory regime could keep pace with the latest innovations.

“Any better performing new charging solution would be welcome as long as it is a common charging solution,” Mr Sefcovic said earlier this month.

