

# EU ready to plug in to 'universal' mobile phone charger

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Man displays universal charger plugged in a mobile phone during a presentation at the Mobile World Congress on February 28, 2012 in Barcelona, Spain

The European Union took another step on Thursday towards the mandatory introduction of a common mobile phone charger, which could power-up all makes of handsets.

The European Parliament in Strasbourg voted in favour of draft

legislation which would include compatibility with "universal" chargers as one of the "essential requirements" of all electrical goods approved for sale in the EU.

While the bill has the informal backing of the EU's 28 member states, it is now up to the European Commission, the EU's executive, to detail what a common phone charger should look like and the conditions under which it would be imposed on the industry.

"The current incompatibility of chargers ... is a nightmare and a real inconvenience for consumers. This new directive ends this nightmare and is also good news for the environment as it will result in a reduction of electronic waste," said the European parliament's negotiator Barbara Weiler after the vote.

If adopted in its current form, the legislation would include all "radio" products, meaning any piece of equipment which receives or emits radio waves with the purpose of communication, including mobile phones, GPS systems, tablets and wireless car door openers.

The Commission said the legislation, which would come into effect in three years' time, was a direct response to consumer concerns.

"We must have a common charger for all mobile phones—all citizens are in favour of it," said Neelie Kroes, the European commissioner responsible for the bill, adding she will now examine which legally binding measures are required to ensure compliance.

Belgian Socialist MEP Marc Tarabella welcomed the bill's approval, saying it would mark the "end of drawers filled with 1,001 cables and different chargers".

If adopted, the legislation would supercede a voluntary system of

standardisation created in 2010, following an agreement among phone producers including Nokia, Sony Ericsson and Samsung.

European mobile phone manufacturers welcomed parliament's vote, saying that the earlier agreement, which expired in 2012, had already laid the groundwork for industry-wide standardisation.

"Samsung sees the benefits and momentum in working alongside other manufacturers and standardisation organisations to find universal solutions to meet consumer demands," said Nicholas Breakspeare, a spokesman for Samsung.

However, Digital Europe, the organisation representing handset manufacturers such as Apple, Blackberry, Motorola and Nokia, tried to throw a spanner in the works by pointing out the important distinction between chargers and connectors.

"We are committed to industry harmonisation but a lot of our members want to reserve the right to innovate around the connector," said Paul Meller, Connect Europe's communications director.

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