

**EU, GSM AND US
OR
HOW TO KEEP YOUR HANDS-FREE WITHOUT DRAINING YOUR
BATTERIES DOWN *)**

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We GSM users are all too familiar with the nail-biting situation in which our battery has run down at the worst possible moment, with nothing but chargers for other handset brands within reach.

Many GSM users have also probably noticed the deteriorating quality, as well as the often changing standards, of mobile telephone accessories: hands-free, chargers (there are three types), and data transmission cables. Manufacturers' short-term interest is clear but volatile: bad quality boosts sales, and sales boost profits. At the expense of competitiveness and users! (Remember Charlie Chaplin's film *The Kid*, where the title character breaks windows to help the glazier get work.)

In this situation, the EU can really come handy. If we introduce a uniform entry plug connector for chargers of all mobile phone brands (they now vary even between models of the same brand) which, moreover, would be the same as the other two entry plug connectors: for the hands-free and for the cable, we will achieve several effects at the same time:

- *) The markets of accessories for all GSM brands used in the EU will merge, as a result of which their price will appreciably fall and their quality will rise;
- *) A standardised charger: both for the handset and for the Bluetooth, will be installed (similar to an Internet connector) in every room at home, in the car, in public places: cafes, hotels, shops, trains, planes etc., which will spare us the consumer stress of finding that our battery is down;
- *) These facilities will boost demand for the mobile service, which will bring its price down;
- *) Users will easily swap peripherals;
- *) We will produce less electronic waste and save materials and resources, thus limiting global warming, which is a declared EU priority.

The USB standard is one of the possible solutions, but if the EU introduces the standardisation principle, experts will come up with a specific option geared to expected future technological advances. Uniform accessories are a natural extension of mobile number portability (which enables us to switch operators while keeping our number). It is time that we should be able to switch our handset while keeping our peripherals. Conversely, just imagine the nightmare at home if each manufacturer of white or brown goods used plugs requiring different sockets,

and each Internet of cable TV provider had a provider-specific connector. Then we should have perforated our walls like a Dutch cheese to please the monopolist.

In this area, we can tap the advanced experience of China, which in June 2007 ordered all new mobile headsets to be manufactured with an identical standardised USB entry plug connector (for hands-free, charger and cable). The expected annual savings are in excess of USD 300,000,000.

After mobile peripherals, the EU should extend the standardisation drive to the boundless variety of GSM batteries (following the example of car batteries or 1.5 volt batteries), before coming to GSM menus, where chaos now reigns supreme.

We should also consider, at a later stage, standardisation for the remote controls of audio and video equipment or cars, as well as dozens of other devices, services and possible standards for the sake of citizens' convenience. (Just think of the time that people around the world waste in search for the remote control at home or in the office!)

And indeed, EU stands for "European Union" as much as for "European Uniformity".

Standards are profitable. Lack of standards leads to huge waste. Here is a simple but staggering example. People who have been to the US have probably noticed that almost all elevator control panels (where the floor buttons) are completely identical. Americans apparently lack artistry in the design of their elevator keypads. Recently, when we were finishing work on this article, in a service elevator, because of the confused arrangement of the buttons, one of us got to the wrong floor, as a result of which he and his three fellow elevator riders wasted some 30 seconds each (2 minutes in aggregate).

Then we remembered the unimaginative American elevator control panels. And we checked and found that American elevators move an average 2 billion riders daily. If each one of these riders wastes just a second daily, this would add up to 555,555 man-hours of time wasted **in just a single day** in American elevators.

With the annual wage in the US averaging USD 40,000, we can see that a single man-day-second wasted in the elevator robs the US of USD 2.8 billion a year. And if an American wastes 30 seconds daily in the elevator (as we did the other day in Parliament), his country's finances would be dented by some USD 84 billion annually. Not counting the waste of electricity, bulbs, energy and everything else that kindles global warming. The conclusion: *the boringly identical buttons in American elevators save several dozens, if not hundreds of billions of dollars annually.*

Some people will say: the Americans are rich and they can afford to replace their elevator buttons, but we in the EU have yet to graduate to the idea. Wrong answer: the Americans are rich precisely because they have standardised and globalised, and we in the EU are completely free to outrun them if we decide we want to.

Therefore, after in-depth research we approached the European Commission with an appeal to take to heart the standardisation of GSM telephones and to move it ahead. This matter, for the time being, does not figure among the legislative priorities of the EC, but we believe that a heightened public interest may be encouraging to the Commission.

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*) We can all feel the ever greater practical applicability of the EU to an improvement of ordinary Europeans' everyday life. One of the most user-friendly recent contributions of the EU in this respect has been the cheapening of GSM roaming. This article emerged back in 2007, as the authors argued over *the limit up to which the EU can favourably impact citizens' life*. The answer at which we arrived is: there is no limit to this impact - as long as we demand, and as long as we are not afraid to demand. It remains for the governments to persuade the European Commission to take up this just Pan-European and even global cause. This article is part of a larger work on the subject of "Recharging Europe", which led to a Bulgarian campaign to recharge Europe with new energy improving the quality of our life.