

**Priority question for written answer P-002250/2022
to the Commission**

Rule 138

Alex Agius Saliba (S&D)

Subject: Unfair practices by telecommunication companies in Malta: distorting competition and increasing the digital divide and discrimination for consumers

The telecommunication companies in Malta have imposed a new charge of between EUR 1 and 2 for customers that continue to pay their bills in cash instead of using a direct debit facility, informing them that if they disagree, they can simply withdraw from their contracts.

The new charge, introduced simultaneously by all telecoms companies, is seriously distorting competition in the market, goes against the revised Payment Services Directive (PSD2), and increases the digital divide and discrimination against consumers who have no or limited digital access or debit facilities. This practice will penalise the most vulnerable consumers in Malta, such as the elderly, people with disabilities and young people, leaving them without healthy competitive alternatives or choices.

Access to telecoms services has become crucial to society and the wider economy, a precondition and basis for economic and social development, participation in public life and social and territorial cohesion. People must have access to these vital services.

1. Can the Commission investigate whether the new charge introduced in collusion by all telecoms companies in Malta amounts to illegal price-fixing, distorts competition law, violates PSD2 and harms consumers' rights?
2. How can the Commission ensure that consumers' rights are safeguarded and continue to have competitive, transparent and non-discriminatory access to essential telecoms services?