

Europe is on Their Way of Scraping Seasonal Time Change

The time has come to put Daylight Saving Time (DST) in Europe to an end. After the highest number of responses ever received in a Commission public consultation, the voices are clear: 84 % of the EU citizens want to end the clock change. Even though the proposal to scrape DST is likely to be approved in the European Council, there is still unsettled debate on which time zone to stay in after the change.

By Liv Longhi & Ryan Li

Have you ever felt sleep deprived the day after moving into summer time as the day is an hour shorter? This situation may not last long as the EU is currently discussing the possibility of scrapping the bi-annual changes of time, also known as the Daylight Saving Time (DST).

The proposal is now pending to be discussed at the European Council after being passed in the Parliament with huge support votes of 410 to 192 in March 2019. If the Council approves the proposal, legislation will take place and seasonal changes will become history in Europe.

The process started in July in 2018 when a public consultation in form of a survey was organized by the European Commission. It led to 4.6 million responses from all 28 Member states which is a record for a Commission public consultant. 84% of the respondents want to scrape DST as a result of a negative perception towards the clock change. This led to The European Commission publishing the proposal to end seasonal time change.

Regarding the seasonal time change in European countries, there may be 3 different results:

- 1. Keep bi-annual shifts:** bi-annual seasonal time changes are kept if the proposal is disapproved in the European Council
- 2. Permanent summer:** proposal goes through in the Council and seasonal time changes are aborted, and member states stay in summer time (one hour forward)
- 3. Permanent winter:** proposal goes through in the Council and seasonal time changes discontinue, and member states stay in winter time (standard time)

After the cancellation of Individual member states can decide to either stay in summer time or winter time on their own.

'Majority rule' are likely to be played

If DST is scraped, it is up to the individual member states if they will settle in summer time or winter time. Member of the European Parliament (MEP) *Johan Danielsson*, who is the leader of the negotiation with the Council, believes the minority will likely coordinate with the majority.

He comes to this conclusion based on the pattern seen when DST was introduced back in the days. The member states didn't want to be isolated so they followed their neighbouring states. Johan Danielsson explains:

"The reason why Sweden did it was that Denmark did it and they did it because Germany did it. States wanted to be in the same time zone"

If the proposal is accepted, according to him, the main problem would be the matter of transition time required.

"When we have abolished (DST), we need to have a period of 18 months before it goes into practice. For example, the energy sector they say they need a least 12 months to prepare"

He stresses that scrapping DST will affect the logistics in the EU if member states are not given enough time for transition.

Danielsson believes that 27 states will compromise by further discussing the benefits of the two choices – permanent summer time and permanent winter time, after passing the proposal in the Council.

Benefits of Permanent Summer Time

The idea of permanent summer time takes away the bi-annual shift of time while keeping the benefits of DST. Therefore, citizens don't need to suffer from negative effects after the shift, such as causing sleep deprivation and strokes.

Literally speaking, DST utilises daylight more by shifting the clock forward during summer days, which means longer periods of time with daylight. Starting the day an hour earlier means the sunset time will be an hour later in their social clock. Positive effects such as reduced traffic accidents and health benefits can be resulted.

Also a good thing about permanent summer time is that it will stop the suffering that people actually experience due to the change.

Daylight Saving Time (DST) in Europe



How DST works in EU (Image: Ryan Li)



Timeline for cancellation of seasonal time changes (Image: Ryan Li)

“Roughly 20% of the population shows negative effects because the body needs time to adjust. The possible benefits that were there when we introduced Daylight Saving Time are not there anymore,” Danielsson says.

Researches also showed that citizens require weeks to adjust and recover after the time shift, and effects are more significant on children and farm animals.

Voices for Permanent Winter Time

Notwithstanding the benefits of permanent summer time, the arguments from the permanent winter camp cannot be neglected as well.

Jay Pea, the founder of Save Standard Time, leads a campaign in raising the awareness of the general public of the importance of having permanent standard time also called winter time. He thinks that permanent winter time has far more advantages over permanent summer time.

“Data and history show permanent Standard Time is the best clock for public health, public safety, scholastic potential, workplace productivity, individual wages, energy usage, environmental preservation, and religious freedom.”

With circadian-health experts’ and children advocates’ scientific evidence on health, he suggested that seasonal time change causes acute harms while permanent summer time causes chronic harms.

Regarding public health, shifting the clock an hour forward poses lethal threats to human health. On the Mondays after changing to DST, not only does it decrease productivity due to the night being shortened by an hour, it is also recorded with more stroke and heart attack incidents.

Even the shift to summer is permanent, harms can still be observed upon sleep quality disruption. Through moving the social clock forward by an hour, it disrupts the biological clock which is tuned to the sunrise and sunset time, thus leading to worse sleeping quality. Research shows that it also resulted in an average loss of 19 minutes of sleep per night.

“Permanent Standard Time provides the most benefit to individuals and society.”

Pea believed that permanent winter time is the correct move to make, as most countries worldwide are adopting it.

According to a poll done by MEP *Morten Løkkegaard*, the majority of Danish citizens want to stick with standard time. He asked his followers on social media if they preferred summer or wintertime. Over 3000 attended and 70% wished to abolish time change. 70% of those wanted to keep normal time.

“I thought all people would like summertime because of long summer evenings and all this but the answers showed that a comfortable majority wants to keep normal time.”

Summer Time or Winter Time – How to Decide?

The current discussion topic is only whether to discontinue the bi-annual time changes for all EU member states. The question on why member states have not yet discussed which side to stay on if the proposal goes through, Johan Danielsson explains that politically people try to avoid the debate.

“You will notice no matter of which side they are on, people have a lot of strong feelings”

Public opinion towards the decision is also unknown in the EU, as the previous consultation only revolved around citizen’s perception towards DST but not their preferences after cancelling the seasonal time changes.

“The question of which time to keep is rarely asked or asked in a clear and neutral way,” Pea added on the topic.

To make the correct decision, permanent standard time advocate *Jay Pea* thinks the choice should be decided by data instead of popularity.

What is next?

Until now, the issue was left untouched for more than a year since the voting in the Parliament. Progress was halted due to the European Parliament Election and the outbreak of COVID-19. Discussion is believed to be kicked off after work in the European Council resumes.

“A prerequisite for this to become a success is that the countries agree and it must ultimately be negotiated between the head of government in the individual countries,” MEP Morten Løkkegaard thinks cooperation between member states is key.

The fate of the EU citizens are now in European Council’s hands: the proposal is yet to be approved by the Council, before the last clock change happens in the EU – the clock is ticking.

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