

Discontinuing seasonal changes of time

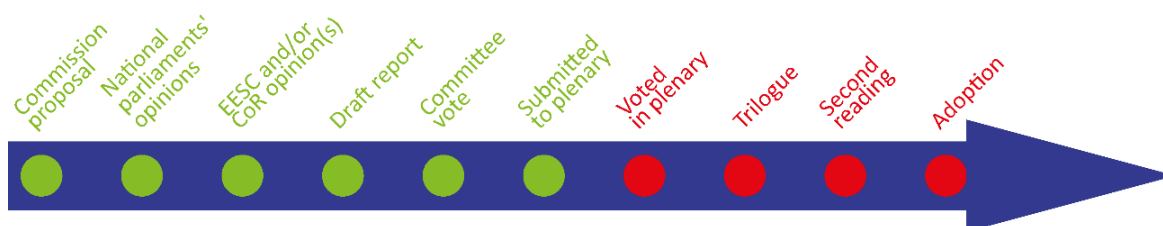
OVERVIEW

To end the biannual change of clocks that currently takes place in every Member State at the end of March and the end of October, on 12 September 2018 the European Commission adopted a proposal to discontinue the seasonal changes of time in the Union. The President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, presented the initiative in his State of the Union address as an issue of subsidiarity, underlining that 'Member States should themselves decide whether their citizens live in summer or winter time'.

The initiative, which would repeal existing provisions governed by Directive 2000/84/EC, proposes a timetable to end seasonal clock-changing arrangements in a coordinated way, in order to safeguard the proper functioning of the internal market and avoid the disruptions that this may cause, for instance, to the transport or communications sectors.

As the Council has decided that a proper impact assessment should be conducted before it can reach a political agreement, the file is due to be closed at first reading, with a vote in Parliament's plenary in March 2019 on the TRAN committee's report.

Proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and the Council discontinuing seasonal changes of time and repealing Directive 2000/84/EC		
<i>Committee responsible:</i>	Transport and Tourism (TRAN)	COM(2018) 639
<i>Rapporteur:</i>	Marita Ulvskog (S&D, Sweden)	12.9.2018
<i>Shadow rapporteurs:</i>	Pavel Svoboda (EPP, Czech Republic) Kosma Złotowski (ECR, Poland) Izaskun Bilbao Barandica (ALDE, Spain) Jakop Dalunde (Greens/EFA, Sweden) Merja Kyllönen (GUE/NGL, Finland) Rolandas Paksas (EFDD, Lithuania) Marie-Christine Arnautu (ENF, France)	2018/0332(COD) Ordinary legislative procedure (COD) (Parliament and Council on equal footing – formerly 'co-decision')
<i>Next steps expected:</i>	First-reading vote in plenary	



Introduction

In his 2018 State of the Union [address](#), the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, stated: 'We all say in soap-box speeches that we want to be big on big things and small on small things. But there is no applause when EU law dictates that Europeans have to change the clocks twice a year. The Commission is today proposing to change this. Clock-changing must stop. Member States should themselves decide whether their citizens live in summer or winter time. It is a question of subsidiarity. I expect the Parliament and Council will share this view. We are out of time.' In the related [letter of intent](#) to the President of the European Parliament, Antonio Tajani, and to Austrian Chancellor, Sebastian Kurz, the Commission's President and Vice-President referred to this proposal as part of the initiatives for delivery before the European Parliament elections, under Priority 10: A Union of democratic change.

The [proposal](#) was adopted by the Commission on the same day as the State of the Union address, 12 September 2018. It is accompanied by a [Commission staff working document](#) that summarises the results of an online public consultation on the subject.

Context

The concept of [summer-time arrangements](#) existed prior to the adoption of legislation at EU level. Moving the clock one hour forward in spring leads to delayed sunset, until the clock is moved one hour back in autumn. This makes it possible to capitalise on natural daylight, and the practice is therefore also called daylight saving time (DST). Summer-time arrangements were first introduced during World War I by Germany and France, followed by their allies, for energy saving reasons, before being abandoned after the war. The arrangements were then revived in the 1970s in many European countries,¹ in relation notably to the oil crisis and related energy-saving arguments.

To understand the impact of summer-time arrangements on a given territory, it is important to understand the relationship between time and daylight on the one hand, and the geographical position of a given territory (defined by its longitude and latitude) on the other.

The latitude, i.e. the distance from the equator, influences the hours of daylight and explains the considerable difference in day length between Northern and Southern Europe. During the shortest day of the year, at the winter solstice, a city located in the north, such as Helsinki, would receive less than six hours of sunlight, while it would get almost 19 hours of sunlight at the summer solstice. On the other hand, in cities located closer to the equator, i.e. southern cities such as Lisbon and Athens, the day length would be more balanced, with around 15 hours of daylight at the summer solstice and approximately 9.5 hours at the winter solstice.²

Another key element is the geographical longitude which defines local time. Member States (excluding overseas territories), span three time zones:

- Western European Time, also known as Greenwich Mean Time (GMT), covering three Member States (Ireland, Portugal and the United Kingdom);
- Central European Time or GMT+1, covering 17 Member States (Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, The Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden);
- Eastern European Time or GMT+2, covering eight Member States (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania and Romania).

This results in current [summer-time](#) arrangements changing the time when sunset and sunrise occur, but without modifying the actual length of day, or daylight hours, experienced at a specific time of the year, while the geographical longitude defines local time. The grouping over different time zones or standard time is independent from the EU summer-time arrangements, as decisions on [standard time](#) are taken individually by each Member State. Hours of daylight might vary considerably within the same time zone, as shown in the examples previously mentioned, even

though the same local time applies. The table below shows, for a selection of EU countries (data are provided for each capital), the existing variations in terms of sunrise, sunset, day length (based on current arrangements) and the impact of the geographical location in this regard.

Table 1 – Comparison of the time of sunrise/sunset at the summer/winter solstice in selected EU countries

Country	Sunrise 21 June	Sunset 21 June	Day length 21 June (hours)	Sunrise 21 December	Sunset 21 December	Day length (hours)
Portugal WET	06:12	21:04	14.52	07:51	17:18	9.27
Belgium CET	05:28	21:59	16.31	08:42	16:38	7.56
Malta CET	05:45	20:21	14.35	07:08	16:51	9.43
Finland EET	03:54	22:49	18.55	09:23	15:12	5.49
Greece EET	06:02	20:50	14.48	07:37	17:09	9.31

Source: timeanddate.com; data for 2017 in [EPRS Study on summer-time arrangements under Directive 2000/84/EC](#).

Existing situation

EU provisions regarding summer-time arrangements were first introduced in 1980 and were [amended](#) in order to progressively harmonise the date of the time switch within the single market. Current provisions are governed by [Directive 2000/84/EC](#), which is the ninth Summer-time Directive. According to this Directive, the summer-time period begins on the last Sunday in March and ends on the last Sunday in October in all Member States. The 'Summer-time period', according to the Directive, is the period of the year during which clocks are put forward by 60 minutes compared with the rest of the year. In other words, the Directive compels all Member States to move their clock forward to summer-time on the last Sunday of March and to switch back to their standard time ('winter-time') on the last Sunday of October. The Directive does not apply to the overseas territories of the Member States.

The rationale behind the Directive is explained in the recitals which say 'Given that the Member States apply summer-time arrangements, it is important for the functioning of the internal market that a common date and time for the beginning and end of the summer-time period be fixed throughout the Community', and also add 'The proper functioning of certain sectors, not only transport and communications, but also other sectors of industry, requires stable, long-term planning. Provisions concerning summer-time should therefore be laid down for an unspecified period'. Indeed, the previous version of the Directive (Eighth Summer-time Directive) introduced clock changes for a limited number of years.

Comparative elements

Over the last century, many countries experimented with summer-time arrangements, and to date such arrangements are used in about 60 countries worldwide, mostly in the industrialised world, and are especially widespread in Europe, North America and Oceania. The [rationale](#) behind such choices was to facilitate cross-border trade, transport, communications and travel. Even though most non-EU European countries have decided to align with the EU summer-time arrangements, a growing number of EU neighbours or trading partners such as Iceland, China, Russia, Belarus and more recently Turkey, have decided not to apply or to abolish such arrangements. Summer-time arrangements are not applied in Africa (with the exception of Namibia and Morocco), or Asia, with the exception of some countries in the Middle East such as Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Iran.

Parliament's starting position

Since the Maastricht Treaty, the European Parliament is a co-legislator on summer-time directives. In recent years, individual Members raised concerns or critical views regarding summer-time arrangements. The European Parliament (Legal Affairs, Transport and Tourism, Industry, Research and Energy Committees) organised a joint public hearing entitled 'Time to revisit summer-time', on 24 March 2015, and two parliamentary debates in plenary on the subject, on 29 October 2015 and 27 October 2016. On these two occasions, Members underlined that the initial rationale behind the summer-time arrangements may be outdated, and called on the Commission to take new scientific evidence into account, notably in health and economic terms.

The European Parliament finally adopted a [resolution](#) on 8 February 2018 on time change arrangements, in which it recalls that 'numerous scientific studies, including the European Parliamentary Research Service study of October 2017 on EU summer-time arrangements under Directive 2000/84/EC, have failed to come to a conclusive outcome, but have instead indicated the existence of negative effects on human health'; that 'a number of citizens' initiatives have highlighted citizens' concerns about the biannual clock change', and that Parliament had already raised this issue, for example in an [oral question](#). Mentioning that 'it is crucial to maintain a unified EU time regime even after the end of biannual time changes', the Parliament in this resolution called on the Commission 'to conduct a thorough assessment of Directive 2000/84/EC and, if necessary, come up with a proposal for its revision'.

Preparation of the proposal

Many studies have been carried out on the EU summer-time arrangements. These include the 2007 [Commission](#) report on the impact of the Summer-time Directive as required under Article 5 of Directive 2000/84/EC; a 2014 [study](#) carried out by ICF International, a consulting company, on 'The application of summer-time in Europe: a report to the European Commission Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport (DG MOVE)'; the 2016 German Bundestag [report](#) on the impact of summer-time; and the 2017 European Parliamentary Research Service [study](#) on 'EU summer-time arrangements under Directive 2000/84/EC: Ex-post Impact Assessment'. This latter study considers and summarises the latest evidence on summer-time and notably concludes that, while summer-time arrangements may be beneficial for the internal market, in particular transport, boost outdoor leisure activities, and generate marginal savings in energy consumption, the impact on other economic sectors remains largely inconclusive. As for the inconveniences, health research appears to relate daylight saving time (DST) with disruption to the human biorhythm ('circadian rhythm'). However, no formal impact assessment is attached to the proposal.

Looking at the impacts on different sectors, the above [reports](#) suggest that when it comes to the internal **market**, uncoordinated time changes between Member States would be detrimental, leading to higher costs to cross-border trade, and possible disruption to transport, communications and travel, as well as lower productivity in the internal market for goods and services. When it comes to **energy**, research suggests that the overall energy-saving effect of summer-time is marginal and

can vary according to other factors, e.g. geographical location. New lighting technologies, smart meters and programming devices are already diminishing the advantages of summer-time arrangements in terms of saving energy.

Overall **health** impacts appear to be inconclusive, with some studies indicating that summer-time arrangements could bring about positive effects in terms of more possibilities for outdoor leisure activities, while some chronobiological research suggests that the effect on the human biorhythm may be more severe than previously thought. The same applies to **road safety**, where it is difficult to isolate the effect of summer-time arrangements on accident rates. In **agriculture**, the concerns over summer-time arrangements (impact on the biorhythm of animals for instance) are somewhat balanced by the development of new equipment such as artificial light or other automated technologies.

To gather citizens', stakeholders' and Member States' views on the subject, the Commission launched an online public [consultation](#) on EU summer-time arrangements between 4 July and 16 August 2018. The report on the consultation result is attached to the Commission proposal. This consultation attracted 4.6 million replies, the highest [number](#) ever received in a public consultation organised by the Commission, 99 % of which were from citizens.

The changes the proposal would bring

Owing to the debate that surrounds the existing summer-time arrangements and the fact, highlighted in recital (3) of the [proposal](#), that 'Evidence is not conclusive as to whether the benefits of summer-time arrangements outweigh the inconveniences linked to a biannual change of time', the Commission proposes to discontinue the seasonal time changes in the Union. However, in order to continue safeguarding the proper functioning of the internal market and to avoid any significant disruptions that this situation may create, the Commission proposes, as mentioned in recital (4), to put an end to summer-time arrangements in a coordinated way.

Therefore, according to the proposal, as from 1 April 2019, Member States would no longer apply seasonal changes to their standard time or times. The last mandatory change to summer-time, as per the current Directive 2000/84/EC, would take place on 31 March 2019. After that date, Member States would have the option, if they so wish, to make one more (last) seasonal change to their standard time or times on Sunday, 27 October 2019. The proposal thus leaves each Member State free to decide whether its standard time would coincide with its current summer-time on a permanent basis, or whether it would apply the standard time that corresponds with its current 'winter-time' on a permanent basis. Member States wishing to make their last seasonal change in October 2019 would have to notify the Commission of their decision at least six months before the change takes effect.

The proposal also mentions that Member States are free to make changes to their standard time which are not linked to seasonal changes. In the future, to avoid unforeseen changes that could impact and disturb the internal market, they should notify the Commission at least six months before the change takes effect. The proposal also adds 'Where a Member State has made such a notification and has not withdrawn it at least six months before the date of the envisaged change, the Member State shall apply this change.' It would then be up to the Commission, within one month of the notification, to inform the other Member States and to publish the information in the Official Journal of the European Union, so that national authorities, economic operators and citizens can prepare for the change.

The timetable included in the proposal is tight as Member States should transpose the Directive by 1 April 2019, which implies that the proposal would have to be adopted by the Council and Parliament by March 2019. Member States would have to notify the Commission by 27 April 2019 whether they intend to move to a standard time corresponding to their existing 'winter-time' in October 2019, instead of their current summer-time. The current Directive would be repealed with effect from 1 April 2019.

The Commission would be required to submit a report to the European Parliament and to the Council on the implementation of the Directive by 31 December 2024.

Advisory committees

Consultation of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is mandatory. The [EESC](#) adopted its opinion (rapporteur: Maria Nikolopoulou, Workers – Group II, Spain) during the 17-18 October 2018 plenary session. It underlined the need to 'provide more time for debate and analysis' and regretted that 'national governments and organised civil society were not sufficiently consulted prior to the urgent publication of the proposal'. Referring to the public consultation, considered as important, it nonetheless underlined that 'the Commission did not take into adequate account that a large majority of participants were from a single country, the proposal was rejected in certain Member States, and there is no clear unanimity about the real benefits of abolishing the current harmonised arrangement or whether it would be better to adopt winter or summer time.' Mentioning that 'The Commission itself points out that the initiative is based on a series of studies carried out by various associations and Member States that are not conclusive or contradict each other, the Committee recommends starting a deeper impact assessment, involving all economic and social sectors, in every EU country in order to be able to understand which system is more adequate'.

National parliaments

The deadline for submitting a reasoned opinion of the grounds of [subsidiarity](#) is 13 November 2018. The United Kingdom Parliament (House of Lords and House of Commons) submitted reasoned opinions, in the first of these, the House of Lords says: 'we do not believe that the Commission has adequately explained or justified the need for EU intervention to replace the obligation to apply seasonal changes of time with an obligation to discontinue this practice, nor has it explored possible alternatives.' It also adds that, considering the geographical and other specificities, Member States are best-placed 'to determine whether seasonal time changes remain appropriate within their jurisdiction.' The opinion therefore concludes that the proposal does not comply with the principle of subsidiarity. The Danish Parliament also submitted a reasoned opinion on the proposal.

Stakeholders' views³

As mentioned above, between 4 July and 16 August 2018, the Commission launched an online public [consultation](#) on EU summer-time arrangements. Of the 4.6 million replies, the country breakdown, in absolute terms shows that 70 % of the replies came from Germany, 8.6 % from France, and 6 % from Austria, while the respondents in other Member States, with more than 1 % of the total replies, were from Poland, Spain, the Czech Republic, Belgium, Finland and Sweden. Germany, Austria and Luxembourg displayed the highest response rates compared to the size of the population.

In terms of results, the majority of all respondents (76 %) mentioned that they had a negative experience with the bi-annual time switch, 84 % were in favour of abolishing it, while 16 % were in favour of keeping it. The only Member States where a small majority was in favour of keeping the existing system are Greece and Cyprus, while in Malta the responses were nearly equally split. The main reasons for those wishing to abolish the bi-annual time switch were human health (43 %) and energy savings (20 %).

The results have to be considered with caution however, because, as highlighted by the Commission itself in its report on the results, if the high number of replies shows the high level of interest and involvement of citizens, 'this public consultation is not a representative survey, nor does it constitute a citizens' vote. Its outcome has to be considered in the context of the wider policy debate about the future of EU summer-time arrangements'.

Legislative process

The legislative proposal has been assigned to the Parliament's Committee on Transport and Tourism (TRAN), which designated Marita Ulvskog (S&D, Sweden) as rapporteur. In her [draft report](#), she proposed a two-year transition period after the legislation enters into force and a national contact point to be set up by each Member State, to facilitate the coordination of the time zones chosen.

In addition, six other Parliament committees provided their opinions: the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE), the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI), the Committee on Petitions (PETI), the Committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO), the Committee on Legal Affairs (JURI), and the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI).

The TRAN committee adopted its [report](#) on 4 March, by 23 votes in favour, to 11 against, with no abstentions. The report argues for a final switch to summer time at the end of March 2021, before a possible final time change at the end of October 2021 (for those states that wish to apply winter time). MEPs propose to set up a coordination mechanism, composed of a representative for each Member State and one from the Commission, to ensure that Member States approach the choice of time zone in a harmonised way. MEPs also want to give to the Commission the power to adopt a delegated act to postpone the date of application of Member States' decisions by twelve months, should the time arrangements notified by Member States have the potential to hamper the functioning of the internal market.

In Council, the matter was discussed on six occasions within the Council Working Party on Land Transport between September and October 2018. At the [informal meeting](#) of EU transport ministers, held in Graz, Austria at the end of October 2018, a majority of Member States expressed their support for ending seasonal clock changes. However, they underlined that a way forward could only be agreed when the next steps are known and the impact assessment available. In order to respond to Member States' concerns, the Austrian Transport Minister chairing the Council meetings, proposes to give Member States more time – until 2021 – to end the existing arrangements; that the Commission nominate a coordinator charged with harmonisation and coordination; and to introduce a safeguard clause to enable the Commission to present a new directive should unforeseen problems occur.

On 19 November 2018, Council published a [progress report](#), which was endorsed by the Transport Council [meeting](#) of 3 December. Ministers assessed the progress in discussions and decided to conduct an impact assessment and coordinate action at European level before reaching a political agreement. The proposed date of application of 1 April 2019 was seen as too ambitious.

In Parliament, the file is scheduled for a first-reading vote during the second March plenary.

EP SUPPORTING ANALYSIS

Anglmayer I., [Study on EU summer-time arrangements under Directive 2000/84/EC](#), Ex-post impact assessment, October 2017.

OTHER SOURCES

[Seasonal changes of time](#), European Parliament, Legislative Observatory (OEL).

ENDNOTES

- ¹ [Modern](#) summer-time arrangements were introduced as follows: Italy (1966), Greece (1971), the UK and Ireland (after abolishing summer-time arrangements in 1968, they switched back again in 1972), Spain (1974) and France (1976). Ten other EU Member States introduced summer-time arrangements between 1976-1981 to harmonise with neighbouring countries.
- ² The comparison of the time of sunrise/sunset at the summer/winter solstice in EU 28 countries, based on 2017 data, is available in Annex 2, page 39 of the EPRS [study](#) on summer-time arrangements under Directive 2000/84/EC.
- ³ This section aims to provide a flavour of the debate and is not intended to be an exhaustive account of all different views on the proposal. Additional information can be found in related publications listed under 'EP supporting analysis'.

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