



State of the Union 2018: Q&A on the Commission's proposal to put an end to seasonal clock changes

Strasbourg, 12 September 2018

Q&A on the Commission's proposal to put an end to seasonal clock changes.



Why is summertime/wintertime harmonised at EU level?

Most of the EU Member States have had a long tradition of summertime arrangements, many of which date back as far as the First and Second World Wars or to the oil crisis in the 1970s. Historically, Member States introduced clock changes to save energy (mostly coal for electricity production) and be in line with their neighbouring countries. However, the date on which clocks were changed was different in different countries. This was a source of problems in the internal market, notably for the transport and energy sectors, which would arise from an uncoordinated application of clock-changes (diverging days) over the course of the year. European measures were gradually introduced to harmonise the date of the switch, leading to [Directive 2000/84/EC](#), currently in force.

What is the situation in the rest of the world?

Internationally, summertime arrangements are observed in about 60 countries, mostly in North America and Oceania. A growing number of EU neighbours or trading partners have either chosen not to apply or to abolish summertime arrangements: these examples include Iceland, China (1991-), Russia (2011-), Belarus (2011-) and more recently Turkey (2016-).

Why is the Commission presenting this proposal?

The Commission put the summertime arrangements on the political agenda because the Juncker Commission has pledged to be big on the big things while leaving it to Member States to take decisions where they are best placed to do so. Following an assessment of the current arrangement on seasonal clock changes, where EU regulation imposes the clock changes every six months, the Commission came to the conclusion that, while avoiding fragmentation, Member States are best placed to decide on whether they want to keep permanent summer- or winter time.

The Commission's assessment took into account a number of elements, such as the vote by the European Parliament of a [resolution on this topic in February 2018](#), requests from certain EU Member States, an analysis of available evidence as well as a [public consultation](#) held by the Commission between 4 July and 16 August 2018. This consultation received 4.6 million responses from all 28 Member States, the highest number of responses ever received in any Commission public consultation. According to the final results, 84% of respondents were in favour of abolishing seasonal clock changes. All these elements led the Commission to propose today to discontinue seasonal clock changes, while maintaining a coordinated approach in order to safeguard the functioning of the Internal Market.

What is the Commission proposing?

The Commission proposes to stop the bi-annual clock changes in the EU in 2019. This would put an end to the practice of changing the clock forward by one hour in March and backward by one hour in October. In order to avoid any fragmentation in the internal market, Member States will decide whether they want to maintain permanent summer- or wintertime. They will notify the European Commission of their decision. After this, they will no longer be able to apply seasonal clock changes. Member States will remain free to decide which time zone to apply to their territories.

Does the Commission propose permanent summertime/wintertime all across the European Union?

No. The European Commission's proposal is about putting an end to seasonal clock changes in a coordinated manner. The decision to apply permanent summer- or wintertime will be taken by each Member State. It is desirable that Member States take the decisions on the standard time that each of them will apply as from 2019 in a concerted manner.

Why can't some Member States continue to apply seasonal clock changes if they wish to do

so?

The Commission proposes to put an end to seasonal clock changes for the entire European Union. In other words, Member States will no longer maintain national arrangements of seasonal clock changes. This is to safeguard the proper functioning of the internal market and avoid disruptions by uncoordinated action by Member States. This includes potential disruption to the scheduling of transport operations and the functioning of information and communication systems, higher costs to cross-border trade, or lower productivity for goods and services. A continued harmonised regime – whereby all Member States abolish the bi-annual clock changes – is therefore essential.

How and when would the proposed change be implemented?

To allow for a smooth transition, under the Commission's proposal each Member State would notify by April 2019 whether it intends to apply permanent summer- or wintertime. This should be based on coordination between Member States, possible consultations and assessments at national and European level.

The last mandatory change to summertime would take place on Sunday 31 March 2019. After this, the Member States wishing to permanently switch back to wintertime would still be able to make one last seasonal clock change on Sunday 27 October 2019. Following that date, seasonal changes would no longer be possible.

This timeline is conditional on the European Parliament and the Council adopting the Commission's proposal by March 2019 at the latest.

What are the benefits of discontinuing current arrangements for changing the clocks?

Citizens will no longer have to worry about adjusting their clocks. The changes were a source of confusion, as it is not self-evident when, and in which direction, the clocks should be changed. Those responding to the public consultation also indicated negative health impacts, increased road accidents and a lack of energy savings as motivations to end the clock change. With an end to this system, the human body will also no longer have to adapt to the change in time.

Businesses will benefit from not having to adjust to clock changes. The new arrangements will make planning easier in the energy and transport sectors (for overnight trains, for example) and simplify time-based applications. Despite having been one of the main drivers of the current arrangements, evidence suggests that today overall energy savings from changing the clocks are limited.

Which time zones will apply in the EU?

Currently there are three standard time zones in the EU: Western European Time (Ireland, Portugal, UK), Central European Time (17 Member States) and Eastern European Time (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania and Romania). Member States choosing to keep permanent summertime will automatically change to the next time zone (standard time + 1 hour). In addition, Member States will remain free to make changes to their standard time which are not linked to seasonal changes. The proposal foresees that the Commission is notified of any change to the time zone 6 months in advance – enabling any adjustment to time-based systems to be made in time.

What was the public consultation about?

Participants were invited to share their overall experiences of changing the clocks, their preference between two alternatives (keeping the system unchanged or abolishing it for the whole of the EU), and if the current switching was to be abolished, whether they prefer to keep summer- or wintertime. European citizens and stakeholders were invited to share their views by filling in [this online questionnaire](#) (available in all EU languages) between 4 July and 16 August.

Where can I consult the final results of the consultation?

The online consultation received [4.6 million responses from all 28 Member States](#), the highest number of responses ever received in any Commission public consultation. 84% of respondents said they are in favour of putting an end to the bi-annual clock change. A more detailed synopsis report has been produced and translated into all EU languages. It is available [here](#).

More information

[Website on the State of the European Union 2018](#)

[Subpage on Seasonal Clock Changes](#)

[Press release: State of the European Union 2018: Commission proposes to put an end to seasonal clock changes](#)

[Final report of the public consultation](#)

Press contacts:

[Enrico BRIVIO](#) (+32 2 295 61 72)

[Alexis PERIER](#) (+32 2 296 91 43)

General public inquiries: [Europe Direct](#) by phone [00 800 67 89 10 11](#) or by [email](#)