

European Parliament hearing on summer time

24 March 2015

Speaking points

- Two times per year the clocks in all EU Member States are switched from winter to summertime (on the last Sunday in March) and back from summer to wintertime (on the last Sunday in October). This practice was introduced by most Member States in the 1960's and 1970's and not always following the same time-table. With the emerging of the internal market it became clear that a harmonised approach of the different summertime arrangements in the EU would be required. **The legislation at EU level is to make sure the internal market can function** by providing a clear and long-term planning and fixed timing for the bi-annual switch.
- Since summer time had already been introduced by Member States on a national basis, the EU only decided to harmonise the dates of the beginning and the end of the application of summer time in the EU in a Directive in 1980.
- The Council and Parliament adopted the current Directive on summer time in the EU in 2001. The harmonisation of the calendar was requested in particular by the then 15 EU Member States. Indeed, different starting and end dates for the summer time caused difficulties in the common market, for example for the transport sector when coordinating national timetables.
- In accordance with the directive, the Commission presented in 2007 a report on the impact of the current summer time regime (COM(2007)739 – 23.11.2007). This report was prepared, on the basis of information provided by the Member States, but also on the basis of other available information.
- Most Member States, partly on the basis of the results of consulting the sectors concerned, conclude that there is no indication of any significant impact of summertime on the economic sectors most affected in their country, i.e. agriculture, transport and tourism.

A few Member States sent in information on recent quantitative studies, relating to the impact of summer time on energy consumption, road safety and health.

Energy: Some studies confirm that energy savings have been made, albeit small ones, in relation to overall energy consumption

Road safety: In Estonia, a comparative study of the number of accidents involving fatalities and casualties 30 days before and after the time adjustments in 2004 to 2006 did not show any significant statistical variations of the annual number of accidents. Research by Estradas de Portugal did not reveal any direct link between summer time and road safety. This view has been confirmed by several transport experts.

Health: In Finland, in 2003 and 2004 two studies looked into the impact on the body of changing the time in March, based on a sample of 10 people. The studies found some impact on sleep and biorhythm in the four days following the time change. However, the authors stress that the studies do not allow any conclusions to be drawn for the population as a whole because of the small size of the sample.

- The report concludes that besides the fact that it encourages the practice of all kinds of leisure in the evening and that it generates some small energy savings – there is **little**

(negative) impact of summer time and therefore it is better to maintain the current summertime arrangements.

- In 2014, the Commission ordered a study to look closer at the potential effects for the internal market of not having a harmonised summertime in the EU. The study looked into the effects if Member States had different summertime arrangements and it was concluded that the **administration and negotiation costs for energy providers are expected to increase**.
- The study includes scenarios of abolishing summertime in one or more Member States. However, **it does not look into the savings** that could be made by abolishing the practice of changing the clocks for the entire European Union.
- The study concludes that if summer time was not harmonised in the Union, **it would entail substantial inconvenience and disturbance for citizens and businesses** alike. Therefore, the Commission believes that the summer time arrangements as established by the Directive remain suitable.
- No Member State has ever expressed a wish to abandon summer time or change the provisions of the current Directive. **The Directive is an essential instrument in guaranteeing harmonised timetables that ensure the proper functioning of the internal market**. It allows for predictability and reliability of the time tables and manages citizens and business expectations. In conclusion, the Commission is of the opinion that **the summer-time arrangements as introduced by the Directive in 2001 continue to be appropriate**.
- To close my remarks I would like to remind you that this coming Sunday the clocks in the European Union will be advanced by one hour.