Nordic-Baltic coordinated approach to Seasonal time changes in Europe

Preface

The European Commission has proposed to end seasonal clock changes in Europe[1]. The European Parliament voted on the Commission's proposal in the spring of 2019, suggesting that the proposal should enter into force in 2021. The final summer-time period should start on the last Sunday in March 2021.

In the Council, the initiative is still under discussion at the working group level, that is by officials, but no rapid solution is expected. The Parliament and the Council will decide on the matter together.

According to the proposal, Member States will decide whether they want to maintain permanent winter- or summer-time. The choice of time zone is a national competence of the Member States. Due to this, the Commission has encouraged consultation at national and European levels.

Member States have also emphasized the need to coordinate the choice of permanent time with their neighbouring countries. With such discussions, the Member States seek to ensure a coordinated approach among the Member States and avoid the fragmentation of time zones in Europe.

In other words, coordination is a matter of importance to advance the acceptance of this file in EU.

Coordination between Nordic and Baltic countries

Late 2019 Finland launched a process with it's neighboring countries, with the aim to discuss possibilities to coordinate common approach that could facilitate decisions of each country regarding their permanent time in order to avoid 'time zone patchworks'. Participating countries have experienced the discussions very helpful and pragmatic. The Finnish valuation tool was used to create common scenarios for the basis of the discussion. The following countries have participated in the discussions: Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, Sweden, Norway and Iceland as well as Åland. This memorandum contains the outcome of the discussions as well as a common conclusions acting as a recommendation for participating countries and as an example for the Commission and other EU Member States.

In order to facilitate discussions, Finland had a research made about alternative options for a common approach. In the research conducted by VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland Ltd., researchers examined which time zone(s) would be the recommended

[1] COM/2018/639 final

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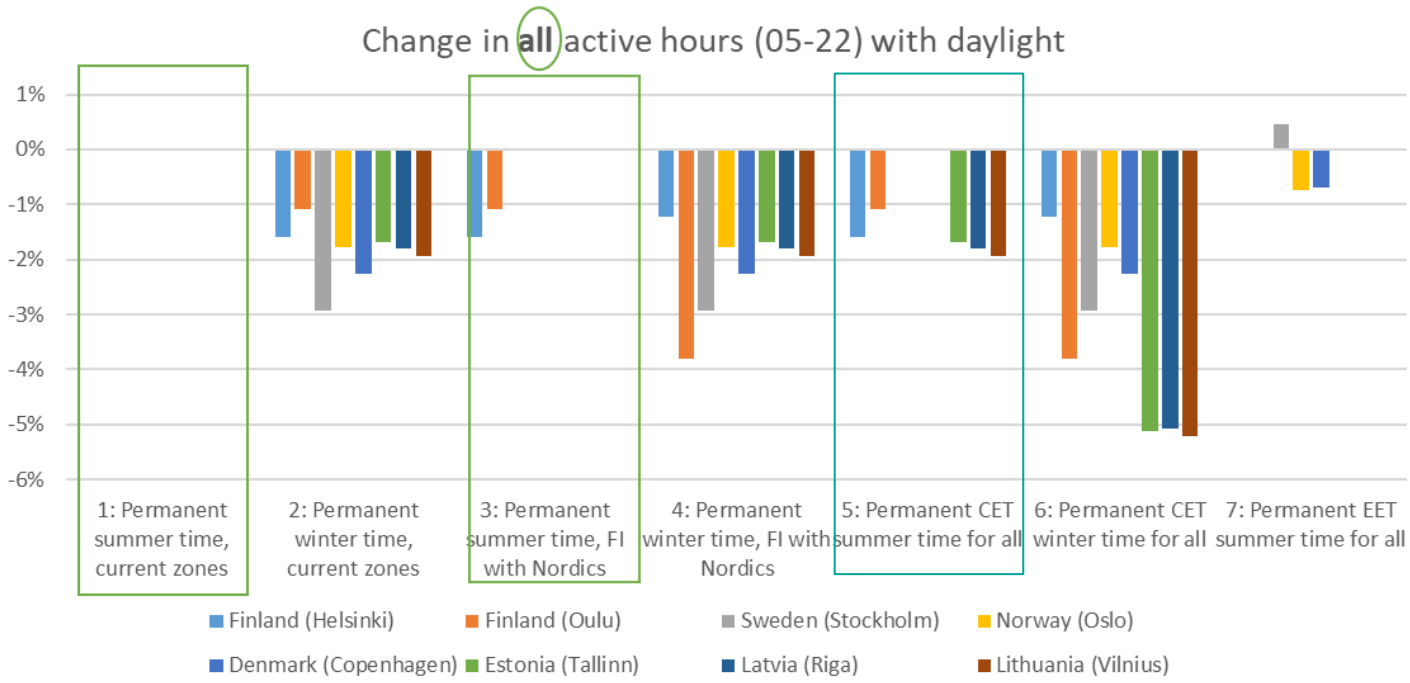
choice that most countries could see fitting their objectives in the Nordic and Baltic countries if daylight saving time was abolished. The Finnish evaluation tool[2] was used to create common scenarios.

The conclusion of the research was that the choice between scenarios is a choice between morning and evening hours with daylight. The choice between them is essentially a political decision: the research also found that there is no strong scientific evidence to choose either over another.

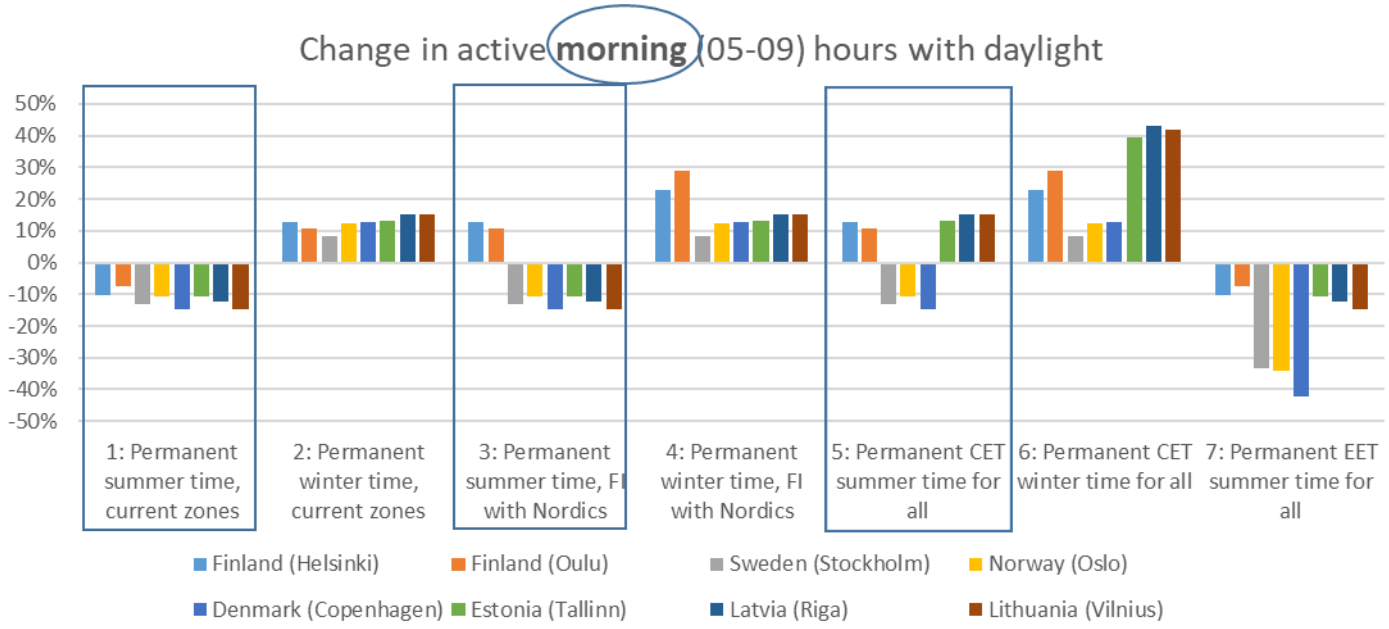
The scenarios developed for the coordination focused on the daylight during active hours (from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m.). Daylight is a significant factor due to outdoor physical activities, road safety, energy consumption and possible health benefits – although it is not the only aspect to be taken into account when assessing the question.

Active hours with daylight by scenario and location

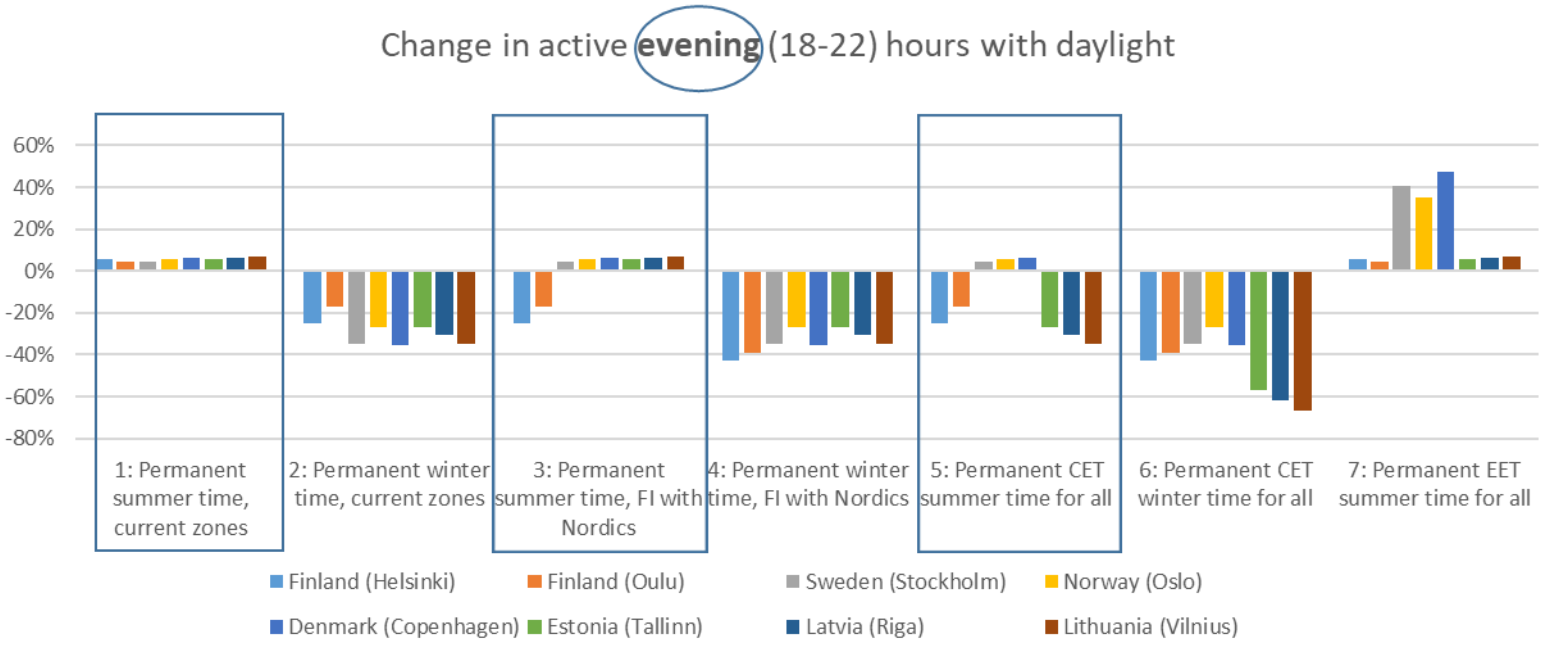


[2] Finland has developed a Time System Impacts Excel tool that is a simple framework to assess and compare the potential impacts of different alternative time systems. The evaluation tool is available to anyone at https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/project?tunnus=LVM070:00/2018 (documents--> publications and reports)

Active morning hours by scenario and loction



Active evening hours by scenarion and local



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Conclusions from coordination discussions

Out of the seven different scenarios, scenarios 1, 3 and 5 were seen most prominent to form the basis for the countries individual decisions regarding permanent time. These scenarios would in practice mean countries deciding between time zones CET+1 and CET+2 as their permanent time, except for Iceland which has had permanent time in place (UTC) already since 1968. The discussions showed therefore no need for any unforeseeable changes to current alternatives the countries were studying. There is therefore no anticipation that the decisions of each country could lead to further fragmentation.

However, all countries did agree that it would be beneficial for their own decision making to have view on the choices of others in advance before drawing their final decisions. This foreknowledge was seen easiest to be shared during the council decision making process. This would mean that at the same time that EU Member States express their position to the acceptance of the act, they would also inform others of their position regarding their choice on permanent time. In most countries the procedure in national decision making would this way also include the opinions of the parlaments.

Recommendation for the Commission and other Member States

1. Commission and Council together with the Member States should continue the work on this file in order to achieve as much progress as possible to abolish seasonal time changes.

2. Well-coordinated approach across the EU is crucial in order to avoid time zone patchworks. It is important to find practical solutions for avoiding any further fragmentation of time zones in Europe, despite the fact that the directive proposal does not cover time zones directly. Baltic and Nordic cooperation model and experiences could be used to encourage and facilitate this work.

3. When making the implementing decisions regarding the permanent time zones, Member States would greatly benefit from information from other countries about their preferred options. Therefore Member States should share as part of the Council decision making process foreknowledge about their preferred option for permanent time zones reflecting their final decisions.

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