

Medvedev Modernizes Time Zones

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David Cameron should envy Dmitry Medvedev: The Russian president [decided](#) this week to move his whole country one time zone further east — something the British prime minister also wants to do, but faces stiff opposition over.

Cameron has come under fire from traditionalists who despise giving up Greenwich Mean Time or GMT for "Berlin Time," and from Scottish lawmakers who argue that in the north the sun will rise at only 10 a.m.

But in Russia's nine time zones, the clocks will move forward one hour to daylight-saving time on March 27 and then stay there next fall while most other countries move their clocks back to winter time.

Moscow will thus move from being three hours ahead of London and two hours from Berlin to four and three hours, respectively, aligning with Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Persian Gulf states.

When the move is implemented in the world's largest country by landmass it will create a massive gap in the global map of states that reset their clocks twice yearly.

But it is likely to please the populace, as daylight-saving time, introduced by the Soviet Union only in 1981, has remained largely unpopular in Russia.

A Levada poll found last March that 46 percent of Russians want to scrap summer time, while only 36 percent prefer resetting clocks in the spring and fall. The rest were undecided.

Critics say the time change is harmful for health, a notion Medvedev played up when he announced the decision during a meeting with young scientists.

"We all are used to cursing this because it really hurts the human biological rhythm. We're all annoyed when we either oversleep or wake up too early," he was quoted by Interfax as saying.

Foreign travelers may be the ones to face inconveniences over what national media dubbed "eternal summer time," as time differences with Russia will differ depending on the month.

For example, New York will be nine hours behind in the winter but eight hours in the summer.

The boundary with Norway, a short strip of land in the Arctic, will mark a three-hour time difference in the winter and a two-hour one in the summer because the local region of Murmansk observes Moscow time.

And people in Kaliningrad, the Russian exclave on the Baltic Sea, will have to adapt during the summer to being two hours ahead of their western neighbor Poland and one hour ahead of their eastern neighbor Lithuania, with whom it currently shares a time zone.

Some in Kaliningrad fear that this will further isolate the region from its neighbors, from whom they are already separated by EU visa requirements.

"I would rather be in line with Europe. Just look at the map, we are on the same meridian as Warsaw," said Vladimir Korolyov, deputy head of the liberal Yabloko party in the region.

But he said he still supported the abolition of daylight-saving time. "This was always against nature," Korolyov said by telephone.

Sergei Kravchenko, a Moscow-based psychologist, said Medvedev was right to keep time distances within the country at a minimum.

Kravchenko, who studies the effect of time on people, argued that the key aim should be to have as little differences as possible. "If everybody wakes up and goes to bed at the same time, it helps people feel more united," he said.

Medvedev started his time initiative in his 2009 state-of-the-nation address, when he proposed not just abolishing daylight-saving time, but also reducing the number of time zones.

Last year, the country discarded two of its formerly 11 time zones by moving regions on the Volga and in the Far East one hour closer to Moscow time.

As a result, Russia now stretches over eight contiguous time zones from St. Petersburg to the Pacific, with Kaliningrad making an extra ninth zone.

When he introduced the changes last March, Medvedev said he would study the possibility of further reducing the number of time zones, but called scrapping daylight-saving time unlikely because this could isolate the country.

But the president apparently reversed the decision, choosing a more popular path, experts said.

"The proposals [to abolish time zones] turned out to be a dead end," said Arkady Tishkov, deputy director of the Academy of Sciences' Geography Institute.

Tishkov, who was part of an expert group that advised the Kremlin on the issue, said further reforms had clashed with the interest of governors in the Far East.

"Making further changes is maybe not very popular before the elections," he said.

The country will have State Duma elections in December and the presidential election in March 2012.

A Kremlin spokeswoman refused to comment when asked whether further time zone changes were planned.

The March Levada poll found that 44 percent are in favor of keeping time zones as they are and just 33 percent prefer changing them further.

Tishkov also said moving clocks forward was better than moving them backward because it results in more daylight.

"In Moscow and St. Petersburg, we will have 8 percent more daylight for more than 10 percent of the total population," he said.

Moving clocks backward, closer to Moscow time, triggered protests last year, most notably in Samara and in the Far East, where residents said the change threatens to boost crime rates and people's depression.

In Kamchatka, where winter days are short, a rally of 3,000 people was held last December against the time change, and reports said last month that authorities criticized a local performance of Cinderella of triggering "unhealthy emotions," because of the scene where the king sets the clock back an hour to keep Cinderella at the ball.

Meanwhile, it seems that the abolition of daylight-saving time is a done deal for Medvedev — and, unlike the British prime minister, he had no significant opposition to square off with over it.

The Duma last year considered a bill to abandon it, but parliamentary speaker Boris Gryzlov said Thursday that no such law was needed.

"The President has spoken — now it just needs to be done," he was quoted as saying

by Interfax.

Medvedev's aide Arkady Dvorkovich said the change would be implemented by a governmental decree.

Still, even in the ruling party, not everybody agrees. "I personally liked daylight-saving time. You wake up, and suddenly a new world has started," said Sergei Markov, Duma deputy for United Russia.

But Markov added that the decision also had a very positive political signal. "At last Russia has done something on its own instead of just repeating what others do," he said.

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