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Siberian City Rallies Against Putin's 'Eternal Winter'

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The recent change to permanent winter time has crippled social, economic and cultural life in the Zabaikalsky region.

Locals in the city of Chita in eastern Siberia have staged a rare public protest against the Kremlin-approved decision to introduce "permanent wintertime" in Russia.

After having practiced daylight saving time since 1917, Russia canceled it in 2011, opting to remain in standard time throughout the year. But this October, it reversed the decision, switching permanently to daylight saving time.

The recent change to permanent winter time has crippled social, economic and cultural life in the Zabaikalsky region, protesters in regional capital Chita said, local news website Zabmedia.ru reported.

With nighttime starting at 4 p.m., locals are reluctant to shop after work — hurting business,

farmers have to work with flashlights, and children avoid playing outdoors, protesters said.

The only form of entertainment locals have left to enjoy is the "zombie-box," also known as television, angry Chita residents were cited as saying.

The rally reportedly gathered upward of 1,000 people, a rare occasion for protests outside Moscow. Organizers ran out of pens to sign the petition against "permanent wintertime."

The petition is to be forwarded to the federal government and the State Duma, neither of which has so far commented on the protest.

The Zabaikalsky government, in an indirect recognition of the issue, said earlier this month it was drafting a recommendation for regional employers to push the start of the workday to a relatively early 8 a.m. in a bid to let the locals catch a bit of winter sunshine.

The Kremlin never offered a comprehensive explanation for changing the time twice in four years.

Apparently reflecting this, the population remains split on the "permanent wintertime," with 33 percent endorsing the move, 35 percent supporting annual clock adjustment and 19 percent favoring "permanent summertime," the state-run pollster VTsIOM said last month.

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