

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

European Committee C

ENDING SEASONAL CHANGES OF TIME
(REASONED OPINION)

Monday 12 November 2018

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:

Chair: STEVE McCABE

† Costa, Alberto (*South Leicestershire*) (Con)
† Creasy, Stella (*Walthamstow*) (Lab/Co-op)
† Drax, Richard (*South Dorset*) (Con)
† Esterson, Bill (*Sefton Central*) (Lab)
† Grady, Patrick (*Glasgow North*) (SNP)
† Harris, Rebecca (*Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty's Treasury*)
† Jones, Darren (*Bristol North West*) (Lab)
† O'Brien, Neil (*Harborough*) (Con)
† Pawsey, Mark (*Rugby*) (Con)

† Smith, Nick (*Blaenau Gwent*) (Lab)
† Tolhurst, Kelly (*Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy*)
† Tomlinson, Michael (*Mid Dorset and North Poole*) (Con)
† West, Catherine (*Hornsey and Wood Green*) (Lab)

Gail Poulton, Daniel Schlappa, *Committee Clerks*

† **attended the Committee**

European Committee C

Monday 12 November 2018

[STEVE McCABE *in the Chair*]

Ending Seasonal Changes of Time (Reasoned Opinion)

[Relevant document: European Union Document No. 12118/18.]

4.30 pm

The Chair: For all but the very experienced hands who know about it, perhaps I should explain the procedure. First, I will ask whether a member of the European Scrutiny Committee wishes to make a statement for no more than five minutes on the Committee's decision to refer the document for debate. The Minister will then make a statement for up to 10 minutes. A short period for questions to the Minister will follow; I stress that they should be questions, as in Question Time, not an attempt to have a debate. After the questions, there will be a short period for debate. Our sitting is destined to end no later than 7 pm, although I should make it clear that we are not obliged to sit until then—we can certainly end earlier. It is a quaint process.

Does a member of the European Scrutiny Committee wish to make a statement?

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I will abide by your strictures and endeavour not to keep us here until 7 o'clock.

The proposed directive would end seasonal clock changes across the European Union. At this delicate moment in the Brexit negotiations, let me briefly set out why the European Scrutiny Committee recommends that the House issue a reasoned opinion on the proposed directive.

Today's debate is not about the merits of seasonal clock changes, on which there are undoubtedly a variety of views across the House—personally, I very much welcomed the extra hour in bed a few weeks ago. It is about whether the EU is justified in ending seasonal clock changes throughout the EU and preventing individual member states from deciding whether to reintroduce them. It relates to the very essence of sovereignty and reminds us of the Brexit debate in the run-up to the referendum in 2016. There is a risk that the EU might come across as a former Prime Minister described it:

“too big, too bossy and too interfering.”—[*Official Report*, 4 June 2014; Vol. 582, c. 24.]

In his “State of the Union” speech in September, Jean-Claude Juncker announced:

“Clock-changing must stop. Member States should themselves decide whether their citizens live in summer or winter time. It is a question of subsidiarity.”

However, in reality the proposed directive gives member states little more than a stark and binary choice between permanent summertime or winter time all year round. According to the European Commission's timetable, that choice must be made in 2019.

A reasoned opinion would signify that the House does not consider that the proposed EU legislation complies with the principle of subsidiarity, under which the EU should act only where there is clear added value and where similar benefits cannot be achieved by member states acting at a national, regional or local level. The reasoned opinion proposed by the European Scrutiny Committee is annexed to our report; should this Committee agree, the House will be asked formally to approve it so that it can be sent to the EU institutions by tomorrow's deadline. The House of Lords agreed it on 24 October.

Why is there haste to legislate now? It may be partly due to the European Commission's wish to respond to a resolution of the European Parliament in February that called for a review of the existing summertime arrangements, but also underlined the need to maintain a unified EU time regime, even after the end of biannual time changes. The Commission launched a public consultation in July that gave a choice between two options: preserving the status quo and requiring all member states to change their clocks at the same time, or abandoning seasonal time changes altogether. Some 4.6 million citizens responded, and a large majority—84%—indicated that they opposed the current system of changing the clocks twice a year.

The European Scrutiny Committee considers that the large majority is not as impressive as it may first appear. First, three member states—Germany, France and Austria—accounted for nearly 85% of the total responses, meaning that it can hardly be seen as genuinely representative or provide a sufficient evidence base for the views of all member states.

Secondly, the consultation presented only two possible options. The Commission did not seek views on a third option allowing each member state to decide for itself whether to keep seasonal time changes, and limiting EU action to co-ordinating the dates. The European Scrutiny Committee considers that member states are far better placed than the EU to weigh the impact of seasonal time changes on different regions and to determine where the overall national interest lies.

Finally, the European Commission accepts that the choice of time zone is a sovereign matter for each member state. That means that the proposed directive would not, and indeed cannot, remove all time differentials between member states. The European Scrutiny Committee cannot, therefore, see an internal market justification for the EU to remove the ability of individual member states, now or in the future, to apply seasonal time variations.

The United Kingdom will leave the European Union in March 2019, but the proposed directive matters because the United Kingdom may be under an obligation to implement EU laws that take effect during any transition period. For that reason, it is important that the House of Commons continues to make its voice heard while it still has the means and opportunity to do so.

With your indulgence, Mr McCabe, as this is likely to be the last ever reasoned opinion in the House of Commons, I place on record my thanks, and those of the European Scrutiny Committee, to the Clerks, the Clerk advisers and the whole Committee team, who advise Members with such skill, dedication and expertise. I urge Members to support this reasoned opinion.

The Chair: I call the Minister to make the opening statement.

4.37 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole for explaining the reason for today's debate. I also thank the European Scrutiny Committee for its report and for requesting a debate on the Commission's proposal to discontinue the practice of daylight saving time. I am grateful to all members of the European Scrutiny Committee for their work. I was once on that Committee, so it is a pleasure to stand here as a Minister and be quizzed by Members.

I assure the Committee that the Government take these matters very seriously. Let me be clear: the UK Government have no plans to change daylight saving time, and Ministers are actively working to convince other member states to block the proposal. My colleague the right hon. Lord Henley was at the EU meeting in Graz in Austria recently to set out the concerns of the Government and the UK Parliament, of which there are many, and to work with other member states on the proposal. Portugal and Greece supported the Government's position at the EU meeting in Austria, while a further five member states had not reached a conclusion.

On the background of the proposals, for some time several member states in the eastern part of the EU have been lobbying for the abolition of daylight saving time. In response to lobbying from those member states and increased interest from the European Parliament, the Commission agreed to review the summertime directive. That review included a public consultation, which took place in July and August this year. According to the Commission, the result sent a clear message: of the 4.6 million respondents, 84% no longer want the clocks to change. Yet, as is often the case with closer scrutiny, that one statistic does not reveal the full picture. Nearly 85% of respondents came from just three member states, as my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole highlighted. Despite that, President Juncker wasted no time in declaring in his "State of the Union" address that the clock changes must stop, and that the Commission would introduce proposals regarding the summertime directive.

Turning to the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, in areas of shared competence, such as that under discussion, the European Union can introduce proposals but must do so within the constraints established in article 5 of the treaty on the functioning of the European Union—namely, that such European Union action must be both necessary and add value in a way that would not be better achieved by the member states. There is a crucial difference between the proposal under discussion and previous similar ones: although they sought to advance the harmonisation of time in line with the objectives of the treaties, this new proposal starts from an existing position of harmonisation.

In that context, any proposal seeking to make changes to the current arrangements should be supported by clear evidence of the benefit for the Union, member states and their citizens. Yet the Commission's impact assessment provided absolutely no detail of the potential impact of the changes it proposed, beyond the summary of literature that already exists. In my view, that literature is inconclusive.

It may be reasonable to suggest that the work would be better carried out by the member states, but the Commission's timetable is unworkable and would not allow member states to conduct those activities with the necessary rigour and depth. The Commission states in its own proposal that the current body of evidence is inconclusive on energy saving, overall health impacts and implications for road safety, and that technological advances in agriculture have largely offset the destructive effect of biannual time changes.

Providing a reasonable timeframe for member states to carry out a proper consultation and impact assessment would have gone some way to remedy the lack of evidence. However, under the current proposal, member states are expected to conclude the work and all the necessary domestic measures to implement the directive by 1 April 2019. On those points, the Government share the concerns of the European Scrutiny Committee. The European Commission has not presented a compelling case on the need to legislate on this subject in order to further advance the objectives of the treaty.

The Commission believes that the proposal does not go beyond what is necessary to continue to safeguard a properly functioning internal market as regards time arrangements, yet the existing directive already ensures harmonisation of time across the Union and the Commission does not demonstrate how the proposal would enhance that.

Let me conclude by reaffirming the Government's position. We have no plans to change daylight saving time and we are working with other member states to oppose the proposal, because we believe the current system works for citizens in the UK. I again thank the European Scrutiny Committee for instigating this interesting discussion, and for the valuable points raised in the report.

The Chair: We have until 5.37 for questions, although we do not have to take all that time. We do not want speeches or statements.

Michael Tomlinson: I am grateful to the Minister for the clarity she has given in her statement. As she knows, the United Kingdom had one of the lowest response rates to the consultation. Does she have any information on how many responses were submitted from the United Kingdom, and how much support there was for each of the options presented?

Kelly Tolhurst: I do not have the particular detail of how many respondents there were from the UK, but I am more than willing to share that afterwards with my hon. Friend.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): In her statement the Minister said that the Government have many concerns, but I did not pick up what they were. She mentioned some of the things that the Commission said, but could she spell out the Government's concerns about the proposed change in time rather than the procedural stuff?

Kelly Tolhurst: My statement clearly laid out the Government's concerns. First, the proposed timeframe is not acceptable. Secondly, we are not proposing to change summertime. Thirdly, it should be for member

[Kelly Tolhurst]

states to make such decisions, but this directive starts from a position of harmonisation. Those are just some of the many concerns.

Michael Tomlinson: Does the Minister know, or could she find out in due course, whether the Government intend to carry out their own consultation, given that we might be obliged to implement the directive if it sticks to its current timetable?

Kelly Tolhurst: Currently we do not intend carry out a consultation. We are working with other member states to block the proposal. Obviously, we will respect the implementation of EU rules while we are still a member but at this moment in time we do not want to consult because we are fundamentally against the proposed clock changes.

Bill Esterson: To clarify: with my previous question, I hoped that the Minister would tell us the Government's concerns about the impact of the change on the economy, society, business, the voluntary sector, schools and other areas. Could she spell those out?

Kelly Tolhurst: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his clarification. He raises an incredibly important point. One of the reasons that we are against the proposal is that we do not know what its impacts will be. The European Commission has not, as far as we are concerned, properly assessed them, and we have not been able to do so, either, in such a short timeframe. To implement this change in such a short timeframe would not be practical when we do not know the impact it would have across the country.

Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab): If the EU proceeds with this proposed change but the UK does not, will the Minister confirm whether Northern Ireland and Ireland would have different times, and what would that mean for the people of Northern Ireland?

Kelly Tolhurst: That is why we are having this debate. The United Kingdom is working with member states in the negotiations, and others have joined us in opposing the proposal. Some member states have yet to give their firm position on whether they will accept the proposal. Responsibility for the time zone is, of course, reserved to Great Britain. If we ever needed to change the clocks, we would, obviously, consult widely within the United Kingdom before making any decision.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister says that the Government are working with other member states to block the proposal but, further to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West, what will the plan of action be if they are not successful in doing so?

Kelly Tolhurst: The Government's course of action at the moment is to be successful—we are still hopeful that we will be able to block the proposal, thanks to what I have outlined in my statement—but if not, we would work with the devolved administrations and would consult widely. One of the reasons for our objection is the timeframe, which is very short, and other member

states have said that other elements are completely unworkable. We have support from different member states and they share some of our concerns.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Does the Minister think that the provision in the Bill presented by the hon. Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris) in the last Parliament but one—that the clocks should go forward to Greenwich mean time plus one hour in the winter and to GMT plus two hours in the summer—would be a good idea, as that would reduce road traffic accidents and save lives? Does she think a similar proposal might be made in the future?

Kelly Tolhurst: As hon. Members will know, during the second world war, we had GMT plus two hours at one point, before that changed in 1968 to 1971, and again in 1972. I take the hon. Gentleman's point; many Members of Parliament and other bodies have suggested that a change in the time zone could have an impact on road safety. Currently, we are not consulting within the UK on whether to change the clocks; we are working with other EU member states to block the proposal, full stop.

Stella Creasy: It would help to understand what the Minister's plans are to alert the public, should she be unsuccessful in blocking the proposal. Could she tell us a little bit about what work has been done? For example, there is a very real risk that if she is not successful, the people of Northern Ireland and Ireland could face different time zones across that border. What work has she done to alert people to that consequence, given the short timetable that she has set out?

Kelly Tolhurst: First, it is not the timetable I have set out, but the European Commission's timetable. Fundamentally, that is one of the reasons we object to the proposal, because we do not feel the timeframe is workable. That is obviously backed up by other member states. I have written to the devolved Administrations to get their position. Given the short timeframe, we need to work. It has been accepted by many that a delay of two years would be preferable for member states to do the necessary consultation to implement any potential new directive that comes from the European Union. At that time, once a decision is made, we will look to ensure that we communicate with people.

Bill Esterson: Following on from the initial question that my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow asked, can the Minister spell out for us what the procedure is for this proposal being blocked, if the reasoned opinion is supported by the Committee today? How does that get support? Is it a system of majority voting, do we have a veto or is it another system? Can the Minister tell us how this would be allowed to go through or stopped, whichever is more likely, and give us a few scenarios?

Kelly Tolhurst: Obviously, we are at the stage where member states are debating the proposal and making their positions clear. What I have already outlined is that we are working with other member states to get the European Commission to change its proposals. At such time, there will be a position where all member states will either agree or disagree with the proposal.

Stella Creasy: The Minister says she has written to the devolved Administrations as the means by which she is alerting the public in Northern Ireland and Ireland about these issues. Obviously, the devolved Administration in Northern Ireland does not exist at the moment; this House has just passed legislation to give powers to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to issue guidance. Can the Minister tell us what guidance the Secretary of State has issued to the Northern Ireland civil servants on this matter?

Kelly Tolhurst: On specific guidance, as I have already said, at this moment we have alerted devolved Administrations to this proposal. We are working to block the proposal and a decision on guidance has yet to be made. I have written to the devolved Administrations to ask for their opinions; I have not issued any guidance.

Michael Tomlinson: Further to the question asked by the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent about his preference on what the time changes should be, does the Minister agree that it should be up to this House to debate each of those proposals, and that that is the whole point of this reasoned opinion? It is not for the EU to dictate to us what our time arrangements should be; it is up to this House to debate them fully in due course. That is the whole point of issuing the reasoned opinion.

Kelly Tolhurst: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. I agree that this House should decide whether we are to change our clocks. That is why the Government's position is that, as it stands, we have no plans to change the clocks for summertime. That is why we are working with other member states to try to effectively block this proposal in the European Commission.

Stella Creasy: I am sorry to press the Minister further, but obviously there is no devolved Administration in Northern Ireland at this moment. She says she has written to the devolved Administrations, but when it comes to the question of a different time zone across the Irish and Northern Irish border, will she clarify who she has written to? Given that the Secretary of State can now issue guidance to civil servants in Northern Ireland about what to do, is the Minister confirming that that has not actually happened yet?

Kelly Tolhurst: As I have said, there is not yet something to issue guidance on, because a decision has not yet been taken. With regard to the matter of time zones and Northern Ireland, the hon. Lady is quite right that there is no functioning Executive in Northern Ireland, but the time zone is actually a function for Great Britain; it is something that we have here in Westminster. I have written to the other devolved Administrations to ask their opinion; of course, any particular time difference between Ireland and Northern Ireland going forward would be something that we would be addressing as these talks progress. As I have told the hon. Lady categorically, I have issued no guidance to Northern Ireland.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): May I just add my little point? Frankly, it is none of the EU's business.

Kelly Tolhurst: Thank you.

Nick Smith: May I ask the Minister if she thinks it is a good idea to bring clocks forward to save lives?

Kelly Tolhurst: First, I would say that it is rather an unfair question to ask me whether a clock change would save people's lives. If the hon. Gentleman was able to provide me with evidence to suggest that that might be the case, it might alter my personal position. I highlight to him the fact that the Government's position is clear: we are not looking to change the clocks as they stand at the moment.

The Chair: Let me point out that we are not engaged in a debate at this stage. That comes later; we are still in questions to the Minister.

Stella Creasy: Given what the Minister has just told us, can she confirm whom she has written to in Northern Ireland, and when and how she intends to tell the people of Northern Ireland, given that there is not a devolved Administration at present to talk to, about the possibility of this happening?

The Chair: I should just point out that we are not supposed to repeatedly ask the same question. I shall invite the Minister to respond, but I would ask hon. Members to bear in mind that we do not repeatedly put the same question.

Kelly Tolhurst: I have written, as a Minister, to the devolved Administration. My officials have written to the officials in Northern Ireland. I have not issued any direct guidance. I hope that that finally answers the hon. Lady's question.

Nick Smith: May I just ask the Minister to take a peek at the evidence provided by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, which quite clearly supports the case I have made today and which may influence her thinking in future?

Kelly Tolhurst: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his clarification. I still believe that his original question was slightly unfair, but as he will know I do engage, as the Minister with responsibility for consumer protection, with organisations concerned with accident prevention. I recently had a forum with those organisations; we are looking at ways in which we can protect consumers and the general public.

The Chair: If there are no further questions, we will now move on to the debate on the motion.

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That this Committee considers that the draft Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on discontinuing seasonal changes of time and repealing Directive 2000/84/EC (European Union Document No. 12118/18 and Addendum 1) does not comply with the principle of subsidiarity for the reasons set out in Chapter 1 of the Forty-Second Report of the European Scrutiny Committee (HC 301-xli); and, in accordance with Article 6 of Protocol No. 2 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, instructs the Clerk of the House to forward this reasoned opinion to the Presidents of the European Institutions.—
(*Kelly Tolhurst.*)

4.58 pm

Bill Esterson: Well, what an interesting set of sub-questions. We made some progress and got answers in the end; I thank the Minister for that. I will offer just a few additional thoughts.

I was surprised that the Minister said that the Government had not carried out an impact assessment. I gently suggest that they might need to do so because, on the basis of her other answers, we do not appear to be in a position to stop the Commission issuing the directive if it decides to go ahead. That might be helpful to the whole country, whether on the island of Ireland or not.

Opposition Members were trying to be helpful with some of our questions. The questions my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent asked about the safety of putting the clocks forward and daylight saving time are actually part of the argument to the Commission. They make the point well that we have concerns about what the Commission is proposing. We were being helpful.

There are some health studies about this matter, and I hope that the Government will look into them. A Nobel prize was awarded to chronobiologists this year, and additional work will be carried out to indicate the health benefits or otherwise of changing the clocks—whether the clocks should change or not. I hope that the Government look at that. One issue is disruption to the circadian rhythm—did I pronounce that correctly? [HON. MEMBERS: “Yes.”] Good; I got that one right. The issue is whether moving the clocks helps or not. What is the impact on the circadian rhythm and health? These are important points.

There are points about the impact on the economy. When we were initially looking at daylight saving time and double summer time, for example, we were in a different era. The importance of the agricultural sector in this country and the impact on agricultural workers were of a different nature, but we still have to consider that. We still have to consider the impact on postal workers, on children going to school and on commuters in the early mornings and whether there is an increase in the number of road traffic accidents when the clocks change. These are all important points that need to be taken on board.

We can start to look at evidence from those countries that have made the change that the Commission suggests. The one piece of evidence that my researcher was able to find relates to Iceland, which has been in a position of removing daylight saving time for some years now. Concerns were raised, in the one English language commentary we found on the matter, about the gap between solar and social time and teenagers dropping out. There is a whole other debate to be had on whether teenagers should go to school later in the day, but that is for another Committee on another occasion.

However, there are concerns about health and about the impact on workers. There is some evidence of small energy savings to be had, whichever way round we go.

Michael Tomlinson: The hon. Gentleman raises some interesting points about whether we should change the clocks and consider any safety aspects, as was suggested earlier, but this debate is about whether we should issue

a reasoned opinion and whether we agree that it should be this House that determines that, or the EU. What is his position on that?

Bill Esterson: This debate is about those things, but it is interesting that the documents that we were given cover in some detail all the points that I have raised—without the background, it is very difficult to go forward. I was about to move on—the hon. Gentleman’s intervention was quite timely—to quote paragraph 1.16 of our papers, where his own Committee quotes the Commission, which

“acknowledges, ‘evidence is not conclusive as to whether the benefits of summer time arrangements outweigh the inconveniences linked to a biannual change of time’, leaving room to doubt that a fully harmonised approach is necessary.”

The reasoned opinion that we give back must be as strongly evidenced as possible, if we are to have as much influence as possible. In the absence of certainty of evidence that a change is a good thing, we want to be as strong as possible, along with our allies and partners across the European Union, in influencing the Commission’s final decision.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow was absolutely right to push as strongly as she did the points about what happens in Ireland. She might also have mentioned Gibraltar, of course. It would be very difficult to see differences on either side of those two land borders. These points should go back to the Commission in as strong a manner as possible.

We are due to leave the European Union on 29 March, as the hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole said—I know that he is very passionate that we do leave on that day. As things stand, we are leaving on 29 March. I hope that there will be a good deal, not the inadequate one being put forward by the Prime Minister—it has little to no support from anybody in her own Cabinet, let alone anywhere else—but we absolutely must not have no deal. If we do get a deal, there will be a transitional period. If this goes ahead, we will have to be ready for it, as with so many requirements coming from the European Union. I hope that the Government will do the work necessary to prepare us for that eventuality.

These questions were raised by the European Scrutiny Committee and are set out in paragraphs 1.19 and 1.20. The Minister is well aware of the concerns raised today. I hope that she will go away and ensure that the Government do that preparatory work and carry out their own impact assessment. Perhaps she will write to members of the Committee with her findings as soon as possible, so that the work we have done today is followed up as thoroughly as possible.

5.5 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. We are in the rare scenario of having a certain degree of consensus on a European matter, at least regarding the question of the reasoned opinion being submitted. That is largely because, as the hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole said at the start, this is actually a technical matter about where the decision-making power for this sort of thing should lie. I look forward to the day when an independent Scotland takes its place as a member of the European Union and is able to exercise its subsidiarity on the question of time zones.

Richard Drax: I remind the hon. Gentleman that if Scotland does join the EU, it will not be an independent state—far from it. It will be enslaved once more, and far worse than it is now.

Patrick Grady: That remains to be seen. We will take an independent, sovereign decision to become a member of the European Union. That is one of the definitions of an independent country these days; we can tell that a country is independent if it can choose whether to take part in an international body such as the European Union, the United Nations or Her Majesty's Commonwealth.

This debate is not really about the merits of British summertime; it is about where the decision should lie. In general, our position is that daylight saving time is very important to the Scottish economy, particularly the rural economy. If it was to be abandoned, there would be an impact on crop yields, farmers' working hours and children travelling to school. The hosts of radio talk shows would be most affected, as they get two bites at this cherry every year by getting people to phone in with their powerful and strongly held opinions on the matter—perhaps some of the hon. Members who have contributed today phone in as well. Everyone has an opinion, so nothing really changes, because no two will ever agree.

I support the points that have been made. Once we leave the European Union—if the United Kingdom finally leaves—there will be nothing to stop there being different time zones across the island of Ireland, because the United Kingdom will no longer be in a position to have the kind of influence that the Minister has been speaking about, to work with other member states to come to an agreement that this is not necessary. Once we are out, we will have no say in those discussions whatsoever. In between times, as the Labour spokesperson mentioned, we may or may not be going through some sort of transition period, and this may or may not impact on the whole of the United Kingdom or Northern Ireland—who absolutely knows? In many ways this demonstrates the utter mess that the Government have left us in. I therefore echo the calls made for clarity and consultation.

I note that the hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole said that this would be the last of these European Committees and submissions of reasoned opinions. I think that remains to be seen.

5.9 pm

Kelly Tolhurst: I thank all hon. Members for this interesting and important debate, and the European Scrutiny Committee for its report. I welcome the opportunity to discuss these proposals from the Commission and the Government's position.

I will highlight a few of the issues raised by hon. Members. We are indeed leaving the European Union next year, as the hon. Member for Sefton Central was right to highlight. He is also absolutely right to request, if there were any proposals to change the times, that the Government carry out an impact assessment on energy, health, agriculture and road safety. The details would be available once the assessment was complete.

I am happy to update the European Scrutiny Committee on progress on this directive. The hon. Member for Walthamstow is absolutely right to raise the Northern Ireland issue, which the Government are taking into consideration; it would be very tricky and the Northern Irish people would not want to live in a different time zone from southern Ireland. We have to work through some of those issues, which is why we are keen to work with all member states to ensure that we can block the proposal.

The UK Government have no plans to change daylight saving time. The hon. Member for Glasgow North is right to raise the specific problems that the change would cause for the people of Scotland because of the daylight times there. Quite rightly, if the UK Government were ever in a position to make any changes, the Scottish people would be consulted. In this instance, we are acting as the United Kingdom and working with other member states to oppose the proposal. To recommend issuing a reasoned opinion is not a matter to be taken lightly. As hon. Members will be aware, the Lords EU Internal Market Sub-Committee conducted a subsidiarity assessment of the proposals, and many of its conclusions reflect the discussions that we have had today. It reinforces the assessment that by bringing forward the proposals in such a manner, the Commission has failed to act within the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.

Question put and agreed to.

5.12 pm

Committee rose.

