

Russia scraps winter time to cut stress

February 8 2011, by Stuart Williams

Russia will from next autumn stop putting its clocks back in winter, President Dmitry Medvedev said on Tuesday, in a move aimed at sparing Russians the stress of the annual time change.

The move means that Moscow will be four hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) all year round but one prominent analyst said it was a worrying sign Medvedev appeared more interested in window-dressing than real change.

"I have taken a decision to cancel the move to 'winter' time starting from autumn of the current year," Russian news agencies quoted Medvedev as telling a meeting in the Kremlin.

He explained the move by saying that the need to adapt to the time change each year was causing Russians "stress and illness".

"This really disturbs the human biorhythm," said Medvedev. "It's just irritating. People either oversleep or wake up early and don't know what to do with the hour," he explained.

His decision means that Russians will be able to enjoy extra daylight in the afternoons in the long winter months when the days are uncomfortably short in most of the main cities across the country.

"We will have prolonged daylight and I think this will be healthy for our country. People have asked me for this several times."

Somewhat bizarrely, he added: "And I'm not talking about unhappy cows or other animals who don't understand the time change and don't understand that the milkmaid is going to milk them at a different time."

Russia has nine time zones, stretching from Kaliningrad on the borders of the EU to Kamchatka in the Pacific.

Medvedev last year changed Kamchatka's time zone to eight hours rather than nine hours ahead of Moscow, a move that sparked street protests in the Far East region.

Time is a sensitive political issue in a country of extreme climate where some zones barely see sunlight in the winter and then enjoy "white nights" when it never gets dark in the summer.

Earlier this year, officials in the Kamchatka region tried to ban a New Year's production of "Cinderella" on the grounds it contained a subliminal political message about the contested Far East time zone changes.

The authorities were rattled when audiences at the theatre in the region's main city of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky furiously applauded a scene where the king turns the clock back to keep Cinderella at the ball.

The Soviet Union introduced a switch to summer time in 1981 and the issue has been the subject of lively discussion ever since.

"This great interest over the time change is a worrying signal," said leading independent political analyst Dmitry Oreshkin.

"It seems they are not managing to do serious things and do small things to create an illusion of activity.

"In Russia, winter time is not the biggest problem and in any case the government should be looking after this and not the president."

Medvedev has embarked on an ambitious plan to modernise Russia but analysts have said that well over half way into his term he has little progress to show so far.

The president's top economic advisor Arkady Dvorkovich said that Russian regions would see 7-17 percent more daylight in winter as a result of the decision.

"This is an important addition to the day which people will be able to use," he told the RIA Novosti news agency.

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