



The Centre for Cross Border Studies

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Submission to the House of Lords EU Internal Market Sub-Committee's inquiry on Discontinuing seasonal changes of time

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This response has been prepared by the Centre for Cross Border Studies as a contribution to the House of Lords EU Internal Market Sub-Committee's inquiry on discontinuing seasonal changes of time, and what such a proposal may entail in the context of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union.¹

About The Centre for Cross Border Studies

The Centre for Cross Border Studies (CCBS), based in Armagh, Northern Ireland, has a strong reputation as an authoritative advocate for cross-border cooperation and as a valued source of research, information and support for collaboration across borders on the island of Ireland, Europe and beyond.

The Centre empowers citizens and builds capacity and capability for cooperation across sectors and jurisdictional boundaries on the island of Ireland and further afield. This mission is achieved through research, expertise, partnership and experience in a wide range of cross-border practices and concerns (for more details visit www.crossborder.ie).

The response that follows, therefore, is closely informed by the Centre's particular knowledge of and experience in cross-border socio-economic development involving a range of sectors from both Northern Ireland and Ireland, including public bodies, business and civil society. **It is also informed by the Centre's ongoing work on the potential impacts of the UK's withdrawal from the EU on the ability of administrations, public bodies, business and civil society to engage in mutually beneficial North-South cooperation post-Brexit.**²

Crucially, the issue which is the specific focus of this inquiry has also been raised by members of an online discussion group hosted by the Centre's flagship "Border People" project, whose

¹ This response was authored by Dr Anthony Soares, Acting Director of the Centre for Cross Border Studies.

² The Centre has responded to a range of relevant parliamentary inquiries and produced a number of Briefing Papers, which can be consulted at <http://crossborder.ie/category/research-and-policy/policy/consultation-responses/> and <http://crossborder.ie/category/research-and-policy/policy/briefings/>.

longstanding objective has been “to help people who cross the border to live, work, study and retire”.³ Their views are reflected in this submission.

However, given the Centre’s main area of activity, our response will limit itself to questions 4, 8 and 9 in the Call for Evidence.

What would be the implications of a time border on the island of Ireland, or between Northern Ireland and Great Britain?

1. As is the case with so many other issues, the UK’s departure from the EU could result in divergences in relation to seasonal time changes that could have a direct impact on Northern Ireland, and place it in the invidious situation of creating a time border that would add further strains to the region’s delicate socio-political balance. Of itself, perhaps, a one-hour time difference between either Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, or between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, would not provoke sustained difficulties; but as yet another distinguishing marker between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, or between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, brought about as a result of Brexit, it would offend either nationalist or unionist sensitivities. In this sense, the implications of a time border cannot be isolated from its social and political implications.

2. For those living close to and/or regularly crossing the Ireland-Northern Ireland border, a time differential between Ireland and Northern Ireland – particularly a seasonal one occasioned by Northern Ireland retaining BST – would result in short to medium term disruption. As one member of the “Border People” discussion group noted, “The key issue here as I see it is not so much that ROI & NI might end up in different time zones per se [...], but that they could be in the same time zone for some of the year and in different time zones for the rest of the year”. However, again it must be stressed that what may of itself be low-level disruption will be in a context of wider disruption provoked by the various other potential consequences of Brexit.

3. The creation of different time zones between the two jurisdictions on the island of Ireland would impact, for example, on the timetabling of cross-border bus and rail services, and particularly on those accessing services on a cross-border basis. Cross-border access to services would have to be undertaken taking into account the additional obstacle of different opening hours, including in terms of essential services such as schools, colleges, health service providers, post offices, and retail.

4. Such obstacles would be felt most acutely by cross-border workers and employers, particularly workers with childcare or other care responsibilities. In the border region there are large-scale companies where up to a third of its workforce resides in the other jurisdiction. Whereas, for businesses, the additional administrative and logistical burden resulting from the creation of different time zones on the island of Ireland (or indeed between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK) may not be prohibitive (although the cumulative effect may be so for smaller enterprises or those operating on already tight profit-margins), time differences between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland would impact on their cross-border workforce and, potentially, on their productivity.

³ For more on the Border People project, which is supported by the North South Ministerial Council Joint Secretariat, among others, see <http://borderpeople.info/about-us>.

5. Although the creation of a time border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, or between Northern Ireland and Great Britain may not be considered as having any immediate implications for the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, this is not necessarily the case. Such a border would add to the stresses imposed on the Agreement as a result of the wider context resulting from Brexit, affecting the operation of relations within and between these islands. A time border would become yet another divergence between the EU and the UK, impacting on Northern Ireland's North-South and/or East-West relations.

Should the Government consult on the proposal? If so, how? How can the implications for different regions of the UK be captured?

6. Although wider consideration should be given to the proposal in light of a consultation (or consultations) of the public and interested parties, a difficulty arises if it were to be undertaken by the UK Government as this is a devolved matter in Northern Ireland. However, given the current absence of a functioning Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive, the Government should support the creation of a mechanism or employ an existing body to undertake a consultation in Northern Ireland, in a manner that would not impinge on devolution arrangements.

7. Any consultation, while allowing for citizens in the UK to voice their opinions, should be targeted at relevant representative business and civil society bodies, as well as major public service providers. It should also be prepared and undertaken in close cooperation and coordinated with regional bodies and devolved regions and administrations in the UK. For a consultation to more properly capture the implications for different regions of the UK, a cooperative approach between the Government and the different regions to its preparation is more likely to include questions attuned to the different regions' particular contexts. Given Northern Ireland's position as the only part of the UK with a land border with another jurisdiction, questions should be framed in order to offer the appropriate weight to this specific characteristic, and responses from Northern Ireland also considered in the same manner.

How can an appropriate level of input by the devolved administrations into the UK Government's approach be ensured?

8. To ensure an appropriate level of input by the devolved administrations, they must not only be involved in the preparation of any UK Government consultation on the matter, but also kept closely informed of any proposed UK Government policies in this area, and any decision reached with the maximum level of agreement. Moreover, given Northern Ireland's particular circumstances, it is crucial that any final decision on the UK's to abolish time changes or not must be fully in line with Northern Ireland's preferred position.

9. Of course, if a functioning Northern Ireland administration is not in place during this process, the UK Government must rely on the results of a consultation process, and adopt any final decision and implement any necessary legislation on the clear understanding that a newly functioning Northern Ireland devolved administration will have the right to adopt its own position.