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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: Project on "Development of Urban Adaptation Plans for cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants in Poland " and adaptation to climate change in urban areas
- Information from the Polish delegation

Delegations will find in the Annex an information note from the Polish delegation on the above subject, to be dealt with under "Any other business" at the Council (Environment) meeting on 19 June 2017.

Project on "Development of Urban Adaptation Plans for cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants in Poland " and adaptation to climate change in urban areas

- Information from the Polish delegation -

Climate change is one of the key contemporary environmental and socio-economic challenges. In the global context, climate change and its effects affect not only the quality of life, but may also have significant impact on the conditions for economic development, public safety and World order. Therefore, adaptation of society to ever-changing conditions is an essential part of the climate policy implemented on various levels. Adaptation actions in the individual sectors should be multidisciplinary, they will also involve different stakeholders and considerable financial resources.

The efficient adaptation to climate change is a response to contemporary threats, i.e.: deteriorating access to water, soil and forest degradation, decreasing production, desertification, famine and migrations. In this context, it is necessary, at the global, EU and national level, to strengthen the synergies between the actions undertaken as part of various international agreements, e.g. the Sendai framework for disaster risk reduction 2015-2030, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs) or United Nations Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), on biological diversity (CBD) and to combat desertification (UNCCD).

In order to achieve the effective and efficient adaptation policy it is necessary that the strategies and plans developed at the EU level were consistent with those being implemented at national, regional and local levels. When publishing in April 2013 the *EU strategy on adaptation to climate change*, the European Commission indicated that urban areas require special attention as the „development driving forces” having the essential share in generating GDP and innovation, as well as a place to live for the majority of the EU citizens. However, we should bear in mind - particularly in the context of the Paris Agreement, that it is the Member States which are the key actors in developing the political and regulatory framework. In addition, local and regional authorities play an important role in reducing the vulnerability to the effects of climate change.

The cities are particularly vulnerable to climate change risks, as this where most urgent challenges are concentrated. The Polish cities are inhabited by 23.3 million people, accounting for more than 60% of the population, thus, the scale of the problem is enormous. High level of urbanization means that the observed and predicted climate change will affect the dynamics of urban growth and development, and thus the safety and quality of life of inhabitants. In case of Poland, it is the cities where many initiatives are implemented with the aim of strengthening resilience to climate change and adapting the individual elements of the environment and infrastructure to this changes.

In order to increase the involvement of the cities and local governments in the climate policy, the Polish Government supports local authorities in developing studies corresponding to climate risks (urban plans for adaptation) as part of the project launched by the Ministry of the Environment: „Development of Urban Adaptation Plans for cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants in Poland”, involving 44 biggest Polish cities. Given the scale of the project, the number of partners as well as the use of a single methodology, it should be noted that the project is unique on a European scale. It should be emphasized that including actions implemented within other projects, adaptation plans are being developed in 50 Polish cities.

The main objective of the project, which is implemented in partnership with the cities, is to assess the sensitivity and vulnerability to climate change and to design priority adaptation activities adequate to the identified risks individually for each city. The use of a common methodology will enable further cooperation at the stage of implementing the plans, and the exchange of information and experiences, also in relation to smaller cities and non-urbanized areas. The project will be implemented in the period of 2017-2019 and is financed from the national and European resources.

In addition, complementary to the above project, more than 100 Polish cities with less than 100 000 inhabitants are provided with adaptation to climate change trainings and courses to increase the awareness and knowledge of local government officers.

The result of the development and adoption of urban adaptation plans prepared within the project should be specific adaptation investments which will in real terms improve the safety and quality of inhabitants life. The modernized flood protection systems, also in the context of urban flash floods, efficient management schemes for water and natural resources or the development of early warning systems, increased green areas, reduced thermal risks, improved housing conditions and investment attractiveness – these elements will determine the success of the project in the long run.

The project met with great interest in the country and abroad and was presented, *inter alia*, in the international forums such as:

- The Amsterdam International Water Week, November 2015,
- Adaptation Futures 2016, May 2016,
- European Week of Regions and Cities, October 2016,
- UNECE International Forum on people-first PPPs for the Sustainable Development Goals, Hong Kong, May 2017.

In the opinion of the Polish Government, the implementation of a coherent approach at the European level in the area of adaptation to climate change is necessary in the context of stimulating efficient activities in the individual EU Member States. Therefore, this project can be of a demonstrative value, which means that its main objectives, in particular, the methodology and rules of cooperation between the Government and local authorities may also be implemented in other EU Member States. In this case, the Polish Ministry of the Environment is ready for cooperation and the exchange of good practices.
