

Opening meeting of the EEA FM project "Capacity building of key stakeholders in the field of geothermal energy"

9 February 2021, 14.00- 16.20 CET

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to Reykjavik. Thank you very much for inviting me to participate in this important event.

- The project co-financed by EEA Grant of the European Economic Area in 2014-2021 under the Programme "Environment, Energy and Climate Change", addressed to participants from the Polish in the Program Area "Energy", implemented by the Mineral and Energy Economy Research Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the National Energy Agency of Iceland will last until April 2024 and is an important stage in the development of Polish-Icelandic cooperation in this field.

- **Traditionally, the good relations between Poland and Iceland have recently strengthened.** Since the establishment of the Polish Embassy in Reykjavik (2015) in place of the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland (2008) and the elevation of the head of the institution (from 23 January 2018), political cooperation has gained new momentum. This is showed by **state visits at the highest level that have taken place recently.** On 13 - 15 October 2018, the Visit of the Speaker of the Senate, Mr. Stanisław Karczewski, Minister of National Education Mrs. Anna Zalewska and Undersecretary of State Mr. Andrzej Papierz took place in Reykjavik. On 5-6 April 2019, Minister of Foreign affairs Mr. Jacek Czaputowicz met his counterpart Guðlaugur Þór Þórðarson, in Reykjavik. Subsequently, the President of the Republic of Iceland, Mr Guðni Tr. Jóhannesson, together with the First Lady, took part in the Celebrations of the Anniversary of the Outbreak of World War II on 1 September 2019 in Warsaw and made an official visit to Warsaw and Gdansk with the First Lady and The Minister of Education, Culture and Science, Lilja D. Alfredsdóttir, from 3 to 5 March 2020.

- **The presence of the Polish national group in Icelandic society is of great importance.** Currently, the number of Poles residing in various forms is estimated at twenty thousand (in the total population of more than 367 thousand people). **Poles make a positive contribution to Iceland's economic development. It is particularly important in the construction, fisheries, agricultural, tourism, aluminum and energy sectors.**

- It is characteristic that Poles live and work evenly in **all regions and cities of this country.** This is important because we know that many Icelanders leave villages located in parts of Iceland far from the capital, causing the collapse of many Icelandic companies. Thanks to the work of our compatriots, these companies function. This is especially true **for fish companies in the Western Fjords and on the east coast.**

- Many contract workers also **come to Iceland** to work on construction and services. Today, several hundred Polish workers are working on the construction of the **Mariott Hotel**, and more than two thousand worked at **Keflavik International Airport until the coronavirus** crisis. About two thousand Polish workers built an aluminum **smelter in Raydarfjörður** and now make up 25% of the crew of this smelter.

- On November 12, 2019, **the Polish-Icelandic Chamber** of Commerce was established (there are 14 bilateral chambers of commerce in Iceland). **The Chamber currently consists of 48 companies representing, among others, the following industries: shipbuilding, tourism, fishing, construction, clothing.** The second meeting of Polish and Icelandic entrepreneurs took place in Gdansk with the President of Iceland, Mr Guðni Th. Jóhannesson, during his visit to Poland on 2-5 March 2020.

- **We are seeing a strengthening** of economic cooperation in important Polish sectors, such as shipbuilding, construction and fisheries and fish processing for Iceland. Poland is also very interested in developing cooperation in the field **of geothermal energy.** We would like to benefit from Iceland's expertise in this area. We aim to carry out the climate and energy transition in a sustainable way, paying particular attention to energy security. **Experts say that Poland has a large untapped geothermal potential.** So, we hope to have an exchange of experience with Iceland in this area.

- **Infrastructure investment can contribute to the recovery** of the Icelandic economy during the current economic crisis caused by the **coronavirus pandemic.** This can also be an opportunity for Polish companies that are thinking about expanding their business in Iceland (fast-growing construction in Iceland uses Polish building materials, which are imported in large quantities from Poland).

- It should be stressed that Icelanders have the highest number **of Icelandic language users among Poles,** which is a natural basis for developing relations between our countries. In the future, Polish children who learn to speak Icelandic perfectly and will know their mother tongue will be able to combine these two cultures and promote knowledge **about Poland in Iceland and vice versa.**

- Iceland is a leader in Europe and worldwide in the use of geothermal energy as an environmentally sound, reliable energy source. It is one of the pillars of economic development, high quality of life and health of society. It is therefore very important to transfer these experiences to Polish, and this project will make this possible.

- I use these benefits every day and observe the widespread use of geothermal energy while in Iceland. The same is true of the large group of our compatriots who work here or come for tourist or professional purposes. Maybe they will encourage the wider use of geothermal energy in Poland, too? I am convinced that geothermal should be one of the main areas of Polish-Icelandic cooperation.

- On 27th November the Icelandic *daily Morgunblaðið* wrote: "Poles want to significantly increase the use of geothermal energy, which can be found in many parts of the country. The EEA Financial Mechanism is involved in this project on a large scale. Poles want to benefit from the knowledge and experience of Icelanders in the field of geothermal energy. According to Michał Kurtyka, Polish Minister of Climate and Environment, Poland is working on reducing coal and gas consumption and moving towards more environmentally friendly energy sources, such as geothermal energy.", and then quotes a Polish minister who stressed that: "Poland is moving towards green and sustainable energy solutions. We have seen a strong increase in the use of renewable energy. Last June, we were delighted to have ten thousand megawatts of green energy at our disposal. However, we are still far from the potential we can achieve. The International Energy Agency estimates that in 2019-2024 the efficiency of renewable energy sources in Poland will increase by 65%. This puts us at the forefront of EU members in terms of increasing the use of renewable energy." In the same article, Minister Michał Kurtyka

highlighted the very good cooperation between the National Energy Authority of Iceland and the Polish energy agencies.

- The project, which is opened at today's meeting, will certainly be another important step towards strengthening cooperation between the Icelandic and Polish institutions in the field of geothermal energy, the transfer of Icelandic knowledge and experience in the field of district heating. Certainly, the Icelandic side will also gain knowledge and experience from the Polish side.

Thank you for your attention and wish you a successful discussion.

Gerard Pokruszyński

Ambassador of Poland to Iceland