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Łódź, EXPO 2022 Candidate: Opportunities for Poland and Central Europe

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Łódź is a candidate to host Specialised EXPO 2022. It proposes the flagship event "City Re: Invented," a newly created city. The theme of change of a post-industrial centre refers to the successful transformation of Poland and other countries of Central Europe. The exhibition provides the host country an opportunity to present itself as an innovative state that uses new technologies to manage development. The final selection of the EXPO host city will be made in November. Łódź's campaign and its international support efforts are entering the final, most intensive phase.

Next to the World Cup, European Football Championship, and the Olympics, EXPO is considered another "mega" event. Usually visited by at least a million people, the event garners global media coverage but comes with high costs to host it and makes a significant impact on the city and region. The organisation of such an event is an important element of shaping the image of the country and presents the opportunity to present its cultural, scientific, and technical achievements. In the case of world exhibitions, the economic dimension is particularly important as a forum for business and politics.

There are two types of EXPOs. Every five years, the World EXPO draws a general theme. Its last one was held in Milan in 2015, and will be followed by one in Dubai, UAE in 2020. The second format is a thematic/specialised exhibition, the International EXPO, and is held between world exhibitions. The latter usually last three months. The theme is narrowed to one issue. In 2012, an International EXPO was held in Yeosu, South Korea, with 105 countries participating in it and more than 8 million people visiting. Astana, Kazakhstan is the current host of the International EXPO, with the theme "Energy of the future." Its pavilions represent over 100 countries, and the organisers expect more than 5 million visitors.

The exhibitions are organised by the Bureau of International Expositions (BIE), based in Paris. Its General Assembly selects candidate states and finalists. Today, 170 countries are BIE members. Each country has one vote in the General Assembly. However, voting rights are granted only to those states that pay membership fees (currently 103 countries). In June 2017, 89 delegates participated in the voting for candidates for EXPO 2022. The decisive vote for the next host country will take place in November.

Poland, like other Central European countries, has never hosted an EXPO (Wroclaw has twice applied, for EXPOs held in 2010 and 2012). The exhibition proposed by Łódź, would take place between 15 June and 15 September 2022. It is estimated that the event would attract about 8 million visitors. Its competitors are Argentina (Buenos Aires) and the U.S. (Minneapolis).

Łódź EXPO 2022 Proposal. The concept of comprehensive urban revitalisation promoted by Łódź applies both to the renewal of space and to the quality of life in a large city. Revitalisation concerns many countries around the world today and is closely linked to the promotion of smart cities dealing with, for example, urbanisation processes and air pollution problems. At the same time, Łódź is being presented not just as the Polish candidate, but as a Central European one, indicating that the processes that have occurred in this

city and other Polish centres are similar to those seen in other urban areas of this part of Europe. The whole region will benefit from the promotion of successful modernisation and innovation processes. The proximity of other large cities means that both visitors and business representatives that attend the EXPO may also consider a visit to other cities in the host country and in neighbouring countries.

Changing the image of Poland's cities will help guide the country towards increased urban and cultural tourism focused on big events (festivals, fairs, conferences). The EXPO, after Euro 2012, the European Capital of Culture in Wrocław, and World Youth Day 2016, would be another stage to promote Poland as a major organiser of global events as well as its innovation and the use of new technologies in urban management.

Łódź proposes holding the event right in the city centre. This is important because there is good public transport as well as plans for subsequent practical use of the facilities. The pavilions will be transformed into offices or apartments, or used for other services. The experience of other countries shows that there is a lack of long-term planning for after the exhibitions end. As a result, new buildings, infrastructure, or "villages" created on the outskirts of an exhibition, despite great interest in the event, then turn out to be useless.

International Support for Łódź. The period between now and the vote in the BIE General Assembly in November is a time of increased promotion and efforts to support the Polish candidate city. The high intensity of activities and the inclusion of many entities requires efficient management of the whole process and coordination of activities.

The promotion process involves actors at various levels of the administration and public partners. The government plenipotentiary for the organisation of the International Expo 2022 in Łódź is the deputy minister of development. Representatives of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are also involved. Polish embassies and consular offices hold meetings and events in which the Polish candidate also plays a significant role. Economic self-government groups (such as the Polish Chamber of Commerce and Employers of the Republic of Poland) and private companies (Atlas, Ursus, IBM) are also included in the promotion activities. The organisation of and introduction of the promotional campaign was entrusted to consulting company PwC, which specialises in marketing activities internationally.

Polish diplomacy particularly pays much attention to the promotion of Łódź in Asia and Africa. Considering that the other candidates are from North and South America, it is hoped that countries from these regions would support a geographically closer candidate. However, it may prove difficult to persuade most former Soviet countries to support the exhibition in Poland. The status of World EXPO host in 2025 is sought by, among others, Russia and Azerbaijan, which are unlikely to favour the organisation of another exhibition in the same region.

The Łódź proposal also calls for allocating some funds to support the organisation of poorer countries' exhibition pavilions. Some of these countries also report an interest in internships and fellowships in Poland for officials and researchers, or other forms of support for their development. It is worth considering the extension of the list of countries covered by Polish Aid after the end of the current Multiannual Development Cooperation Programme for 2016–2020 to countries that support the Polish candidate. In the longer term, exchanges and internships could also take place within the framework of partner cities. Partnerships with Łódź in the area of exchange of experience on revitalisation, smart cities, or other areas of cooperation may be of interest to the capitals of Asian and African countries voting in BIE in November.

Conclusions. Regardless of the result of the vote, the preparation stage itself and the promotion of the city and its transformation will have an impact on the image of Łódź and Poland. The promotion of Polish successes after the transition period, especially in urban policy, can be used for other events. Łódź's candidacy is ongoing, even at the International Exhibition EXPO Astana 2017 and national and international conferences. Comprehensive urban revitalisation, relying on tradition and history, rebuilds an area visually but also influences the quality of life and fits into the innovation and smart cities concepts. These are important experiences can be an inspiration for other countries and one that Poland and its cities can share and treat as an element of the Polish brand.