**The advantages of the new LIFE Programme are enhanced flexibility, simplified rules and a lower administrative burden**

On 1 June 2018 the European Commission presented a proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1293/2013. The proposal will be examined in the ordinary legislative procedure, and the date of its application is envisaged to be 1 January 2021, covering the period until 2027. The new proposal provides for an overall budget of 5,45 billion euros against 3,457 billion euros for the previous programming period. 2014-2020. Negotiations in the Council of the EU on the dossier commenced during the Bulgarian Presidency, and the Austrian Presidency will aim to achieve a partial general approach on the Regulation.

With this proposal the European Commission wants to maintain and enhance the broad range of policies, funds and tools, amounting to the most modern standards in the world to tackle climate change. The transition to a low-carbon and circular economy as a comprehensive model for modernizing Europe’s economy is a priority for the EC. The LIFE Programme is the mechanism which contributes to the protection and improvement of the quality of the environment, the quality of life and the health of EU citizens. The Programme plays a catalytic role through small scale actions intended to initiate, expand or accelerate sustainable production, distribution and consumption practices, and last but not least, the prudent and rational utilisation of natural resources.

A progressive increase of the budget is noted against the previous programming period of the Programme from 3,457 billion euros for the 2014-2020 period to 5,45 billion euros for the new programming period. The new budget will be distributed in four sub-programmes:

* “Nature and Biodiversity” – 2,15 billion euros;
* “Circular Economy and Quality of Life” – 1,33 billion euros;
* “Climate Change Adaptation” – 0,95 billion euros;
* “Clean Energy Transition” (a new component transferred from Horizon 2020 Programme) – 1 billion euros.

The advantages of the new LIFE Programme are enhanced flexibility, simplified rules and a lower administrative burden with the purpose of achieving deeper synergy between EU policies and programmes. The funding conditions of the Programme are foreseen to be changed. This will enable the adaptation of the multiple projects and their adjustment to the different tendencies in member states. The purpose of these changes is the avoidance of the geographical imbalance regarding the absorption of funds, which may be considered as a shortcoming during the previous programming period. There will also be priority funding intended for strategic projects.

The most important criterion for the approval of projects under the new LIFE Programme will be their quality. In this regard the role of national contact points is intended to be enhanced, and they will conduct trainings and consultations of the potential beneficiaries. The Ministry of Environment and Water will continue to perform the functions of a national contact point for Bulgaria during the new programming period.