CHAPTER 4

Core Executive Institutions in Poland

This chapter maps cross-temporal variation in position, authority, and information rules that the Polish core executive employed in order to extend selective incentives and monitoring to cabinet ministers and departments. It finds that over the first two years of the Buzek government, the core provided limited mobilization for ministries to comply with EU legislative commitments. In mid-1999, there was increased mobilization of lines ministries and their departments by the core executive. The chapter documents the emergence and consolidation of a strong “European” core under the Buzek and Miller cabinets.

Early Adaptation of the Core Executive

Internal and External Pressures for Institutional Change

In the mid-1990s the Polish “European” core executive came under increasing adaptation pressures. The need for institutional change was, first and foremost, due to a new integration dynamic that emerged after the EU reformulated its policy vis-à-vis the Central and Eastern European states. Having agreed to work toward enlargement at the 1993 Copenhagen summit, the EU became more actively involved in guiding adaptation processes in Poland, putting pressure on domestic actors to respond to the new integration challenges. In the area of legal alignment the European Commission published a Single Market White Paper that identified the core of the acquis communautaire to be adopted during the first stage of the preaccession.
At the same time, the Polish government became increasingly aware that the existing domestic institutions did not guarantee effective response to the new challenges (cf. NIK 1996). Since 1991, EU affairs had been coordinated inside the executive by a cabinet plenipotentiary, who had a noncabinet rank of undersecretary of state and was placed within the Office of the Council of Ministers (URM). The chief problem was that the plenipotentiary had too low a rank to redirect ministerial attention to EU adaptation (interview 13, p. 3; URM 1995b, p. 33). He was not a member of the cabinet, and his interlocutors in line ministries typically had the rank of director or undersecretary of state, which limited his coordination role to an administrative level.

The plenipotentiary’s predicament was thus summarized by the parliamentary Europe Agreement Committee, writing in 1994 to Prime Minister Pawlak,

> The present organizational structure does not ensure sufficient degree of adaptation, in particular due to lacuna in inter-ministerial coordination; the plenipotentiary for European integration and foreign assistance does not hold [sufficient] powers to perform [his] functions [. . .] which means that he is not able to secure and control the implementation of adjustment processes by appropriate ministries.

(Komisja ds Układu Europejskiego 1994)

Unsurprisingly, when the Oleksy government resolved in November 1995 to prepare a comprehensive program for the transposition of the White Paper directives into the Polish legal system, the plenipotentiary met with serious problems in coordinating this process. Most significantly, he found it difficult to arbitrate competence conflicts where EU legislation cut through a number of ministerial portfolios. A close observer noted,

> The plenipotentiary did not have any powers [. . .] he ran into serious problems because he could not arbitrate conflicts. [. . .] It was simply not possible to solve a majority of conflicts without the involvement of the political level in the decision-making process. This is why a change was necessary.

(interview 15, p. 4)

These internal and external pressures found their window of opportunity when the Oleksy government launched a comprehensive center of