CHAPTER 7

Conclusion: Core Executives and EU Compliance

This concluding chapter teases out the broader implications of the study. This is done under three headings. The chapter first shows how the present findings contribute to a better understanding of the modalities of EU rule adoption in Central Europe. Second, it demonstrates that the core executive argument resonates well with the research on EU compliance in the old member states and may be used to improve the predictive power of the theoretical models employed in that research. Finally, the chapter argues that this study of EU rule adoption in Central Europe can inform our understanding of how governments may organize to produce policies that deliver general long-term benefits but impose sectoral short-term costs.

Understanding Europeanization in Central Europe: What Have We Learnt?

Lesson One: EU Rule Adoption Presented Challenges for Domestic Executives

The first lesson from this study is that the specific characteristics of EU rule adoption before accession presented significant institutional challenges for domestic executives in Central European states. The uncertainty about how much rule adoption had to be achieved to qualify for EU membership created incentives for ministers and their staff to shirk on EU-related legislative commitments. The diffuse and long-term nature of the benefits from rule adoption encouraged ministerial administration to commit resources to other uses that could bring concentrated...
and short-term political gains. The extensive need for coordination, across both time and sectors, pushed up the transaction costs of rule adoption, which provided a further bias against engaging in transposition work. These problems made it difficult for Central European executives to initiate and adopt EU-related legislation and had to be resolved before successful rule adoption could be achieved at the domestic level.

The national executives had to respond to these challenges by strengthening the capacities at the center of government. The book finds evidence of a move toward the institutionalization of “European” core executives in all of the three countries analyzed. In Hungary, the core was reinforced in 1996–1998—before the accession talks started—and remained almost unchanged until 2004. In Poland and the Czech Republic, some institutional changes were undertaken before the onset of negotiations, while the most significant overhauls occurred in 1998–1999, when the membership talks were already under way. In functional terms, the reforms were designed to solve the problems of free riding, opportunity costs, and coordination. The reorganizations had two common features. They created the position of a monitor/central authority for EU rule adoption whose primary task was to program, monitor, and—if necessary—induce ministerial compliance with EU legislative requirements. The other shared feature was the setting up of collective institutions to lower the costs of programming, monitoring, and coordination.

That the transposition of EU law prior to accession presented important challenges for domestic executives in Central Europe has not so far been appreciated by the research on EU rule adoption in Central Europe (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005; Grabbe 2006; Vachudova 2005). Inspired mainly by international relations perspectives, this research has treated national institutions as black boxes and has paid limited attention to the internal life of executives. The present findings confirm, however, the results reported in the literature on the emergence of core executives in Central Europe (see Laffan 2003; Lippert and Umbach 2005; Dimitrov, Goetz, and Wollmann et al. 2006 for comparative overviews). This research shows that the three governments covered in this book are not exceptional in having sought to institutionalize a “European” core. Similar reforms were also undertaken in the other accession states in Central Europe (see Nakrosis 2003, Dimitrova and Maniokas 2004 for Lithuania; Scootla and Scootla 2004 for Estonia; Bilčík 2004 for Slovakia; Fink-Hafner and Lajh 2003 for Slovenia).