

## **Evolution of the Core Executive under Prime Minister Abe's Government in Japan**

### **Description for the General Public**

The power of prime ministers in Japan has been traditionally limited due to existence of two kinds of veto players: ministerial bureaucrats and ruling party backbenchers. While the electoral system and administrative reforms of the 1990s created new institutional tools for exerting top-down leadership, the ability of the core executive (prime ministers and their closest entourages) to independently shape policies still greatly depended upon personal abilities of heads of government. One of the factors that severely inhibited prime minister-centred decision-making process was the shortness of their terms in office. For example, in 2006-2012 there were as many as six heads of government in Japan, each serving for approximately one year.

The aim of this project is to examine decision-making reforms in Japan's government from reassuming office by Prime Minister Abe Shinzō in December 2012 until the expected end of his tenure as Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) president in September 2018. Abe is the first Japanese prime minister since Koizumi Jun'ichirō (2001-2006) who managed to remain in office for two consecutive terms as ruling party leader. Furthermore, he has prospects to be elected for the third term and thus become the longest-serving head of government in the history of Japan. For that reason, his tenure provides a rare opportunity for examining the impact of prolonged premiership on decision-making patterns. The problem of top-down political leadership under the second Abe administration has attracted a wide interest from Japanese political scientists, but so far only partial analyses of decision-making reforms implemented since December 2012 have been published. As such, the project is innovative not only in Poland, but also internationally.

According to the theory of gradual institutional change, the scope of institutional reforms has to be adapted to the strength of veto players and the level of discretion in interpretation or enforcement of rules. The project argues that in contrast to his predecessors, Prime Minister Abe was able not only to exploit the weakening of veto players caused by earlier reforms, but also to initiate the process of redefining the unofficial rules of decision-making. The reforms under the second Abe Cabinet have been implemented through taking full advantage of pre-existing structures rather than abruptly replacing them with new ones. Exploitation of long-term power shifts in the government, supplemented with gradual creation of new decision-making bodies (especially the National Security Council and the Cabinet Bureau of Personnel Affairs) led to enhancement of coordination capabilities by the core executive. Within the core executive, in turn, it is the Cabinet Secretariat that became a crucial decision-making centre. The project will assess the long-term impact of these changes on the Japanese political system.

The efficiency of new institutional arrangements under the Abe Cabinet will be evaluated through theory-driven case studies. Case studies will be devoted to such crucial processes as implementation of the 'three arrows' of Abenomics (Abe's economics), postponement of the consumption tax increase, or revision of interpretation of Japanese Constitution regarding Japan's participation in the pacts of collective self-defence. The project will contribute to furthering knowledge on the preconditions for a successful gradual institutional change in political systems characterized by relatively strong veto players and high reliance on unofficial decision-making rules.