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NEWS RELEASE

Caught in a Vicious Circle

Quebec should re-engage in intergovernmental discussions to defend true federal principles

Montreal – The signing of the Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA) without Quebec is the most recent manifestation of a deep and longstanding impasse between Quebec and Canada, a situation that has ongoing negative effects on the Canadian political system, says Christian Dufour, professor at l'École nationale d'administration publique (ENAP), in a new analysis released today by the Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP).

In "Restoring the Federal Principle: The Place of Quebec in the Canadian Social Union," Mr. Dufour examines the nature and evolution of Canada-Quebec relations over the past two decades and, in particular, highlights the opportunities as well as the pitfalls that have come up more recently within the context of the social union.

Mr. Dufour argues that an important aspect of the problem is that the rest of Canada has never truly recognized the legitimacy of Quebec's distinct vision of Canadian federalism. There is a tendency to forget that federalism is a system that provides for the *sharing* but also the *separation* of powers between the two orders of government. As he points out, however, Quebec's *de facto* withdrawal from this system, from the 1976 rise to power of the Parti Québécois through to the 1995 referendum, has also contributed to a weakening of the federal principle in Canada.

The author identifies two conditions necessary to break the impasse:

- Quebec must engage more actively in Canadian intergovernmental relations in the field of social policy. The fact that it has not signed the Agreement does not mean that it is not part of Canada and Canadian federalism. Quebec also needs to adapt its traditional constitutional position to better reflect the needs of the distinct society that it has become at the beginning of the 21st century. In particular, it must acknowledge the fact that constitutional jurisdictions are not self-contained as they once were.
- The rest of Canada must come to recognize that there still is a Quebec problem and that it won't disappear even if the sovereigntists are eventually defeated. The rest of Canada will also have to accept the real implications of Quebec being a distinct society. Quebec must be able to go its own way from time to time without this being seen as an aberration or as a sign of disloyalty to Canada.

"Restoring the Federal Principle: The Place of Quebec in the Canadian Social Union," the latest *Policy Matters* paper in IRPP's social union research project, is now available on the

IRPP website at <http://www.irpp.org> – To access the document, simply click on the “What’s New” icon on the homepage.

For more information, or to schedule an interview with the author, please contact IRPP.

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