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NEWS RELEASE

New European Union Policy Processes Suggest Canadians May Undervalue Own Institutions

Canadian and EU Converging on What Might Become an Ideal Model of Political Regulation in a Multinational Context

*Institute for
Research on
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Montreal – The Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP) is pleased to announce the release of a new study entitled “L’union sociale canadienne dans le miroir des politiques sociales de l’Union européenne” (“The Canadian Social Union in the Mirror of European Union Social Policies”). In this study, published today, Bruno Théret maintains that the European Union’s adoption of political instruments similar to those already in place in Canada should spur Canadians and Quebecers to hold a more positive view of their political system. According to Théret, the European experience shows that intergovernmental federalism is a well-suited, stable, even ideal form of political regulation within the context of a multinational society.

The author explains that the challenge of federalism faced by a European Union (EU) that is slated to expand—and thus become even more heterogeneous—and to deepen its involvement in political and social democracy reflects the challenge of multinationalism faced by Canada. Although on a trajectory opposite of that of the Canadian federation, the EU has adopted institutional mechanisms similar to those already in place in Canada. The fact that Europe and Canada have implemented very similar instruments to tackle these challenges suggests that they are both taking a promising approach.

This study also shows how the dynamic created by the Canadian Social Union in the areas of intergovernmental relations and resourcing of the welfare state is reflected in the social developments of Europe following the signing of the Maastricht Treaty. Théret concludes that the EU and Canada are both heading toward a similar reformulation of the principles of federalism, which could lead to a stable compromise between supranationalism and intergovernmentalism.

In this framework, the ongoing European experience could offer Canada and Quebec a vision in which their day-to-day methods of regulating jurisdictional conflicts are seen as particularly relevant and are thus valued as a “well-understood federal principle.” When the time comes to re-evaluate the Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA), this experience should be considered, and Canadian innovations such as the opting-out formula and executive federalism should be seen in a more positive light.

“L’union sociale canadienne dans le miroir des politiques sociales de l’Union européenne,” is the sixth *Policy Matters* paper published in the IRPP’s Social Union research project. It is

now available in Adobe (.pdf) format on the IRPP website at <http://www.irpp.org> – to access the document, simply click on the “What’s New” icon on the homepage.

Bruno Théret is Research Director at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), Institut de Recherche Interdisciplinaires en Socio-économie, Université Paris IX – Dauphine. For more information, or to schedule an interview with the author, please contact the IRPP.

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