

For Immediate Distribution
Wednesday, November 14, 2001

NEWS RELEASE

SUFA: Intergovernmental Collaboration Is Much Less Evident than What Was Anticipated or Implied in the Agreement

IRPP

Since its signing in February 1999, the Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA) has not produced a more institutionalized and stable fiscal federalism, and has not prevented unilateral federal initiatives in core areas of provincial jurisdiction. However, it has paved the way for new policy instruments that not only provide greater flexibility and control for the federal government, but also lessen its commitments, says Professor Alain Noël.

As the three-year anniversary of the agreement and the deadline for review and renewal approaches, the Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP) is pleased to announce the release of "Power and Purpose in Intergovernmental Relations." In this new study, Alain Noël, Professor in the Department of Political Science at the Université de Montréal and IRPP Research Fellow, reassesses SUFA, its implementation and its significance in the broader framework of intergovernmental relations in Canada.

The author examines SUFA and subsequent developments in light of the evolution of Canadian federalism, and concludes that Ottawa's flexibility and control have increased in recent years. Indeed, the federal government has tended to choose policies that lessen its commitments and leave it as much flexibility as possible. The result, for individual Canadians as well as for provincial governments, is increased insecurity.

This approach however should not be mistaken as a sign of weakness or lack of purpose. The cultivation of uncertainty is a prerogative of power, which in this case stems from an uneven relationship solidly rooted in a sharp and growing vertical fiscal imbalance between the two orders of government.

Alain Noël concludes that provincial and territorial governments could alter the course of events if they took advantage of the SUFA review and renewal process to re-create their original common stance and put forward simple but forceful demands. This approach would not be convincing, however, without a clear proposal in favor of more provincial autonomy. Provincial governments must reaffirm their constitutional jurisdiction over social policy and see that it is recognized by the federal government. Of course, this approach would have a better chance to succeed if the Quebec government took part in this process. While this is certainly a tall order, the satisfactory results of the September 2000 health-care negotiations indicate that a genuine Quebec participation cannot be excluded.

1470 Peel Street
Suite 200
Montreal, Quebec
H3A 1T1
(514) 985-2461
fax: (514) 985-2559

E-mail:

irpp@irpp.org

website:

www.irpp.org

"Power and Purpose in Intergovernmental Relations", the latest *Policy Matters* paper in IRPP's research program on the social union, is now available on the IRPP website at 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 Alain Noël, please contact IRPP.

To receive IRPP media advisories and news releases via e-mail, please subscribe to the IRPP e-distribution service by visiting the newsroom on the IRPP website.

Founded in 1972, IRPP is an independent, national, nonprofit organization whose mission is to improve public policy in Canada by generating research, providing insight and sparking debate that will contribute to the public policy decision-making process and strengthen the quality of the public policy decisions made by Canadian governments, citizens, institutions and organizations.

- 30 -

Contact:

Sáng Tran-Quang
Media Relations Officer
IRPP

(514) 985-2461
stranquang@irpp.org