R. Simeon, “Plus Ça Change… Intergovernmental Relations Then and Now,” *Policy Options* (March-April, 2005)

**Overview**

The shape and discussion of federal-provincial relations in 2005 bears more than a passing resemblance to the development of IGR in the 1960s. The current discussions over asymmetrical federalism, the debate over shared-cost programs, and the constitutional issues raised by the federal spending power in provincial jurisdiction are not new events in the life of the federation. “The preoccupations of the present find echoes in the past”

**Background**

* In 1972, Simeon published *Federal-Provincial Diplomacy: The Making of Recent Policy in Canada*. Exploring the dynamics of IGR.
* Events caused worry about federal govt “intrusions,” while D. Smiley worried about “the attenuation of federal power”
* The debates found expression in a massive expansion of executive federalism, through intergovernmental conferences
* Have things changed?
* Not much… “Intergovernmental players from the 1960s would be on familiar ground if they joined the fray today”
* IGR in the 1960s were the vehicle for a fundamental transformation in intergovernmental fiscal arrangements
* Collaborative federalism in the 1970s – a time when Cdn federalism was simultaneously decentralizing dramatically *and* advancing nationwide social policy
* Chretien downgraded executive federalism by turning FMCs into first ministers’ meetings, which were called infrequently and on an ad hoc basis (came with dropping the constitution from the agenda)
* Today’s story seems very much the same as yesterday’s – greater funding assures Ottawa’s place in leading areas, but it has no right to tell the provinces what to do, at least not without the political and fiscal levers they used to have