

Threehundred decisions for changing France

prof. dr. Jacques Attali

“France is in the process of a long-lasting reform and I do believe that this is a very promising momentum”, said prof. dr. Jacques Attali in an exclusive interview with ACADEMY® Magazine. He has led the Commission pour la libération de la croissance française, that was able to diagnose the country’s economic situation in a record six months’ time and to propose 316 measures that would change France. Already, two-thirds of those measures have been implemented or are in the process of being finalised. Attali is confident the implementation of all measures will be completed by June 2009. Attali, who is a professor of Economics and Political Sciences, a writer, a European statesman, a philosopher and a CEO, is regarded to be one of the greatest thinkers of our time.

In the summer of 2007, the French president Nicolas Sarkozy and prime-minister François Fillon requested Jacques Attali to form and head the new economic commission. Together they wrote: ‘Mister president of the commission, the French economy lacks growth potential and competitive power. Our European partners experience more growth and less unemployment (...). This situation has a negative impact on innovation, social justice, technological progress, corporate development, and the quality of life in general. France is not keeping up with its neighbours and its place in the world is threatened. We ask you to investigate under which conditions France will be able to grow again’. “It was not a matter of a short-term analyses of the situation. France’s economy was not that bad! We weren’t performing up to our full potential, but there was no real gap between us and other countries. Reforms were needed in a variety of areas, to accomplish sustainable economic growth. France should use the best of its capacities, no matter what the situation is in other countries.”

The Commission pour la libération de la croissance française worked unbelievably fast. “I first gathered a very brilliant team, consisting of 43 members from the private and the public sector. All members



of the country’s administration were available for any inquiries and prepared to attend hundreds of hearings. The commission has examined many suggestions that were submitted through the internet, and a number of foreign experiments to boost economic growth.

The report, including 20 fundamental decisions and more than 300 other decisions that have to get France back on its feet economically, has been presented to the president and the prime-minister some time ago now. “It is not a report, not a study, but a manual for urgent and fundamental reforms (...). It is not an inventory the government can use whenever they want, and certainly not a competition for original ideas.” But, as prof. Attali also makes clear, his measures must be adopted wholesale, not à la carte. “Every component is connected to all the others and contributes to the success of the composition as a whole”, says the commission in a comment on their report. Not some, but all decisions have to be implemented in order to succeed. Attali:

“Some decisions are more important than others, but I am sure all measures will be implemented halfway 2009. That is a huge success. In our analysis we even predicted the credit crunch. We dedicated three pages to a potentially huge financial crisis and came to the conclusion that, in case the worst should really happen, we would need to accelerate the reforms. Now, I am happy to see that that is exactly what has happened. We were ready for this crisis.”

Knowledge economy

“Our most important conclusion is that we need three main modifications to start off and sustain the development of the economy of knowledge. I am talking about research and our ability to innovate, which is crucial, general, social and (inter)national mobility, and more efficient state policies and better governance of public affairs.” Providing the credit crunch doesn’t get any worse, Attali calculates that his plans could boost annual GDP growth by one percentage point, cut unemployment from 7.9% to 5%, reduce the numbers living in poverty from 7 million to 3 million and take public debt down from 64% to 55% of GDP by 2012. “So far we have had fruitful discussions with the government. President Sarkozy has asked us to keep him informed”, says Attali.

The results Attali publishes regularly on the *Libération de la croissance* website illustrate the success of his commission’s proposed approach. “Competition reforms have already been turned into law, distribution systems have been changed, and labour market reforms have been implemented. Other reforms include representation by the unions, and payments for job-seekers. The minister of Education, Xavier Darcos, has announced new education programs based on Attali’s report. The minister of Higher Education and Research, Valérie Pécresse, is planning to stimulate university education, and to create possibilities for second-chance education in the suburbs. Those are just some examples. The integral, coherent and progressive way Jacques Attali and his commission members have done their job, without any party political interference, and the fast response of the French government are without precedent. “A fast and forceful implementation of all our decisions secures the future of our children.”



Text: Jacques Geluk



Prof. dr. Jacques Attali is a Professor of Economics and Political Sciences, prolific writer, European statesman, philosopher and CEO, and one of the great European thinkers of our time. He gained his political experience at the highest levels. As an honorary member of the council of the French republic he was special advisor to the French president of France from 1981 to 1991. He also was founder and first president of the European bank for reconstruction and development from 1991 to 1993. Attali is currently CEO of an international consulting firm specialised in new technologies. He is widely acclaimed to be an authority on micro-finance. His advise is much sought after by NGOs, financial institutions, governments and central banks. In 1980, he founded Action Contre la Faim (against world famine). Attali advised the Secretary General of the United Nations on the risks of nuclear proliferation. One of his most lasting and far reaching accomplishments is his reform of European higher education for the entire EU, known as LMD. To this we owe amongst other things the bachelor and master structure.

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