

The translation of a letter of Jean Tirole to Madam Fioraso, State secretary in charge of Higher education and Research in France. This letter from mid-december 2014 has been published in the French magazine *Marianne*.

The reader should be aware of two points, before reading the letter :

- 1. The claim that « heterodox » economists want to escape the assessment of their research is preposterous. Our proposition of an authentic peer evaluation of research, based on a variety of publications, is different from the current ranking of journals and the perverse quantitative bibliometric norms of assessment that it implies.*
- 2. The proposal to create a commission with Nobel prize and Clark medals winners is similar to take a representative sample of a Papal conclave to decide about the legitimacy of a demand by a minority of protestants.*

Association Française d'Economie Politique (AFEP)

Madam Minister,

I was very touched by your presence at my side in Stockholm this week. The support you and your teams gave to Toulouse School of Economics for more than two years plays a part in my optimism concerning the future of the best research centers in economics, that I have conveyed in the media since October 13th.

May I inform you of my concern about a continuing rumor about the creation of a new section of the National Council of Universities named « Institutions, Economy, Territory and Society ». Should this rumor be confirmed, it would cause a disaster for the visibility and the future of research in economics in our country.

As you know, I always advocated for our country to adopt the norms of research assessment that are in use in the rest of the world. It is specially important for the community of academic teachers-researchers and researchers to be endowed with a single scientific assessment standard, based on a ranking of the journals of the discipline and on an external assessment by internationally prominent peers. It is inconceivable for me that France would recognize two communities within the same discipline. The quality of research ought to be appraised on the basis of publications, compelling each researcher to face the assessment of his peers. This constitutes the very foundation of scientific progress in all disciplines. Trying to sidestep such judgment encourages relativism of knowledge, the antechamber of obscurantism. Self-proclaimed « heterodox » economists have to comply with this fundamental principle of science. For them, the objective of the creation of a new section of the National Council of Universities is to escape such discipline.

Besides, criticism voiced by promoters of this project about the lack of interdisciplinarity, of scientific character and social utility of modern economics, is unfounded (moreover, supposing it was founded, the proof should have been given that a new section of NCU would improve the situation on these questions !). Modern economics is concerned by the great questions of society, as perfectly demonstrated by recent works of Thomas Piketty and many other great French economists. Among the best French and foreign economists, many researchers investigate the links between economics, psychology, sociology, history, political science, law, and geography. Economics is growingly interdisciplinary, as shown for example by the Institute for Advanced Studies in Toulouse. Particularly, my colleagues economists and I, in

Paris, Toulouse, Marseille or in other places, have been for long working on institutions, territories and society. These topics are at the very heart of our researches. Logically, we should all be part of this new section.

In the second place, as all other scientific disciplines, modern economics is permanently questioning its own hypotheses, it compares models with data, and discards theories that fail when confronted to the test of reality. Eventually, regulators, international organizations and firms crave for the economists educated by the centers of excellence that emerged in France in the last three decades, as they allow them to better face the great technological, economic, social and environmental challenges of the 21st century. Such high demand is the best demonstration of the societal value brought about by our discipline. Breaking up the community of French economists by creating a refuge for a disparate group, in trouble with the assessment standards that are internationally acknowledged, is a very bad answer to the failure of this group in its effort to have its works validated by the great scientific journals, that prevail in our discipline.

If the rumor was correct, I would find necessary to organize a new assessment (the Hautcoeur commission had already given a negative recommendation, but its advice has seemingly not been followed), this time at the international level ; it would thus be absolutely indisputable. For instance, a representative sample of internationally award-winning researchers (Nobel prizes, and, to have younger people, Clark medals and Yjro Johansson awards – respectively the best economists less than 40 and 50 years old, prizes awarded by american and european economics associations) could be asked to give a ruling on the relative merits of two texts, with relevant arguments, that would be signed : one in favor, and one against the creation of such a section. I am totally at your disposal to talk about the possible means of such an assessment.

Please accept, Madam Minister, the assurance of my highest respects.

Jean Tirole