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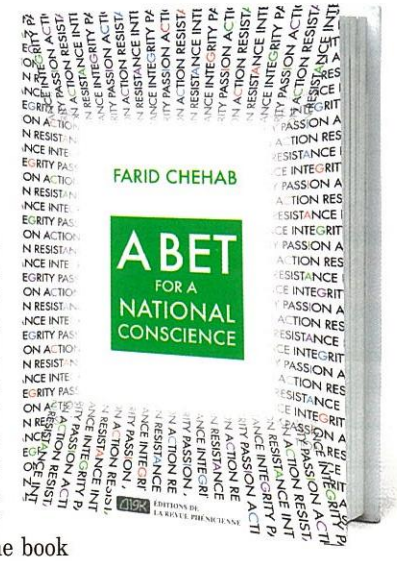
Where to invest 2012

A publication of INFOPRO

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A bet for a national conscience

Author: Farid Chehab
Publisher: Editions de la Revue Phénicienne
Languages: English, Arabic, and French
Pages: 355
Price: $20
More info: www.pari-rihan.org



How can we build a national conscience through the economy? The country has the potential to become a model of democracy and coexistence in the region, if public opinion is unified over an economical project at a national scale, according to 'A Bet For A National Conscience', a book by *Farid Chehab*. Chairman and Advisor to the Board of Leo Burnett MENA, he has written a book that puts forward the idea that a Federative Economy is the only common language all can agree upon. The book suggests a new approach to the problems that plague society, and lays out a plan for collective participation towards building a prosperous country.

TIME FOR CHANGE

The country failed until now to find a viable political solution that allows its citizens to build a common National Conscience. A troubled history, the plurality of political parties and religious groups of different views, the influence of global and regional powers on the political system, the mismanagement of feudalism, nepotism and fanaticism, as well as the frustration of the youth from all political camps, can be cited as the main reasons behind this failure. But there is room to evolve and to offer a better future for new generations. The establishment of a Federative Economy would require some fundamental changes in the way the country is run. The economy in the country is increasingly commanded by political forces. To reverse that situation, "the economy must free itself from political meddling and outside influences to become consensual and accessible to all irrespective of class," said Chehab. To guarantee the growth of this economy into a self-sustainable model, "brain power and expertise must be employed to ensure the coherence of its structures." It can be achieved through collective participation.

ALL THE TOOLS ARE READILY AVAILABLE

A unity of public opinion is an additional requisite factor for a solid national economy. Society suffers continual economic, political, and social problems, including high levels of unemployment, corruption of public institutions, increasing public debt, high levels of immigration, and the ever-present fear of another war. In Chehab's view, an economical project on a national scale could unify people of all backgrounds. "The intellectual maturity of our people, our mental energy, and our intelligence are readily available," he writes. This unified public opinion concerning the economy would allow room for "a grass-root movement calling for State reform, a solid plan for the future, youth participation, exploitation of our resources, job creation, Civic spirit development, environmental preservation, and State audit," he said. He believes that "vast economic projects would be replacing the political concerns that persistently divide and tear us into pieces, while big projects would be treated with integrity, confidence, and creativity."

FIVE-YEAR PLAN

The book recommends a five-year economic plan. It pushes for the development of infrastructure projects in the fields of water, electricity, railroad networks, in addition to urban landscape and educational projects, and administrative decentralization measures. Chehab insists on the following essential criteria that the plan has to adopt in order to be successful: It must be applied to all regions simultaneously. It must be realistic, affordable, be economically viable, and heavily mediatized. "It must be formulated in such a way that people from all walks of life can effortlessly connect to it," he said. The plan must encourage citizens to contribute to the investments so they can reap its benefits. The support of influential actors is necessary for the economic plan, too, as "decision makers can commission big State projects."

THE POWER OF IDEAS

Investing in ideas and not relying on leaders is a huge step towards building a Federative Economy. "While a leader is incapable of guaranteeing the future, an idea can," Chehab said. "If the idea is good, it not only reinforces itself, but also grows through the conviction and participation of those who believe in it. Ultimately it blossoms into a big idea that federates, solves, and saves."

NEW CIVIL INSTITUTION

An organization backed by the mobilization of all citizens will be crucial in the forging of a National Conscience as envisioned by Chehab, and such an organization will also play a major role in supporting the development of a unified economy. Chehab suggests an NGO at the service of the State. This civil entity includes a Council of Wisdom which is open to all without exception locally and abroad, "who may find a calling, an interest in contributing, or even the will to join the Civic and Apolitical Group of Influence (CAGI)," said Chehab.

IN CONCLUSION

The last chapter is dedicated to a vision for the year 2030. Chehab predicts that by this year, "Lebanon has matured and backed by a significant portion of new politically-advanced generation, hailing from various communities, it is ready to take the ultimate leap, appreciative of what has been achieved so far. We will become a model for a real democracy and coexistence", said Chehab. "The kind of model the Arab Youth is aspiring to.

Reported by Leila Rahbani