



A blank page: this is what the next column "Message from St. Eustatius" will look like. Since I am "off island" and thus no longer making my observations from St. Eustatius, this is my last column in this series. A successor has not yet been found: is there really no one who can, will or dares take over the pen? I realize that many of my pieces have a critical tone, but there are already enough good-weather stories from the local government.

It occurred to me that I could also write under the heading "about St. Eustatius" from the position I am in now (with input from friends from St. Eustatius) but even that doesn't cover it. My pieces are actually not about the island or the people who live there, but about the situation there and in particular the attitude of political The Hague towards St Eustatius.

We arrived on Statia in 2014 for a three-year stay; it turned into eight. To get to grips with the island conditions and to make the language a bit my own, I thought it would be useful to attend Island Council meetings. Little by little I seemed to understand the dynamics of island life. Rightly 'seemed' to understand. After all, there was a lot of ambiguity, there was little real transparency and the information about the backgrounds of decision-making was not always clear. The population register was unclear or not up to date. There was an odor of favoritism toward "family and friends. These were some of the factors why, in February 2018, the national government decided to intervene and put Statia under surveillance.

My initial 'resigned watching' soon turned into surprise. The government commissioners appointed went about their work with Dutch solution orientation and vigor. My surprise and indignation increased, especially when, as a member of the Social Advisory Board, I gained more insight into the way things were done.

I reread my first column for DossierKoninkrijksrelaties.nl dated March 28, 2021 (in Dutch: https://www.jhtm.nl/eux/bibliotheek/dossierkoninkrijksrelaties_20210328.pdf) and found that little has changed. Nothing at all. That which amazed me at the time is still there, and to a deepening degree.

Points I wrote about over time:

- The lack of good and affordable air connections; there is a new air traffic control tower, new airport building, an airport boulevard is being built. All this while there are only 2 regular flights a day with aircraft that hold about 19 people. There are still few tourists.
- Failing healthcare with inadequate doctors and a healthcare organization that gives financial efficiency more importance than actual healthcare (and a Dutch ministry that knowingly looks away from this).
- Consistently inventing ruses to avoid having to equalize social minimum with the European Netherlands while the three BES islands are part of the country of the Netherlands.
- Non-careful handling by the government of erosion and tolerance of careless handling of nature and coastline.
- Implementing central legislation without consultation. 'Comply and explain' is the new magic word. Unfortunately, The Hague still assumes that the Caribbean Dutch (!) islands cannot have their own input.

It requires patience from both sides of the ocean and complementing each other in areas where the other is somewhat less agile. And where the Statian has held its position in second (or lower) place in the Kingdom of the Netherlands for decades, European Dutch unwillingness to really help the Statian prevails.

The island and its people are slowly but deeply ingrained in me. I will not lose it. As long as I observe differences in treatment of European and Caribbean Dutch, social conditions and health care, and other things that strike me, I will continue to write and publish that. I will also continue to contact members of the House and Senate, the National Ombudsman and the National Coordinator against Discrimination and Racism.

All the best to you!