

Dear chairman and members of the House of Representatives' Committee on Kingdom Relations,

In view of next Wednesday's AO, I hereby present an update.

With kind regards,

J.H.T. (Jan) Meijer MBA.

References: My earlier written mails from...

- November 12, 2018 topic "St. Eustatius"
- November 14, 2018 topic "financial infrastructure on the bower islands (in particular: on Sint eustatius)" => everyone BSN, make CN into euro area and open NL banks
- December 17, 2018 topic "whether or not to hold elections on St. Eustatius..."
- 24 December 2018 topic "procurement issues...", addressed to the (wnd) government commissioner, with a plea for transparency (to which no reaction)
- 16 January 2019 topic "connectivity", addressed to the (wnd) government commissioner, with a call to the initiative of Saba together to tackle (to which a short, non-substantive response)

St. Eustatius, 8 February 2019.

Dear chairman and members of the Committee on Kingdom Relations of the Lower House of Parliament,

Although your recent visit to the Dutch Caribbean is appreciated, it seems to me that, because of its short duration, you have only had exposure to only a fraction of our society. A society that is characterized by small scale and social isolation. It is for this reason that I take the liberty of bringing a few points to your attention in addition to your visit. The underlying reason for this is partly based on a paragraph from the letter from Secretary of State Knops. In his letter of 14 November on page 4/17, he states: "*As the Cabinet shares this context with you, I have asked the Government Commissioner to (continue to) do the same with the population and its spokespersons*", but the Government Commissioner thinks very differently about the sharing of information. In the planning phase, the population does not hear anything at all, and only at the stage when there is actually nothing more to say or contribute about the projects that have been realised. In principle, communication on the island has only one direction and certainly does not have the character of a consultation. This is a major concern of mine.

Note: In a previous work environment, I took note of the VBTB budget with questions such as "what do we want to achieve", "what are we going to do for this" and "what can it cost". This system seems to me to be simple, crystal clear and applicable in the present problem.

Note: The letter from State Secretary Knops dated 14 November 2018 is so far only in Dutch on the island. Some insistence on my part has indeed led to an English translation, but this concerns the letter of 31 May 2018 (i.e. from six months earlier). In particular, the passage about the elections and the conditions imposed on them is known throughout the island (with an English-speaking population) from sources such as "van horen zeggen" (from hearsay). See also

http://statiagovernment.com/documents/Brief%20Knops_Voorgang_op_Sint_Eustatius-ENG.pdf.

Apart from the lack of transparency with which the government commissioners work, I mainly see movements (projects) that are doing well for the proverbial stage but do not have a long-term vision. Take education, for example. You have been able to take a look (just a snapshot, of course) at the in's and out's of the Gwendoline van Puttenschool. You were able to ask the pupils how they see their future. In many cases the answer will have been: "away from the island!". Why is there no desire to develop and invest in the island? For example - an agricultural MBO-/HBO-education, as dependence or under the supervision of - also: for example - the University of Wageningen? A few centuries ago St. Eustatius was an important food supplier for the other islands in the Caribbean. And instead of pushing the problem of 'roaming animals' through like a hot potato over and over again (and de facto doing nothing about it), a reason can also be found to develop sustainable agricultural and livestock breeding activities. After all, goat's cheese does not have to come from France alone...

Note: At the time there was a University of Medicine on St. Eustatius (an American institute, as on Saba). If the programme ('tropical agriculture') can be given a regional (Caribbean) status that also attracts students from the region (or perhaps also from the United States and Canada; similar to the University of Medicine on Saba), then it is also an asset from an economic point of view!

Just a little more about the stage. An eye-catching project, at least once it has started, is of course the renovation of the roads. I realize that I am certainly not speaking on behalf of the majority of the population here, but I would still like to express some opposition. Although the roads are not in good condition, this does require careful driving behavior on the part of drivers. Once the roads have been renovated then - as I'm sure they will be - there will also be people driving faster. This in turn requires an intensification of enforcement (which is not such a strong point on our island). In terms of prioritization, it seems to me that an honest, service-minded and transparent government apparatus (including a good financial household) is of a higher order, as is the fight against poverty. Speaking of enforcement: it bothers me (and I don't think I'm the only one) that Mr. Clyde van Putten still uses the term "member of the Island Council" (or worse: "leader of the island") in which he shamelessly uses the logo of the local government (for example for publications on Facebook). If you strive for a safe climate in which debatable matters are discussed, it is not appropriate for the board not to take a stand against this kind of recalcitrant behavior.

In 2017 Hurricane Irma made everyone aware that the dependence on St. Maarten for the small islands of Saba and St. Eustatius is very large and vulnerable. At that time, voices were heard of the need for greater diversity in connections and in purchasing and supply lines. These noises have been silenced again and the dependence on St. Maarten is great again, as it was in the past. For a moment there was a direct air connection to Bonaire (with the CN Express) but nothing is heard about it now. The impression is that the Dutch government (incl. RCN) does not want to do anything at all to break Winair's monopoly position in order to facilitate mobility with the environment. Here, too, I give you (in the next paragraph) a possible look on my part in the longer term.

Note: BES-reporter reports on 16 January that Saba would like to be advised to increase and facilitate the accessibility (e.g. for tourists). Immediately after I became aware of this message, I brought it to the attention of the government commissioner in order to see whether there can be cooperation with Saba in this respect. From the side of the board I only heard in their reaction that it "has been picked up". I do not know what that means in concrete terms.

Back to the long term perspective. Without having investigated this further, I suspect that two groups of recurring passengers can be identified for the air connections. There are government personnel (RCN) with a head office in Bonaire and branch offices in Saba and St. Eustatius. These staff regularly fly back and forth. During this travel there are often many delays. It sounds cynical to conclude that it is almost faster to reach Bonaire from Sint Maarten via Amsterdam than directly or via Curaçao. It seems as if Winair cannot make enough profit on a direct connection between St. Eustatius/Saba on the one hand and Bonaire on the other hand. Non-rational earning models (here I try to avoid the concept of 'possible self-enrichment by top executives') seem to stand in the way of a rational approach.

A second group of regularly returning passengers are patients who are taken to treatment centres elsewhere at the expense of the 'ZVK'. An important destination in this respect is Colombia: many specialist contracts have been concluded with Colombian health organisations. Again, I have not really researched this and I am not an expert in the medical field, but it seems to me that the doctors working in Bonaire, Curaçao and Aruba - who I suspect are mostly trained in the Netherlands - will not be any worse than their Colombian colleagues. Wouldn't it be a more efficient use of public funds to make as much use as possible of health organizations on the Dutch Leeward Islands instead of those in Colombia? The language problem - not everyone has mastered Spanish - is also tackled in this way, and family counselling may also be less intensive and therefore cheaper. After all, in current practice, a family member accompanies the patient; I'm sure I won't tell you a secret when I notice that the visits to Colombia funded by the 'ZVK' have peaked around Christmas, because it's nice to do the Christmas shopping there. In short, when this flow of passengers is also "diverted" from Colombia to Bonaire/Curaçao/Aruba, it is inevitable that these flights will also be or become cost effective for Winair (or another airline). A joint effort by MinVWS, MinBZK and RCN should, in my view, can be effective in this respect.

I would also like to say something about the contribution of expertise. An easy and frequently made misconception concerns the way in which European Dutch civil servants/advisers arrive at a feasible and accepted advice within a short period of time of a few weeks. After all, it takes time and it takes a truly helpful

institution (with understanding for the local culture and pride) to get out of the ivory tower and get improvements accepted and implemented on the shop floor. Instead of "just getting a quick report", I would like to invite the ladies and gentlemen officials/advisers - just like the (acting) government commissioner - to translate their findings into realisable, sustainable and effective improvements that fit in with the local culture in about two years time. The underlying idea is this. I strongly disagree with the verbal rhetoric of Clyde van Putten et al. but I understand the frustration extremely well! In Sint Eustatius I, too, do not always experience "my" European Netherlands as the country in which we (want to) listen to each other, in which we naturally help each other and in which the doors are open to each other. How easily do we see the inhabitants of St. Eustatius as second-class Dutchmen? The very name "special Dutch congregation" is an exponent of this: life here is especially "special" and has little affinity with a "Dutch congregation". For which removals within the Netherlands do you have to emigrate, report to the IND, terminate your insurance policies, etc.?

I would like to conclude with the remark that I realise that the above (and earlier) remarks often have a critical tone. A negative view can easily be deduced from this. Nothing could be further from the truth! I am a great supporter of the intervention as it took place last year. However, I am of the opinion that the intervention can and should be so much 'fairer' and more transparent. The fact that the administrators (and also the State Secretary) do not really have a good idea of what to do and where to start is not so bad. It is more disgraceful that they do not (or at least: not optimally) consult with the population and that they too easily only listen to officials/advisers from the European Netherlands (and now - see the note below - to former, local politicians with a not entirely uncontaminated track record) without taking into account the Statian component.

Note: According to Statianews (6 Feb 2019) - a free news service that is emailed to subscribers - the government commissioner on 25 January 2019 held consultations with the Cooperative Platform (a college of former, local politicians, without representatives of the PLP, the party in which Mr Clyde van Putten is a member). Let me start by saying that I welcome these consultations. At the same time, I note that the consultations with the Advisory Council, which was set up just for this purpose, have not been convened since November 2018. The minutes or agenda of the latter consultation have never been made public to date.

Yours sincerely,

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He has been living and working as a teacher (at the Gwendoline van Puttenschool) on St. Eustatius for almost five years.

Note: Earlier this week I took note of the planning overview with which State Secretary Knops intends to enter into consultation with your Commission. I would like to express my thanks for this overview. It gives at least some guidance. I do not expect to hear much about this from local government.