

St. Eustatius, 13 February 2019.

Dear chairman and members of the Kingdom Relations Committee,

I do understand that the importance of St. Eustatius is similar to that of the smaller villages in the European Netherlands. Then it is not surprising that at the level of the House of Representatives, the interests of the village receive little or no attention (such as today's General Consultation, in which about twenty agenda items are discussed in about four hours). In a meeting structure with a first and second chamber and limited speaking time for all, everyone - understandably - chooses his or her own cherries from the porridge. Not all items on the agenda are then given attention. A fact of life.

It is of course true that last year 'The Hague' considered St. Eustatius so important to carry out an administrative intervention due to observed 'neglect'. From this point of view, it is striking how little attention is paid to monitoring what is happening on Sint Eustatius.. During a working visit to the island, the government commissioners will control what you see. They will control who you speak to. All the while you are not getting a well-considered and well-balanced opinion. It is difficult for me to blame you for this, and I am not doing so.

In the light of the above considerations, it seems necessary to me to keep informing you about how things are going here. And I too see the challenge of staying on the main lines and not falling into village details. The most important omission in my eyes is the one-sided view with which the ins and outs of St. Eustatius are considered. If in the General Consultation it is noted that projects are in the pipeline and will soon become visible, this is an implicit confirmation of my criticism that little to no consultation is done beforehand.

Elsewhere, others are thinking of what is good for St. Eustatius, which is not to say that everything in the project pipeline is wrong or bad, but in terms of involvement, support or input from practical, local experience, an important step is still missed. Why is local consultation ignored or viewed as non-important? Is the Secretary of State in a hurry? I do not think so. It is true that this is important, but European Dutch advisers and officials tend to want to achieve effective results quickly and then ignore local the local voice.

And this has been the case for decades - not to say centuries - so that a certain degree of resignation arises naturally among the population, with a few developing into an active and frustrated opponent (which the European Netherlands has cultivated itself, in fact). It does not help either, of course, that the vast majority of the population is relatively poorly developed. Nor does it help if the intervening board (i.e. the government commissioners) continues with a non-transparent working method. Of course, a form of lethargy arises which is characterized by an attitude of "whether I am bitten by the cat or the dog, it always hurts".

I would like to see the intervening board continue with good things for the people, but with a big impulse in the field of communication about it with the local population. And then please in the form of consultation and not only with announcements on which no more input is possible. Once again, it will increase involvement and support. After all, it is not only

about the good technique of things, but also about the (re)gaining of trust. My estimation at the moment is that confidence in the good care by the European Netherlands for St. Eustatius among the local population is only marginal at the moment. And if that is not or is not seen, then you should ask yourself why that is. The Statian has now learned that adopting a clear position or expressing a clear opinion is not risk-free. The question is, of course, whether the director (and his European Dutch advisors) *wants* to see this.

Kind regards,

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