

Dear Chairman and members of the Kingdom Relations Committee,

In a previous letter I already wrote about the *hearts and minds* of the Statians that are not won with the current intervention. It's mainly a material "hassle" and little real communication between the island government and the population. More than once I think of the village where Asterix and Obelix live. Of course it's only a comic strip, but in the centre is the Gallic village that doesn't give in to the Romans. The Romans lose every time and the villagers continue to celebrate.

The Gallic village is of course just a caricature, but the fact that the European Dutch (in or working for the island government *and* in The Hague) and the Statians are really working together is hardly noticeable. The Statians do not always seem to be in agreement with each other either, but with the European Dutch government nobody seems to be really satisfied. And if that is how it seems - it is my conviction - it is in order to keep the sweet peace. Once upon a time, there will probably be times when an elected Statutory government is on the controls, and until then "we'd rather not argue", so is a broad view.

Recently there was a radio interview with one of the former island governors. His demagogically tinged argument is based on simple lines and has little depth or plan. However, the tone of the speech is effective. As I mentioned earlier, the fact that the Statian population is generally not very highly educated, and the effective and convincing communication will therefore, I expect, once the intervention has been completed, that we will soon find ourselves in the same situation that prompted us to intervene at the time.

The simple lines of communication are based on the following:

- The democratically elected and now deposed government has done nothing wrong or it would have been arrested and sentenced. That is not the case.
- Of course, we have put Wolbes and Finbes aside, because those are Dutch laws and international treaties that have a higher priority.
- The Netherlands is the colonizer, the decolonization process has not been completed and the oppressed island demands its right to self-determination, and thus the right to its own independent government (*which then lacks a plan for the "how to proceed" apparently nobody notices, but that aside*).

And it is not so much about the *legal reality* (which according to the report *The Kingdom against the light* [April 2019] is also somewhat unclear) but about the *reality experienced*. The oppression in The Hague is not in line with the rights that could be derived from documents or directives of the United Nations and that starting point is, as already mentioned, effectively *framed* in the communication on behalf of or by the former island government. For the rest, the former administration is rather quiet: apparently it is waiting for better times. In the meantime, the current, formal island government (managed by State Secretary Knops) does *not communicate with the population at all*.

I wonder about two things. Why is the contact between Saba (at a distance of Statia) and The Hague so much smoother? And what needs to change on the Statian side to find the way forward again? The answer to the first question I'm not just shaking my sleeve. I can guess. Politics Saba is a lot more uniform. Although I am convinced that there will be some division between the Sabans as well, the idea of setting up *shared responsibilities* between The Hague and the island seems to dominate. And so the informal policy line is created that says "by working together we are more independent". The contacts with The Hague are thus pragmatic and are not abhorred or condemned.

When I look at Statia again, I mainly see (the potential for) cooperation between like-minded people and not "all of us". The masses are not very active politically and wait and see what this day will bring. The small group of political activists is part of either one or the other party. And the most important

thing that each of those two parties do is to profile themselves at the expense of the other. My view of history is also limited, but in the past five years not much has gotten off the ground, partly because everyone is mainly trying to put a spoke in someone else's wheel.

When Mr Ronald van Raak states that it must be possible to set aside general rules if we only want to achieve something for one, two or three villages - and above all for practical reasons - then I understand very well what he means. At the same time, that is what the previous island administration did, with the result that it intervened. It is therefore quite difficult to establish 'rules'.

When I look at the differences between *rules* and *principles*, it turns out that *rules* are often imposed externally in order to comply with them (or to have them complied with). *Principles*, on the other hand, are created internally as shared norms and values. When I try to connect with this, I come across the word 'common'. For the record: I do not have a monopoly on wisdom, but I do have the strong conviction that the various parties (not only on the island but also in the European Netherlands) must enter into dialogue with each other in order to find a set of shared norms and values in order to continue along this path.

I would therefore once again urge you to really get the often applauded but almost never organised townhall meetings with an open agenda and intended for two-way communication off the ground.

With kind regards,

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