

Dear Chairman and members of the Kingdom Relations Committee,

And then, out of nowhere, a letter from the DP (or more precisely: from the two former island council members of the DP), addressed to State Secretary Knops, responsible for Kingdom Relations at the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, comes along. The letter was made public on 7 August 2019 via the website koninkrijksrelaties.nu. The plea in the letter is aimed at restoring local democracy as soon as possible by allowing it to organise local elections on St. Eustatius. The decision for this by the State Secretary will be taken in the autumn of 2019 and has been made dependent on twelve previously formulated criteria.

Note: I have included the publication of Koninkrijksrelaties.nl in the website www.statianews.info, as well as the present reaction to it.

First a preliminary remark: my observations and reports (to you, the House of Representatives) I do without any inconvenience or consultation. I am not affiliated with any political party, either on St. Eustatius or in the European Netherlands.

In the DP letter, the lack of transparency in the current administration is central. That will not be a new message for you: after all, it is the common thread in my reports to you to date. There is virtually no communication with the local population by the government commissioner and/or his observer. The only changes, at least as far as they are visible to the ordinary islander, compared to a year and a half ago are the refurbished walls around the cemeteries and the ubiquitous street name signs and house numbers. If any progress is made with the less visible projects, then at least nothing will be revealed.

Note: The infrastructural project aimed at strengthening the eroded mountain on which Fort Oranje is positioned does indeed have visible progress, but is in fact outside the context created by the administrative intervention.

So far, I don't see much light between the DP Plea and my own reports. Where the two paths separate is the question of "what to do next". Apparently, the DP sees salvation in local elections. I do not share that opinion, at least not when there is nothing to choose from.

In my e-mail to you of 20 June last, I write, among other things, this paragraph: "*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.*"

I see the DP plea against this background. When the State Secretary allows himself to be convinced by the plea, the idea will soon emerge (and be widely propagated): "*Adelka and Koos have managed that nicely anyway*". And if the Secretary of State is not persuaded, then there is actually not much going on. After all, then everything will remain as it was and the list of twelve criteria will (only) apply.

The PLP/Merkman coalition is now called to have made a mess of it, but in all those years the DP has not prepared much of what is now expected of the government commissioner and his deputy. In order to argue in favour of elections, and only in favour of elections (in order to make the most of a

democratic right), it seems to me that this is a way forward that does not, in my view, include an important preliminary step: *what do we actually choose for?*

In fact, the aforementioned coalition, through Brighter Path Foundation and supporting lawyers, does not advocate much else, although the latter argument goes further: elections AND far-reaching autonomy (far-reaching in the sense of distancing itself as far as possible from the country of the Netherlands).

The Committee of Wise Men has already put its finger on the sore spot: the (European) Dutch attitude is characterised by a lack of interest and a lack of a shared vision. In my view, it is precisely this common vision that needs to be developed and broadly supported. This common vision must be about the image of the future of the island and the strategy of how to get there. The common aspect concerns both the Netherlands and St. Eustatius.

It will, of course, help in this respect if St. Eustatius is committed to developing a *common* vision of the future for its own island. And that means that rival parties, under the leadership of the government commissioner, must be brought to a fruitful cooperation. This is only possible if there is intensive cooperation with each other (and with the population). *And that is exactly what is not happening at the moment.*

My plea is therefore twofold:

1. Work in regular townhall meetings on a shared vision of the future and reach agreement with the (European) Netherlands.
2. Work out the scenario in which the current intervention with a government commissioner and a deputy will make way for a local government with its own elections, and this will be subject to the condition that an agreed and jointly supported vision of the future for the island will be realised. That local government does not need to be politically coloured. Capable, but not politically bound, officials can, after all, form an excellent business cabinet.

I shall conclude by wishing you a great deal of wisdom in this dossier, which is full of small and large, sometimes personally tinged, sensitivities.

Yours sincerely,

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