

Your Excellency, dear Mr Knops,

At the townhall meeting on Sint Eustatius on 23 September 2019 we spoke briefly. You felt touched by where I touched upon the aspect of (the lack of) transparency. I would like to qualify my words: I am convinced that you personally are very transparent, or at least that you want to be. However, this does not alter the fact that there is virtually no transparency on the island from the government commissioner to the Statian public.

In the European Netherlands, where the Prime Minister convenes a press conference after the weekly consultations with the Council of Ministers, communication from the local government is very minimal (moreover, there is no independent and critical press at all). The published minutes of the administrative consultations are unreadable without underlying documents and the townhall meetings to date have always been "retrospective" and for information purposes. In other words: they think, talk and decide *about* the Statian population, but certainly not in consultation *with* them.

The reference made by Mr Franco that his weekly walk-in consultancy is an excellent alternative is of course only true to a limited extent. In a one-on-one conversation, of course, the same is not achieved as in a townhall meeting with a truly open agenda in which a wider audience is present. Discussions are then initiated and are necessary to reach a certain consensus. Such open discussions do not take place at all.

Mr Franco has made this clear to me: he certainly does not intend to discuss plans in advance, because before you know it you will be kept to promises (with regard to a planning) that may not be fulfilled in retrospect. His method comes down to small-scale and limited consultation in proverbial back rooms without a broad "test" among the Statian population.

His argument that it would be regularly discussed with the Social Council of Advice is incorrect. Every member of this Council is on the leash of the government commissioner and there is no question of any consultation. The government commissioner decides when the Advisory Board meets, even if there are requests from the board to meet earlier or more frequently. The agenda is set by the government commissioner and sent about one day in advance. There is virtually no open discussion. It is more a matter of communicating decisions that have already been taken. The role that remains for the members of the Advisory Board is that of an applauding public. Unsolicited advice, critical questions or requests for more transparency are not tolerated or fall outside the agenda. Minutes are not sent, barely or sometimes weeks later. In any case, these minutes are not available on the government website. For the same reason (i.e. no real, open consultation), the Cooperative Platform (with former politicians from the island), mentioned by the government commissioner, has already abolished itself (under the motto "this is no use consulting after all").

I regularly write my findings to the House of Representatives' Committee on Kingdom Relations. The first time I did so, I sincerely felt that it would be a good idea to inform the government commissioner about this. That did not work out well. In an intimidating tone, he

told me " you don't trust me, isn't it?". He added (my wife was asked to take a seat on the Advisory Board), "and if your wife thinks she is insufficiently informed, she will just step out of this Board". It seems to me that this intimidating tone is not compatible with your feelings about "good governance". Since then, I have not submitted my communication with the Lower House to the government commissioner. At the same time, all my correspondence can be found in Dutch and in English on my website, which I have set up especially for this purpose, <http://www.statianews.info>.

You asked me to give concrete examples of where things went wrong in the communication. I mentioned a few things, but they were immediately denied by Mr Stegers. The licensing policy was discussed. With regard to hotel construction near the Botanical Garden, the (draft) permits have been asked several times and, despite the promises made by the government commissioner, they have still not been revealed to this day. Tourism policy was also discussed. It turns out that some coordination with those directly involved has indeed taken place (call it a back room), but the broader picture - what will Statia look like in ten years' time, where we are going, which dot on the horizon we are fixing - are many opinions that have never appeared in front of any kind of footage in an open townhall consultation. You will then immediately see my problem with your question to me: how am I supposed to give examples of what has not been discussed?

*Note: Shortly after the intervention of 2018, the Brighter Path Foundation organised two more sessions in which the vision of the future was central. The government commissioner was not present or represented. It is a pity that this initiative was not followed up.*

It is by no means my intention to go through all the domains and points of view exhaustively here, but in a multitude of policy areas it is possible to identify points that are desirable to include in a sustainable future scenario. The point I wanted to make in the townhall meeting of 23 September is that, in my view, this is a missed opportunity to get a coherent and supported vision of the future of the Statians themselves off the ground. Viewed from a distance, it seems that this vision, assuming it exists, is mainly the result of input from the European Dutch civil service.

I should like to conclude with a positive word. I am convinced that the intervention was necessary, just as I am of the opinion that the failure of this intervention is actually not an option. My somewhat critical words are mainly intended to be constructive and to stimulate the contribution of the Statian population in any future scenario. I count on (more, active and sincere) support and transparency (than hitherto spread by the government commissioner) in this stimulation process.

Kind regards,

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