

Dear ladies Diertens, Van der Graaf, Kuiken and Özütok as well as Mr. Bosman,

In preparation for your interview with Mr. Jan Helmond, acting Rijksvertegenwoordiger Caribisch Nederland, I take the liberty to inform you how I experience the position of the Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland.

In the first instance you could see the Rijksdienst and the Kingdom Representative as a hierarchical layer between the three separate islands, Bonaire, Saba and St. Eustatius, together forming the Caribbean Netherlands on the one hand, and the various departments of the Central Government in the European Netherlands on the other hand. Compare it with the layer "province" between "municipality" and "central government" in the European Netherlands.

In practice, however, this comparison is not valid in view of the geographical situation. Bonaire is a Leeward Island that lies about 900 km southwest of the other two islands. And also the Windward Islands Saba and St. Eustatius, although at a distance from each other, have virtually no physical contact with each other. There is also no regular transport between Bonaire, Saba and St. Eustatius. So a natural exchange of experiences and ideas based on the fact that people from one "congregation" to another "congregation" visit (think of family visits, shopping, going to work, going to school, etc.) does not exist. Whichever way you look at it, the three islands mentioned are three separate entities, each with their own concerns, points of attention and current affairs.

In a certain respect I would even call the situation with a Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland (located on Bonaire) undesirable. After all, where there used to be an administrative center of gravity on Curaçao, it has now moved to Bonaire. *"Bonaire is the former Curaçao"* is a much heard sigh when it comes to the place from where policy, money, regulations, etc. descends on the small Windward Islands. In practice, it is not the independent third party that is "above" the three islands, it is primarily Bonaire and secondary Saba and St. Eustatius. The people who work there also largely live on Bonaire and, depending on the department or department, once every so many weeks or months a working visit is made to Saba and St. Eustatius for no more than a few days. Where Curaçao used to take care of itself best, Bonaire does so now. And even if that is denied, appearances are against it. In that respect, it would already help if the Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland would be "divided" between the three islands (as in the European Netherlands that was also attempted at the time - without success by the way - with a division of The Hague departments over the different provinces).

From my own experience I would like to illustrate this point (i.e. "the shirt is closer than the skirt"). On St. Eustatius, the transition from Dutch to English-language education is related to the system change from VMBO/HAVO to CSEC/CVQ (in the CXC domain). This aspect does not play at all on Bonaire and the added value of the Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland is therefore zero in this file. There is

currently some progress in this file (there is an internet consultation on the CXC Decision) but Bonaire or the Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland does not play any role in this.

Of course there are also advantages of the existence of a Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland. For example, it is undeniably true that when working together on ICT facilities, purchasing or employment conditions, there will be some profit to be made. The informative website of the Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland is also beautiful, but in my opinion does not justify a separate service in Bonaire. It is my conviction that the "profit" of the existence of a Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland does not outweigh the disadvantages of the extra layer of government that in practice is little more than a conduit between the central government and the separate island of Bonaire, St. Eustatius or Saba.

In my opinion, an obvious question to Mr. Helmond would therefore be: "*What is the added value of the Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland and what is your substantiation?*". All in my opinion conceivable variants of an answer to this question seem to me to be refutable or also otherwise fillable without the Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland. Respect is a much heard concept in this region; I think it would testify of The Hague's respect if the three islands of the Dutch Caribbean would have an independent communication channel with the departments of The Hague. Of course, this already happens in practice, but as a small island you are easily fobbed off with the argument "*discuss this first with the Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland*", after which the machine automatically crashes....

Another question to Mr Helmond could concern the flows of information on the basis of which he was acting. It is obvious that these are channelled through the individual Public Entities (or: "the Municipalities") but whether the voice of the population in general, or more specifically: that of the Island Health (ZVK), Employment or Education Offices (schools) is sufficiently reflected in them seems questionable to me to say the least. Speaking about information flows: I suspect that the management of the Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland will mainly take place from the Netherlands (with the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations as coordinator). In that respect, it seems to me that the originally good idea of the Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland may have become a moloch that should lead to European Dutch policy being implemented regionally. Again, I have no concrete indications for this but where does the Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland stand up for the local/regional common interests, such as an affordable regional air transport between the three islands *)? And what is the added value of the Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland in tackling the great dissatisfaction that prevails - at least on St. Eustatius - about the functioning of the 'ZVK'?

To think about it *in the broad sense* the following. Where Bonaire is currently the administrative center of gravity for the Dutch Caribbean and Curaçao that used to be in the era of the Netherlands Antilles, in practice the Netherlands is considered equivalent to the Kingdom, while the Statute sees the Kingdom as "superimposed" with four separate countries on an equal level below: The Netherlands, Curaçao, Aruba and St. Maarten. Of course, this "beautiful" thought has nothing at all to do with reality. *The European Netherlands makes up the service.* Understandable given the interrelationships,

but contrary to the ideal image evoked by the Statute. From that point of view it seems to me a good proposal for all islands (and the Netherlands) to define the six Caribbean islands as a "public body" (with anchoring in the Constitution) and then to lay down the individual, island situation in tailor-made legislation, based on respect for the right to self-determination.

In my opinion, the basic attitude should be: do locally what can be done locally and centrally what (really) should be done centrally.

With kind regards,

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*) Immediately after hurricane Irma a much heard recommendation was to make St. Eustatius (and also Saba) more independent of St. Maarten (in terms of accessibility and purchasing). Those arguments have meanwhile been completely pushed into the background. In anticipation of new hurricanes... (thinking of proverbially drowned calves and dampening wells).

In copy to: All other members of the Kingdom Relations Committee