

Dear Chairman and members of the Kingdom Relations Commission,

Further to my commitment to keep you informed, there is little I can tell you for the time being. The removal of the image of non-transparency has been confessed, but after the first (introductory) townhall meeting it has become very quiet again. No plan for the (near) future, no document that should provide support for the individual Statian, other than the announcement during the introductory meeting "we are going to organise the elections".

The fact that there will be a muzzled 'island council' after these elections, which will de facto not be challenged to draw up progressive, budget-friendly and practicable policies or to assess proposals to that end, seems to be of secondary importance. An initial consultation (after the installation of this commissioner's team) with the Social Advisory Council has taken place, but minutes have not yet been published, so let me wait. I have tried to make an appointment for the previously much-vaunted "consultation hour" with the government commissioner, but it appears that this consultation hour will not take place until April. So we have to wait and see. And the global coronavirus developments and measures will probably not accelerate the improvements in local governance. Very paradoxical: perhaps to wait even longer while everyone is forced to do less (which in my opinion creates time to talk to the Statian population about the future).

On Monday 16 March 2020, it is announced that Statia - in the context of the global corona pandemic - will be locked up for passenger transport. Only medical reasons can still be a reason to fly. This decision fits in with the developments in the world (literally!) around us. There is no doubt about that. Prime Minister Rutte gives a speech for all Dutch people. All of them? I listened carefully but not a word is said about the islands that are located in the Caribbean region. It won't be a set-up, I still believe in that. But it's a missed opportunity to promote inclusiveness. In this context, I would like to mention that I may hope that the entrepreneurs in the Dutch Caribbean will also be involved in the general and broad compensation scheme for entrepreneurs that is being discussed.

Of course they are only rumors but they are becoming more and more concrete and persistent. For some months now the news has been circulating here that a very wealthy Dutchman has interests in St. Eustatius. The idea is - according to the rumours - that the northeast side (i.e. the Atlantic coast) will become a tourist centre, with St Barths as an "example". This example says that the visitors/guests will (have to) be wealthy. Maybe the rumours go too far, but even one can hear that there are plans for a heliport and a (yacht) harbour on the northeast coast. These plans don't seem to exist officially anywhere; at least they are not publicly known. The same applies to the permits that should be related to the construction work already taking place on the same northeast coast. For the record, it does not suit me to judge these developments (in terms of right or wrong for the island) but the non-transparency about these plans and developments is a thorn in my side. In the absence of facts, I too let my feelings speak for themselves: the authenticity of the island is lost and the gap between (very) poor and (very) rich only seems to widen. By the way, these feelings are reinforced

when you read reports about the working methods of this very wealthy Dutchman in the recent past: a rather opaque web of small businesses where the ultimate goal is "to make as much money as possible by making smart use of fiscal rules". The moral standard of this Dutchman does not seem to be very high. And, although the Statian has heard nothing about this, the brochure mentioned below is a publication of the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. Does the minister know more?

Here is the brochure referred to in the previous paragraph =>

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/Qanxnv7PAut4FAad8>; on the last page you will see a reference: MinBZK, August 2018, publication no. 114768. This brochure was used approximately one and a half years ago - according to the then acting government commissioner - as information for potential investors in the European Netherlands. I can't imagine that anyone with common sense is really going to tarnish the only volcanic crater in the Kingdom with a cable car, replace the authentic black (volcanic) sand with beautiful white sand as on Barbados, and engage in other supposedly attractive activities (a brochure with this kind of information was also circulating on the island at the time; nowadays I hear very little more about this, but the construction activities on the northeast coast continue unabated and apparently without a permit). I can hope that in the end sensible policy will prevail here. For the time being, however, I'm not reassured about it and backroom politics, backhanded clapping and non-transparency seem to be the winning hand at the moment.

Today I heard another story like that. It is almost a euphemism that the road project is not going so well. But where a part of the project fell apart some time ago, this subproject is now being carried out in a simplified way by the Public Entity of St. Eustatius under its own management, where it seems as if the strict requirements with regard to drainage have now been abandoned. Precisely this drainage was very important to collect the rainwater for use in the agricultural sector. It was also precisely this correct drainage, without unnecessary waste of water flowing to the sea with the inclusion of sediment, which was one of the original principles of the project. Who knows, may say it, because the government channels are deafeningly silent on this matter.

Finally, a word about the educational domain. Apparently, I didn't know, as early as August 2019 an initiative was taken to have ProDemos in The Hague develop teaching material for schools on the subject of "democracy" with associated concepts such as "rule of law", "free elections" and "dual cooperation in government and parliament". This development took place under a cheese cover in The Hague and in any case the secondary school on St. Eustatius is not actively involved in this (partly due to its own actions, incidentally). At this secondary school there is the idea to give students in The Hague a taste of democracy (e.g. at ProDemos) instead of playing locally a "game" developed by The Hague \*). Another example where people think FOR us and not WITH us. Incidentally, I was pleased to see that the CXC Decision - aimed at including the English-speaking CXC educations in the Dutch landscape of legislation and regulations - has been included in internet consultation and I hope that the comments I have made on this subject will be incorporated appropriately in the elaboration of this Decision.

I understand that your Commission's procedural consultations, which were planned in the short term, have been cancelled, which I regret (and at the same time understandably and inevitably). As far as the financial infrastructure is concerned, I have already sent you an e-mail on 1 February 2020 (see also <http://www.statia.nu/> and click on 'How it continued' and 'Financial infrastructure'). For this report I would like to leave it at that. I will be back on the air next month. To conclude, I will give you a final question (which may have to be passed on to the responsible minister): "What has the intervention yielded so far (after two years) in the direction of the restoration of democracy? I wish you much wisdom.

Kind regards,

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\*) For the time being, the means are lacking to allow approximately 25 pupils (per year!) to travel to the Netherlands (or wider: the European Union in Brussels is also envisaged) for a period of approximately 10 days. It would be nice if the travel budget of MinBZK could be charged for this (instead of letting many Hague officials travel here; possibly your Commission could play a mediating role in this).