

Dear Chairman and members of the Kingdom Relations Commission,

Things went wrong in the board of St. Eustatius. The law drawn up for this purpose speaks of "neglect of duty". This particularly took place in the period 2015-2017 (although in the period before that it was not all cake and egg). In the period that followed - 2018-present - there is now the intervention on the island under the leadership of a government commissioner. So far some facts in broad lines.

The issue now is the question "how do we return to the normal situation?". You're going to be discussing a proposal for a law in the next few days, with the advice of the Council of State. In this e-mail, I'd like to give you my views.

To begin with, it's not that easy to grasp exactly what the problem is now. It is true that the Minister states that there is a list of twelve concrete points which, when solved, the island may be considered ready to continue in self-government. It is striking that these twelve points all have to be picked up on this side of the ocean while on the other side (your) side there were also some spots that had to be removed. The Commission of Wise Men as well as the Council of State have pointed this out, but I can't find anything about it in the documents offered at the meeting.

The population of St. Eustatius is not broad and highly educated. But that is something other than "stupid". Too easily the Statian (and the undersigned) sees that the problem "can be solved for a while" and yes, a cargo of officials from The Hague will take care of it. A report here, a report there, but no proper consultation with the Statian. Then of course you (and with you the minister or the government) should not be surprised that the European Netherlands is 'framed' as the cause of evil, and certainly not as the bringer of good. Black and white (as skin colour) are not the important values in life on the island, but 'Statian or Dutch' does make some difference. And so the Statian may be Dutch, but not of the same status as the first-class Dutchman who comes from the European Netherlands. Annoying to read or hear, but no less true.

In April 2019, at your initiative, the report 'Het Koninkrijk tegen het licht' will be published. An analysis of the way in which the Netherlands, France, Denmark and the United Kingdom give shape *de jure* and *de facto* to the relationship with their respective "overseas territories", in order to distil from this analysis how the relationship of the European Netherlands with the Caribbean Netherlands (and perhaps also with the countries of our Kingdom in the Caribbean) can best be updated and improved. But - and this is not the only good report for which this applies¹ - after this report saw the light of day, it subsequently became deafeningly quiet on the (your) front.

Of course I also see that on the island itself "working together" is not a highly developed value. There is the big, strong man who knows what has to be done and who is followed. If he points to the left then right is a bad direction. As former president Bush put it after terrorist attacks on the United States: "if you are not for us then you are against us". In miniature that also applies on this island. A good plan of

¹ The report "Connectiviteit Caribische deel van het Koninkrijk" (dated 30 July 2018) is also moved forward in time with barely disguised reluctance and disinterest. BES reporter reports on February 2, 2020 that almost nothing has happened with the recommendations of this report until then.

someone from family X can't be good according to family Y. And for years now, nothing has gotten off the ground (and neither has the (erosion causing) problem of free roaming goats). Honesty compels me to say that this characteristic also bothers me very much. Or more neutral: it is quite an obstacle to an energetic approach of the island.

And then, returning to my initial remark "what is actually the problem", I sincerely wonder if having administrations in order will really help us further. Which, of course, does not mean that these administrations can remain unkempt.

And IF the twelve points made by Minister Knops really do cover the whole problem (which I doubt), why is there no adequate project management that - visible to all of us - effectively focuses on a "green light" that indicates that a project has been completed completely and successfully? To put it somewhat abstractly, the theory of programme and project management says that projects produce "products or services", which in interdependency bring us into a new, predefined "desired" state (i.e. the purpose of a programme). Whether the translation of the 'desired state' to the twelve criteria (or: projects) mentioned elsewhere is sufficient is not yet a matter of course for me. For the time being, I see the 'twelve points of Knops' only mentioned in the progress reports addressed to you from his side. I don't see anything of them in the reports of local government meetings (as far as they can be followed).

Note: In an e-mail to Stegers, I have already volunteered myself to help set up the Court of Audit function. I have never received any response. My (unremunerated) appointment would just reduce the list of twelve points to a list of eleven.

By now it looks like a gray twisted gramophone record, but the most important instrument (at least in my opinion) is the actual, physical consultation with the Statian on the question "how to proceed". And that is by no means an easy or quick way. It will take many townhall meetings in which opinions and expectations will go back and forth, and by a good moderator always have to be brought back to the central question "how to proceed". We can discuss it for a short or long time, but such meetings have never taken place. If a meeting had been planned, it would have been a one-way street without real consultation with an open agenda. A good example: in the evening of September 23, 2019 there is a meeting under the leadership of Minister Knops and Messrs Franco and Stegers. And on 24 September 2019 there will be a so-called 'September Letter' in Parliament in the mailbox. I hope that no one is trying to tell me that any input from the population on the Minister's report really mattered: this letter had already been drawn up long and wide and could be sent as soon as the Minister had informed those present that elections would be held in October 2020. This is the type of consultation that the government commissioners have been reflecting to date. You say something and you leave. Consultation? Listen? Whoa! This of course mainly concerns the period Franco/Stegers; their successors seem to want to show a little more communicative skills, but up to now they are quite hampered by the way the coronavirus determines daily life on St. Eustatius (analogous to the way it happens in the rest of the world). In this context I also note that the consultation (of Franco/Stegers) with the Social Council of Advice was a sham as well: no consultation but listening to what the gentlemen had come up with. Not a single Statian sound has been taken into account in the proposal of the law about the way in which the present one might return to democracy.

I will conclude. It seems to me that every consultation on this side will be taken seriously as long as the interlocutors are on an equal footing and sincerely want to listen to each other. And, well, of course, the Statian people have been rather disappointed in this not only now, but for much longer. Until now The Hague is simply not really interested in a self-developing St. Eustatius - with the help of and from the European Netherlands. How did former vice-president Al Gore put it in the discussion about the climate? An uncomfortable truth!

Back to the present agenda item: what to do with the proposal of a law? Well, I don't have a very definite answer to that. A phased return of powers to an elected island council? Would you appreciate it if you were an elected Member of Parliament? You represent your constituency but are not allowed to influence the policy: a situation that is impossible in the European Netherlands, it seems to me. The Council of State is also right to wonder whether organisations will stand for election under these conditions. And that the alternative is that the intervention lasts longer? I would say 'that would be a surmountable problem if, from now on, all activities were actually aimed at tackling a serious, broadly recognised (and comprehensive) defined problem' (with action points on your side of the ocean as well).

Honestly, the finding of the Council of State is much more realistic than the bill. I sum up the Council of State's doubts (in my own words):

1. So far, in terms of "restoration of democracy", almost nothing has happened (apart from some cleaning up of administrations), nor has much happened on the NL side. The list of twelve points is an insufficient dividing line between 'task neglect' and 'ready for self-government'.
2. With regard to the longer maintenance of the Social Advisory Council (as recommended by the Council of State), I have my doubts. After all, an elected Island Council has more support than this Social Advisory Council whose members were "handpicked" shortly after the intervention in February 2018.
3. The Kingdom Representative (housed on Bonaire) will also have a role in the bill. In my opinion an absolute non-option. Fortunately, I read in the document of the Council of State (in footnote 8) that the Council of State is of the opinion that it is better to abolish the function of Representative of the Dutch Central Government. Got out of my heart...

It goes without saying that I am always willing to serve as your sounding board. At the same time I wish you much wisdom.

Kind regards,

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