

Dear Chairman and members of the Kingdom Relations Commission,

It was with great interest that I read the report which, in the absence of a physical consultation (as a result of corona), is composed of written contributions, all in the format of the Explanatory Memorandum to the proposal of the Restoration of the Sanitation Facilities Act (Wet herstel voorzieningen Sint Eustatius). I have tried to discover a 'red thread' and then asked myself "are we going in the right direction".

More than once (at least in my mind and with a smile around my mouth) I made the comparison with the Gallic village in which Asterix and Obelix live, which successfully defends itself from Roman domination time and time again, and benefits from maintaining itself on the basis of its own culture (and helped by magic potion ;-).

This comparison is of course only a caricature and the reality is of course more complex. A real open dialogue about the question "how to proceed", or broader "how do we deal with the Dutch Caribbean in general and with St. Eustatius in particular" does not get off to a good start. In that respect I very much appreciate the initiative of your committee to open a Facebook page to get in touch with the residents, but I am curious if that has been successful.

St. Eustatius does not have a really happy relationship with the European Netherlands and that led two years ago to the intervention as it exists today. A significant part of the population had - I think for myself - quite a reasonable expectation of that intervention. But when almost nothing actually happened afterwards (at least not that the population noticed anything about it or could talk about it), that expectation was watered down to a resigned wait and see. An attitude that the Statian, over the course of decades, or maybe even centuries, by necessity, has adopted itself quite well. And let us not beat about the bush: the Statian (or perhaps even broader: the inhabitant of the Dutch Caribbean) is legally and socio-economically no more than a second-class Dutchman.

The 'red thread' I mentioned above concerns a certain consensus among all parties in your committee that there is an understanding for the gradual nature of the (recovery) process in different phases and that some questions still need to be answered here and there. Gradually and with small steps forward: it gives a sense of security in the process, that way it does not go wrong and you can adjust more easily, that will be your underlying idea. If I try to catch the Statian thought, there will 'just' be a democratically elected island government again - as it was - *as soon as possible*, but without undesirable side effects like nepotism and intimidation.

In my view, it is mainly the Netherlands itself that stands in the way of a good relationship between the European Netherlands and St. Eustatius. Of course, I don't want to polish away all the abuses that have taken place and about which the Commission of Wise Men reported at the time. It actually went wrong, but the cause of this is not unequivocally St. Eustatius! When did the Netherlands really communicate seriously with the Statian, with an open agenda and an understanding and listening ear?

From the moment of the intervention in February 2018 until today, I dare say in all honesty: "not once!" Your working visits to the island were always tightly directed by the government commissioner and there was no room for such a dialogue.

And even before the intervention, there were moments when administrators of St. Eustatius in The Hague found a closed door with the then Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, and that letters to the Dutch government remained unanswered (because 'statements' were mainly made and no questions were asked: 'statements' you can ignore, you don't have to respond to them...). And of course it was not convenient when administrators of St. Eustatius run away for a conversation when the State Secretary of Kingdom Relations is visiting the islands, but is it not - in that light - somewhat short-sighted and perhaps even arrogant to lay the blame of the poor communication (and underlying: the lack of mutual trust) one-sidedly at St. Eustatius?

My advice: as the European Netherlands, be the wisest and (finally) enter into a dialogue about the near future of the relationship between the Netherlands and Saint Eustatius. Take away that feeling of being a 'second-class Dutchman' and take the conversation partner seriously. Of course you may expect Statia to take that initiative seriously as well, but keep in mind that Statia hasn't been used to being taken seriously for a long time (how was the saying again: "trust comes on foot and goes on horseback"). In my opinion, these serious conversations should lead to mutual trust (and that will not be the case after one or two consultations ...) and to management agreements: SMART formulated goals, to be achieved within specified frameworks (of which the law - especially WolBES and FinBES - is one, of course). And then have the locally elected administration take up the implementation of these agreements (insofar as actions on the side of St. Eustatius are concerned) and report on them to a remotely operating European Netherlands. Insofar as administrations are not yet in order, these are of course part of the set of goals to be achieved. Conversely, it may also be expected of a really good relationship that the European Netherlands reports to St. Eustatius how the actions to be completed by the European Netherlands are going.

I will conclude by expressing my hope (and expectation?) that (soon?) things will come right again between the European Netherlands and St. Eustatius. Whenever I can make a contribution: my mailbox is always open!

With kind regards,

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Note 1: Referring to a recent opinion piece in the Antilliaans Dagblad ("Ronddobberen of land bereiken met referendum" by Enrico van der Meij), I agree with the author that the Statute would be better abolished in favour of the Constitution. After all, the Statute is based on the equivalence of the countries with an upper federal Kingdom, while the countries are not equal at all: the Netherlands is de

facto equal to the Kingdom. I do not agree with the author that there should be a province of Dutch Caribbean with six municipalities. The islands are too little "common" for that. Develop the six islands into a Public Entity (as defined in the Constitution) and make per Public Entity (= island) "own" legislation with direct lines of communication per island to administrative The Hague. Lift in that framework also the construction Rijksvertegenwoordiger and the Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland. This board is on Bonaire and the practice is that the important things on Bonaire are on the agenda of the Kingdom Representative and/or the Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland, more than the things that are (exclusively) considered important on Saba and/or Statia. In that respect Bonaire is the new Curaçao (referring to the era of the Netherlands Antilles).

Note 2: There is a danger that I too - coming from the European Netherlands - give an incomplete or perhaps even incorrect account of the Statian sentiment. I see many advantages of abolishing rules and laws that, in practice, ensure that we recognize second-class Dutch people in addition to the native Dutch. At the same time, the distrust in the European Netherlands of Statia is so deeply rooted that many Statian people disagree with me about it. And mainly for emotional reasons, more than for rational reasons. The trust in the European Netherlands really needs to get a place next to and after that instead of mistrust. A process that can take quite a long time in practice. But it is never too late to work on an improvement...